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Ethnography of Hope in Contemporary Worship Songs
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**Worship and the World to Come:
A Theological Ethnography of Hope in Contemporary Worship Songs and
Services**

Glenn Previn Packiam

Abstract:

This research explores how hope is encoded in contemporary worship songs and experienced in contemporary worship services.

Three paradigms for contemporary worship in North America which emerge from the literature on congregational worship are outlined. Then models for understanding hope are explored from psychological, philosophical, phenomenological, and theological perspectives. The theological perspective uses the Nicene Creed as a summation of early Christian hope and Jürgen Moltmann and N. T. Wright as representative of recent scholarship on the theology of hope. Based on historical overviews of Evangelical eschatology, a suggested taxonomy of popular Evangelical eschatological frameworks is given as a starting point for fieldwork.

The fieldwork is focused on two Evangelical churches, one Presbyterian and one Pentecostal-Charismatic, and uses ethnographic methods such as participant observation, interviews, and focus groups to collect data and engage in discourse analysis. A national list of worship leaders is also surveyed to provide a catalogue of 'songs of hope' which can then be analysed. Employing Helen Cameron's 'theology in four voices', the 'espoused theology' of hope from pastors, worship leaders, and congregants, and the 'operant theology' of hope encoded in songs and experienced in services is compared with the 'normative theology' of hope in the Nicene Creed and the 'formal theology' of hope articulated by Moltmann and Wright.

The research demonstrates a disproportionate focus on the present tense, proximate space, and personal perspective encoded in 'songs of hope'. Yet the experience of hope in congregational worship seems to be a regular phenomenon for focus group members in weekly worship, and this experienced hope had a quality of resilience, adapting to outcomes that were desired. The thesis engages in theological reflection around three questions: How could the experience of hope be consistent when the encoded hope was so theologically weak? Why does the experience of God's presence produce hope? In what ways is the Spirit present and active in congregational worship? The thesis concludes with recommendations for church leaders and songwriters.

**Worship and the World to Come:
A Theological Ethnography of Hope in Contemporary Worship Songs and
Services**

Glenn Previn Packiam

A Thesis in one volume submitted for the degree of
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Declaration

None of the material contained in this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree in this or any other institution. The thesis is my own work.

Statement of Copyright

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Chapter 1

Introduction

What do Christians sing about when they sing about hope? Do Christians experience hope when they gather to sing in worship? If so, what sort of hope is it? Is there any connection between the songs that bring hope and the experience of hope in congregational worship? This research sets out to address these questions. In a work of theological ethnography, this thesis explores the kind of hope that is encoded in contemporary worship songs and experienced in contemporary worship services.

Contemporary worship has become ubiquitous within contemporary Christianity, yet only recently has its history been documented and its roots traced. It is worth briefly summarizing this history here to demonstrate the significance of its place within the life of the church today.

1.1. Overview and Origins of the Contemporary Worship Movement

Though the term contemporary itself technically means with the current time, the term ‘contemporary worship’ in North America has become an identifiable genre of Christian congregational music. The term has surfaced in density of usage in three clear time periods: the 1920s-1930s, the 1960s-1970s; and the 1990s. In the first decade of its widespread use, it was not a technical term; it simply referred to the worship of its own day.¹ But the rise in usage of the phrase in the 1960s and 1970s corresponded with an innovation and experimentation in worship during those years, particularly as the ‘Jesus Movement’ spread.² After several decades of use, its surge in usage in the 1990s marks the phrase as a ‘clear technical name’.³ But the

¹Swee Hong Lim and Lester Ruth, *Lovin' On Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2017), p. 2.

²*Ibid.*

³*Ibid.*

widespread use of the term was not always in a positive light.⁴ Worship historians Lester Ruth and Swee Hong Lim note, ‘Almost as soon as the term *contemporary worship* had begun to appear in publications so too writers began to note the “worship wars” being waged in congregations’.⁵

Nevertheless, as a movement that now has a history, ‘contemporary worship has become an identifiable phenomenon.’⁶ Lim and Ruth identify nine qualities which they cluster into four groups. The first group is a set of ‘fundamental presuppositions’, which are comprised of the following: the use of ‘contemporary, nonarchaic English’; a ‘dedication to relevance regarding contemporary concerns and issues in the lives of the worshippers’; and a ‘commitment to adapt worship to match contemporary people’, which includes using the right instruments, a ‘popular sound’, and familiar song lyrics and lyrical structure.⁷ The second cluster of attributes are musical. These involve ‘using musical styles from current types of popular music, engaging in ‘extended times of uninterrupted congregational singing’, and making musicians the visual center of ‘the liturgical space’ as well as central to the ‘leadership of the service’.⁸ The third group is what Lim and Ruth call ‘behavioral’. Here they cluster the identifying marks of a high level of ‘physical expressiveness’ with a ‘predilection for informality’.⁹ In Lim and Ruth’s final grouping of key attributes of contemporary worship, they name a ‘reliance upon electronic technology’ as a ‘key dependency’.¹⁰

In their survey of the literature of these decades, along with dozens of interviews

⁴ Because the alternate name ‘modern worship is used in some circles today, it is worth noting here that in Ruth’s appraisal, the term ‘modern worship’ was coined by music executives as a way of ‘promoting worship music that was an edgier style of rock, much of originating from outside the United States’—mainly Australia and the UK (Lim and Ruth, *Lovin’ On Jesus*, p. 15).

⁵ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin’ On Jesus*, p. 11.

⁶ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin’ On Jesus*, p. 2.

⁷ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin’ On Jesus*, pp. 2-3.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

with key leaders and teachers within the movement, Lim and Ruth discovered several shared points of emphases in these various accounts. There is ‘the importance of congregational singing’; ‘the focus in the singing on the heart-felt love for God (or Jesus)’; ‘the criticalness of singing *to* God (or Jesus) and not just *about* God’; the necessity of ‘full, sincere engagement of the worshipper’, and finally, the need for ‘an experience of God during this kind of worship’.¹¹

Lim and Ruth’s work also names four key sources of the contemporary worship movement. One source was the development taking place in youth ministry. It became a truism in the 1960s that churches need to reach the next generation. Appeals were made with urgency, warning that the church was in danger of losing the youth.¹² The youth movement was so influential in effecting widespread changes to church programming, sermon content, and worship design that some scholars have considered this ‘youth movement’ the cause of a ‘“juvenilization” of American Christianity’.¹³

A second source which contributed to the rise of the contemporary worship movement is Pentecostalism. Pentecostalism shaped contemporary worship in four important ways. The first was the way Pentecostalism shaped the expectation that praise and worship should be ‘physical and expressive’.¹⁴ Secondly, Lim and Ruth note the role of Pentecostalism in highlighting ‘intensity as a liturgical virtue’. Thirdly, Pentecostalism brought the ‘expectation of experience’ to contemporary worship. I will say more about this later, but for now it is important to note that it was Pentecostal teaching that moved the encounter with God from being a possibility to it being an expectation. Finally, Pentecostalism effected a

¹¹ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' On Jesus*, p. 13.

¹² Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' On Jesus*, p. 16.

¹³ Bergler’s term quoted in Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' On Jesus*, p. 17.

¹⁴ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' On Jesus*, p. 18.

‘sacramentalization of music’—which will also be explored further below—and this led to the fourth aspect of Pentecostal influence, the centrality of musicians to the service.¹⁵ Congregational music scholar Monique Ingalls adds another layer to Pentecostalism’s influence, citing its impact on style, songs, and structure in ‘non-charismatic evangelical churches in the United States beginning in the early 1980s’.¹⁶ This ‘blending of evangelical and pentecostal practice’ has been referred to as ‘the “pentecostalization of evangelicalism”’.¹⁷

A third source, according to Lim and Ruth, for the rise of contemporary worship is the priorities of the baby boomer generation. Boomers are known for the ‘questioning of tradition’, and for treating authenticity as a virtue in itself. Thus, contemporary worship was shaped by the freedom to depart from tradition in order to worship in a way that was true to one’s self.¹⁸

The fourth source from which the contemporary worship movement is said to have arisen is the ‘church growth missiology’.¹⁹ Traced back to Fuller Seminary professor, Donald McGavran, the church growth movement made prominent a ‘homogenous unit principle’, which taught that people are most effective at reaching people who are just like them.²⁰ Using music as a stylistic brand that unified a particular group and provided a sense of belonging was a way of growing the church. It was vital that the unsaved came to church and heard musical styles which they recognized, and sermons on topics to which they could relate. This approach was not actually revolutionary; it was merely the next iteration of a technique

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Monique Ingalls, *The Spirit of Praise: Music and Worship in Global Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity*, ed. by Monique M. Ingalls and Amos Yong, (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), in Amazon Kindle e-book (Introduction, para. 13, location 209).

¹⁷ Spittler 1994, 112, quoted in Ingalls, *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' On Jesus*, p. 19.

¹⁹ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' On Jesus*, p. 21.

²⁰ Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, ed. by C. Peter Wagner, Third edn (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), p. x.

developed to great ‘success’ by Finney and others during the Second Great Awakening, which I will say more about below. In this paradigm, ‘[c]reativity and innovation became self-evident virtues’.²¹

In summary, contemporary worship is recognizable by its use of contemporary English, relevant themes, popular instrumentation and musical style, extended times of congregational singing, the centrality of a band or worship team, physical expressiveness, and a preference for informality. It resulted from the rise of youth ministry, the spread of Pentecostalism, the priorities and preferences of Baby Boomers, and the influence of church growth missiology.

1.2. Theoretical Perspectives: Three Paradigms for Congregational Worship

Three paradigms emerge from the literature on contemporary worship which I am proposing are dominant ways of understanding congregational worship. These theoretical perspectives are confirmed by my own personal perspective from travelling to various churches in North America to lead worship and preach as well as from leading worship and teaching workshops at regional and national worship conferences. Yet I will also engage critically with these paradigms, drawing from my own research and lived experience. These three paradigms of worship as mission, worship as formation, and worship as encounter, shape choices within the churches that adopt them—choices such as the order of the service, the songs which are sung, and the place of sung worship within the service. These paradigms also informed the ethnographic research that follows in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. As Evangelical churches, both have been influenced by the ‘worship as mission’ paradigm, either in partial conformity to it or by consciously constructing a response to it. Additionally, the fieldwork examined a church that embraces the ‘worship as

²¹ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' On Jesus*, p. 21.

formation' paradigm of worship and is grounded within the Reformed tradition, and a Pentecostal-Charismatic church which operates within the 'worship as encounter' paradigm.

1.2.1. Worship as Mission: The Evangelical Paradigm

Lim and Ruth observe that 'white mainline congregations' in the 1990s adopted contemporary worship for 'tactical reasons'.²² 'Whereas the Pentecostal approach had been to adopt the new music as a way of encountering God, these congregations tended to implement contemporary worship as a strategic way of attracting new people.'²³ This impulse to adopt new techniques in order to reach new people is endemic to American Evangelicalism, with its roots in the Second Great Awakening. While Jonathan Edwards during the First Great Awakening described 'revival as "a marvelous work of God"', Charles Finney about a hundred years later argued that revival was the result of employing ' "appropriate means"'.²⁴

Though Finney is famous for his 'new methods', his legacy is not actually about innovation; it is the relativisation of form. Finney's premise was that the end justified the means; so long as souls were 'getting saved', it did not matter what the methods were.²⁵ In the face of harsh criticism, Finney defended his philosophy by comparing his approach with the one he perceived Jesus and the apostles using:

When Jesus Christ was on earth...he had nothing to do with forms or measures...The Jews accused him of disregarding their forms. His object was to preach and teach mankind the true religion...No person can pretend to get a set of forms or particular direction as to measures out of [the Great Commission]. Their [the apostles'] goal was to make known the gospel in the *most effectual way*.²⁶

Finney's innovation of methods and relativisation of form were not the only

²² Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' On Jesus*, p. 131.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Melanie C. Ross, *Evangelical Versus Liturgical? Defying a Dichotomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), p. 14.

²⁵ Ross makes a similar point in *Evangelical Versus Liturgical?*, p. 15.

²⁶ Finney, quoted in Olbricht, 'The Invitation: A Historical Survey', p 251, quoted in Ross, p. 15.

marks he left on American Evangelicalism. Liturgical scholar Melanie Ross credits Finney with creating a ‘threefold *ordo*’ which ‘is still followed in many evangelical churches’.²⁷ This order of service, created in reaction to liturgical traditions, has become, in an irony of church history, a new tradition and a new ‘liturgy’ adhered to by modern American Evangelicals even without their realization. The pattern is roughly as follows: songs, readings, or dramatic elements to warm up the crowd; a sermon, employing theatrical speech and communication techniques; an opportunity to make a decision, such as an altar call.

The Frontier Tradition succeeded in the prioritization of mission and the personalization of salvation. Both of these have developed into traits which Bebbington has enshrined in the evangelical genetic code: activism and conversionism.²⁸ Yet it also laid the groundwork for a wholesale departure from tradition, and with it the theological depth of the past. Pastors not only lacked theological education; they boasted about it. Billy Sunday, the famous evangelist of the early twentieth century, famously bragged ‘that he knew as much about theology as a jackrabbit knows about Ping-Pong’.²⁹ It is not unfair to say that the ‘church’s evangelistic apparatus was strong, but its theological muscles had atrophied due to disuse’.³⁰

Perhaps the greatest negative legacy of the Frontier Tradition is the unashamed relativisation of forms; any method can be used if it proves to be

²⁷ Ross, *Evangelical Versus Liturgical?*, p. 15.

²⁸ Bebbington lists ‘conversionism’, activism’, ‘Biblicism’, crucicentrism’ as the four primary traits. See Bebbington, D. W., *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, Electronic edn (Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis Group, 1989), pp. 2-3. To demonstrate that this is not simply a description of British Evangelicalism, the National Association of Evangelicals in the U.S.A. cites Bebbington to describe what an evangelical is. See ‘National Association of Evangelicals, *What is an Evangelical?*’ (<<https://www.nae.net/what-is-an-evangelical/>> [accessed 22 July 2017].

²⁹ Quotes in Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), p. 90.

³⁰ Vanhoozer and Strachan, *The Pastor*, p. 91.

effective in winning someone to Christ. Thus James White sees the ‘seeker-sensitive’ services of the 1980s and 1990s as the natural fruit of Finney and the Frontier tradition. This philosophy has been articulated more recently by megachurch pastor Craig Groeschel who publicly and regularly claims that he would ‘do anything short of sin’ to win someone to Jesus.³¹ At the rise of the ‘seeker-sensitive’ movement in the mid-1990s, two landmark books written by megachurch pastors sought to define a new approach to church ministry and practice. One is Rick Warren’s *The Purpose-Driven Church* (1995), and the other is Bill and Lynne Hybels’s *Rediscovering Church* (1995), both of which came out the same year. While Warren’s book may have been less direct about catering worship services to non-believers, Hybels is seen as the founder of the ‘seeker-sensitive’ movement, and his book functioned as a de facto manifesto for the movement. Each book devoted a portion of its content to a discussion about congregational worship. That same year, Sally Morgenthaler would provide worship leaders their own charter on why and how worship could be evangelistic precisely by being worshipful—designed to engage the congregation in glorifying God rather than functioning as warm-up music. *Worship Evangelism* (1995) in part affirmed the core desire of both Warren’s and Hybels’s approaches, but also redirected its practice with regard to sung worship. All this focus on worship design with the seeker or unbeliever in mind may have also prompted the writing of a text frequently quoted by worship professors or liturgical scholars to validate their criticisms of contemporary worship: the provocatively-titled, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down* (Dawn 1995), a book which shall be discussed further in the following section.

The struggle to determine how Evangelicalism relates to culture in its effort

³¹Craig Groeschel, *How Churches and Leaders Can Get it and Keep it* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), p. 93.

to ‘win the lost’ has been resulted in three approaches, articulated by Mathew Guest as ‘resistance, cultural accommodation, and engaged orthodoxy’.³² Guest shows how each approach emerged in response to Peter Berger’s foundational work on modernity and religion. Those who understand Evangelicalism’s relationship with culture to be shaped by resistance would tend to be less enthusiastic about contemporary worship because of its adopting of ‘secular’ musical styles. Those who favour more cultural accommodation would embrace it. Yet Guest highlights Christian Smith’s work on Evangelicalism as ‘engaged orthodoxy’, where there are ‘clear symbolic boundaries’ and also an ‘orientation characterised by active engagement with the world’, seen in mission projects and in the daily lives of individual Evangelicals.³³ Guest notes that this ‘process of accommodation involves a revitalisation of evangelical identity’.³⁴ But this can only be if the core of Evangelical identity remains intact. In my view, contemporary worship is a kind of engaged orthodoxy because of the way it demonstrates resistance in its lyrical content and accommodation in its musical form. Yet this approach is predicated on the assumed neutrality of forms, and it is this assumption of the neutrality of forms that the next paradigm challenges directly.

1.2.2. Worship as Formation: The Reformed Paradigm

Formative Practices: Human Re-enactment and Divine Action

One of the strongest critiques of the evangelical paradigm of worship as a form of mission has arisen from contemporary writers in the Reformed tradition. Within the Reformed paradigm, worship is not simply what the gathered people of God do; it is what God does by the Spirit through the proclamation of the gospel.

³² Mathew Guest, *Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture: A Congregational Study in Innovation* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2007), p. 7.

³³ Guest, *Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture*, p. 16.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

The heart of worship's formative power is its rootedness in and faithfulness to the 'gospel', thus worship must be 'gospel-centred'.

A key component of the Reformed understanding of congregational worship is that it is a re-enactment of the Gospel. Presbyterian pastor Tim Keller writes that the built-in order of Reformed liturgy in its ' "foundational rhythm and flow" ' is ' "gospel re-enactment" '.³⁵ Moreover, at the centre of this gospel re-enactment is the proclamation of Scripture and the response of the congregation. It is through the Word that God acts in corporate worship.

The lack of 'gospel re-enactment' in contemporary worship is a major criticism of the movement. Marva Dawn's landmark work, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*, appeared in the same year as books by Bill Hybels and Rick Warren who each championed versions of a 'seeker-sensitive approach'. Dawn's book was clearly a challenge to their movements. Yet Alan Rathe's appraisal of Dawn's central contributions are the twin themes that 'God is both subject and object of worship, and a respect for the deeply formative power of corporate worship.'³⁶ Because God is the 'subject'—the active agent—in worship, worshippers can expect to be transformed. But for Dawn, neither God's action nor the worshipper's transformation is a given. A church's worship practices must provide the ' "proper place and scope" ' for God's work.³⁷ Rathe writes:

Dawn especially stresses this deeply formative power of corporate worship. She understands that power to be, on the one hand, wholly God's. She also recognizes that the practices of the gathered community, especially in connection with worship, are powerfully formative in and of themselves. The structures and elements of worship 'subtly influence the kind of people we are becoming.' Insofar as God is subject, liturgical practices may either make space for or impede God's work. Insofar as God is the object of worship,

³⁵ Alan Rathe, *Evangelicals, Worship, and Participation: Taking a Twenty-First Century Reading* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), p. 79.

³⁶ Rathe, *Evangelicals*, p. 129.

³⁷ Rathe, *Evangelicals*, p. 130.

liturgical practices may either shape or misshape human spirituality with respect to God.³⁸

You Are What You Love: James K. A. Smith's Claim

While there have been many within the Reformed tradition who advocate the view of worship as formation, one of the primary proponents of such a view is Christian philosopher James K. A. Smith. As a professor at the Reformed Calvin College, Smith's work captures the key components of the 'worship as formation' perspective by drawing from both the Reformed tradition and the sacramental traditions to show the importance of mystery, story, and beauty in Christian worship as a means of formation.

Smith's argument is threefold: We are what we love; we may not love what we think; and, our loves have to be shaped by intentionally God-centred, counter-formative practices in Christian worship. Smith's first claim, that we are what we love, is rooted in a philosophical anthropology. Smith begins with Husserl's phenomenology that 'consciousness is always consciousness *of*' as opposed to Descartes view that a person might just 'think'. A human is aimed toward something, '*intending* something as an object'. As Smith puts it elsewhere, humans are 'existential sharks', perpetually moving in order to stay alive.³⁹ To explain *how* we aim at a particular end, Smith traces Heidegger's debate with Husserl in which Heidegger argued that humans do not primarily '*think* about a world of objects', but that humans are '*involved* with the world'.⁴⁰ To push the shark metaphor further, the world is not a picture that we observe from a distance; it is the

³⁸ Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), p. 119, quoted in Rathe, *Evangelicals*, p. 130.

³⁹ James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), p. 8.

⁴⁰ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), p. 49.

very sea in which we swim.⁴¹ But the critical move Heidegger makes, the move that shifts the ‘centre of gravity of the human person from the cognitive to the noncognitive’, is his argument that ‘*care* is the most primordial way that we “intend” the world’.⁴² Summing up the anthropology which emerges from the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger, Smith writes, ‘The point is...that the way we inhabit the world is not primarily as thinkers, or even believers, but as more affective, embodied creatures who make our way in the world more by feeling our way around it.’⁴³

Smith’s final piece in forming his first and foundational claim that we are what we love is to bring Husserl and Heidegger in conversation with Augustine, to whom Smith argues Heidegger already owed a large debt. Augustine would refine Heidegger’s notion of ‘care’ or ‘concern’ by arguing that the ‘most fundamental way we intend the world is *love*’.⁴⁴ Thus, Smith writes, ‘We are essentially and ultimately desiring animals, which is to say that we are essentially and ultimately lovers. To be human is to love, and it is what we love that defines who we are.’⁴⁵ What we love can be identified as ‘love’ in this ‘thick’ sense— as opposed to a preference or inclination or weaker desire— by identifying its *telos*. Drawing from the Greek notion of virtue as being shaped by a particular vision of *eudameia* (or, ‘flourishing’), Smith writes that ‘what we love is a specific vision of the good life, an implicit picture of what we think human flourishing looks like. Love has a *telos*.

This leads us now to Smith’s second claim: we may not love what we think. This is true because our loves work below the level of our consciousness, and because our love is being shaped by habits and practices that we do not always

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, p. 47.

⁴⁴ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, p. 50.

⁴⁵ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, pp. 50-51.

recognize as formative. Smith calls these powerful, physical, and habitual practices ‘liturgies’ because they function like a communal ritual that aims our worship at a particular *telos*. Here Smith relies on Charles Taylor’s notion of a ‘social imaginary’, which is a way of referring to the ‘“way ordinary people ‘imagine’ their social surroundings,” which is “not expressed in theoretical terms, but is carried in images, stories, and legends.”’⁴⁶ Smith then cross-references Taylor’s ‘social imaginary’, which creates a dynamic relationship between ‘understanding’ and ‘practice’, with Pierre Bourdieu’s ‘logic of practice’.⁴⁷ Both Taylor and Bourdieu assert that there is a kind of understanding that is implicit in practice even when that understanding cannot be spelled out. In a fascinating section, Smith outlines the ‘cultural liturgy’ of the shopping mall which aims our love at the *telos* of consumerism, through its architecture and decor, its ‘chapels’ (stores) with various ‘icons’ (mannequins) of the life we want, the ‘acolytes’ (sales people) who welcome us in, the racks full of ‘tokens’ and ‘relics’ (clothes), and the ‘altar’ (cashier) where our transaction of sacrifice is complete.

Finally, Smith’s third claim is that Christian worship is critical because of its potency as a kind of counter-formation, recalibrating our heart toward love for God and love for neighbour. Smith argues that the ‘practices of Christian worship are the analogue of biking around the neighbourhood, absorbing an understanding of our environment that is precognitive and becomes inscribed in our adaptive unconscious’.⁴⁸ Thus the ‘rhythms and rituals of Christian worship are not the “expression of” a Christian worldview, but are themselves an “understanding” simplicity in practice...’⁴⁹ This forms the basis of Smith’s critique of what he calls

⁴⁶ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, p. 65.

⁴⁷ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, pp. 66-67.

⁴⁸ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, p. 68.

⁴⁹ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, p. 69.

elsewhere the ‘expressive’ paradigm of Christian worship.⁵⁰ Christian worship is not simply an expressive practice; it is fundamentally a formative practice.

Smith rightly asserts in *You Are What You Love* that worship, though entirely embodied is not ‘*only* material’, and though wholly natural is ‘never *only* natural’.⁵¹ He expounds on this by invoking Trinitarian theology, describing worship being an invitation to ‘participate in the life of the Triune God.’⁵² Smith also clarifies what he means by ‘“form” of worship’ as being twofold: the ‘overall narrative arc of a service of Christian worship’; and the ‘concrete, received practices that constitute elements of that enacted narrative’.⁵³ Smith is in good company by advocating for a particular narrative ‘shape’ to Christian worship: ‘gathering, Word, Table, sending’, which Smith names as ‘gathering, listening, communing, and sending’.⁵⁴ The value of both the narrative and the practices for Smith is that they form character and recover beauty. As the worshipper enters the Story of God’s redemption re-enacted in worship, she realizes which ‘character’ she is to be in the drama, and thus is able to develop the ‘character’ necessary to participate. ‘Worship that restores our loves will be worship that restor(i)es our imagination,’ Smith asserts.⁵⁵

Evaluating Smith on Worship as Formation

Though Smith’s thesis on the formative nature of what he calls ‘liturgies’ is more comprehensive than previous models which privilege rationality, Smith’s specific conclusions for Christian worship are untested by ethnographic work, and therefore lack nuance or differentiation. For example, Smith pays little attention to the particular ways Pentecostal-Charismatic worship operates. Smith goes to great

⁵⁰ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, p. 75.

⁵¹ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, p. 70.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, p. 78.

⁵⁴ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, p. 96.

⁵⁵ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, p. 94.

lengths to say that contemporary worship, operating out of an ‘expression paradigm’, focuses on human activity rather than God’s activity. Yet, Pentecostal-Charismatic worshippers, as will be evident in my fieldwork on experienced hope, routinely arrive to a worship service with the expectation of God ‘showing up’. Smith casts aspersions on the focus on the ‘presence of God’ in contemporary worship, suggesting that it is simply a modern iteration of the medieval mistake of gathering to be near the mystical presence. Rather, Smith argues, Christians should come expecting an interaction with God, placing primacy on God’s activity over His ‘mere’ presence. Yet this is precisely the thing Pentecostal-Charismatic worshippers expect: God is going to speak, to ‘move’, to ‘do something’. Mostly, they expect this will take the form of various spiritual gifts— understood as the manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

Another example of Smith’s lack of differentiation comes in the way he discusses megachurches. Offering a reflection on the disappearance of confession in contemporary worship, he takes aim at megachurches, stating that the ‘philosophy of ministry and evangelism behind the mega-church movement was often described as “seeker sensitive”’.⁵⁶ This is certainly an echo of the critique espoused by Marva Dawn and others, but this is only half the story. Many megachurches are far from ‘seeker-sensitive’, as I will show in Chapter 7.

Smith also misses the sociological data that church movements with ‘low forms’ have high social engagement. If biblical, Christ-centred, Spirit-breathed forms plus faith equals rightly formed loves, and rightly formed loves result in working toward the ‘shalom’ of the world, then one might expect the highest levels of social engagement to emanate from denominations with forms which most

⁵⁶ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, p. 103.

resemble historic Christian worship practices. Conversely, one might expect that worship traditions with ‘low church’ forms, such as Pentecostalism, would be less likely to produce worshippers who are socially engaged.

However, sociologists Donald Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori discovered that ‘some of the most innovative social programs in the world are being initiated by fast-growing Pentecostal churches’.⁵⁷ Miller and Yamamori sent four hundred letters to ‘mission experts, denominational executives, and other informed people’ requesting nominations of churches around the world which fit the following criteria: ‘fast-growing’, ‘located in the developing world’, run ‘active social programs’ which ‘address needs in their communities’, and ‘indigenous movements that are self-supporting and not dependent on outside contributions’.⁵⁸ Nearly 85% of the churches which were nominated were ‘Pentecostal or charismatic’.⁵⁹ As Miller and Yamamori discovered on their global tour, the relationship between an approach to worship and an engagement in society is not simply a correlation; it is causal. Miller and Yamamori conclude that the ‘single most important element that empowers Progressive Pentecostals’⁶⁰ is ‘unequivocally’ the ‘energizing experience of worship’.⁶¹ They argue that social ministry work, because of its difficulty and potential to drain an individual’s energy, requires hope and a spirit of joy, both of

⁵⁷ Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), p. 6.

⁵⁸ Miller and Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, pp. 5-6.

⁵⁹ Miller and Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, p. 6.

⁶⁰ Miller and Yamamori define ‘Progressive Pentecostals’ as ‘Christians who claim to be inspired by the Holy Spirit and the life of Jesus and seek to holistically address the spiritual, physical, and social needs of people in their community. Typically, they are distinguished by their warm and expressive worship, their focus on lay-oriented ministry, their compassionate service to others, and their attention, both as individuals and as a worshipping community, to what they perceive to be the leading of the Holy Spirit’ (Miller and Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, pp 2-3). Miller and Yamamori notably exclude from their definition Pentecostals who are aligned with ‘right-wing repressive governments’, who focus exclusively on faith healing or “health and wealth” without connecting their Christian faith to socially beneficial programs for their community’, and who ‘emphasize conversion as their only mission to the community’ (Miller and Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, p. 2).

⁶¹ Miller and Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, p. 221.

which are found in worship for Pentecostals.

For Pentecostals, worship provides the opportunity to experience an alternative reality. It is a moment when mind and body can potentially connect; it is a space in which worshippers imagine impossible possibilities; it is a time when they are filled with new hope and desire for a better world. The challenge is to channel these emotions, these feelings, these desires. And that is where teaching and preaching enter, they say. But it is also where potentially mysterious encounters happen. It is where, according to Pentecostals, the Holy Spirit speaks to them about their duties as Christians... The key, however, as our respondents have told us, is to have daily periods of renewal in personal prayer. It is in these moments of meditation and prayerful reflection over scripture that they realize that if the work is going to go forward, it will not be on the basis of their personal strength alone.⁶²

Smith's work would do well to interact with such sociological research.

1.2.3. Worship as Encounter: The Pentecostal-Charismatic Paradigm

Tracking a Global Phenomenon

It is estimated that there are about 500 million Pentecostal Christians in the world today, which accounts for roughly 25% of the world's Christians.⁶³ Pew Foundation's 2006 report marked Pentecostals and charismatic 'renewalists' as 28% of U.S. Protestants, and 23% of the total U.S. populations.⁶⁴ One of the most prominent features of Pentecostal spirituality is its music. Yet, as noted in an earlier chapter, Pentecostalism is responsible for exporting its particular approach to music beyond the boundaries of its own theology. These songs and practices may be Pentecostalism's most successful global export; they have been 'adopted, adapted, or resisted by Christians in a variety of local communities within and outside pentecostalism'.⁶⁵ Congregational music scholar Monique Ingalls notes, 'Moving along pathways formed by mass mediation, migration, and missionization, pentecostal music and worship evidence and spur on religious globalization, as

⁶² Miller and Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, pp. 221-222.

⁶³ Ingalls, *The Spirit of Praise*, (Introduction, para. 1, location 77).

⁶⁴ Rathe, *Evangelicals*, p. 9.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

songs from influential pentecostal churches—and the record companies and media industry to which they are often intimately connected—make their way into in churches across denominational lines.’⁶⁶

It has become common practice to mark the history of Pentecostalism in three waves: ‘ “Classical Pentecostals,” “Charismatics,” and “Neocharismatics” (or “Third Wave”)’.⁶⁷ Classical Pentecostalism is generally thought to have begun in 1901 in Topeka, Kansas, through the ministry of Charles P. Parham.⁶⁸ But the spark was fanned into flame in the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles from 1906-1909, led by William Seymour.⁶⁹ The Charismatic Movement began as a renewal movement among mainline denominations in the 1960s.⁷⁰ It draws its name from the Greek work for ‘gift’, *charism*, and was evidenced by various spiritual gifts, such as healings, miracles, and even the one most associated with Pentecostalism—speaking in tongues. The renewal movement began first with the Episcopalians, and caught on among other Protestant denominations.⁷¹ Renewal movements with similar phenomena also occurred in Catholic and Orthodox churches.⁷² While Classical Pentecostals sought to differentiate from culture, charismatics tended to focus more on the supernatural while being affirming of culture in general.⁷³ This may have contributed to the ease of charismatics adopting musical forms from the culture of their day, since, as noted above, the ‘praise and worship’ movement began in the 1960s, the same decade as the charismatic renewal.

The Third Wave is sometimes called the ‘Neo-charismatic’ movement, and is the

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ R.G. Robins, ‘Pentecostal Movement’, in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), p. 885, quoted in Rathe, *Evangelism*, p. 246.

⁶⁸ Rathe, *Evangelism*, p. 246.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

hardest to place boundary markers on. Rather than a unified movement, it is a general category for the ‘ “18,810 independent, indigenous, post denominational denominations and groups that cannot be classified as either pentecostal or charismatic but share a common emphasis on the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, pentecostal-like experiences... signs and wonders, and power encounters.” ’⁷⁴ Ingalls uses the term ‘ “pentecostal-charismatic” ’ to invoke the constellation of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Christian renewal movements that are related to one another as part of a transnational social network connected by shared beliefs and practices—of which music is, of course, key’.⁷⁵ While recognizing their contingency, the music and worship practices described as ‘pentecostal-charismatic’ share an emphasis for Ingalls, following Bergunder, upon ‘the presence, work, and gifts of the Holy Spirit as manifest in glossolalia, healing, ecstatic worship practices, and prophecy’.⁷⁶ This emphasis on the presence and activity of the Spirit portrays a God who is different from humans without being distant from them; it maintains transcendence while adding a ‘vital role for personal experience and spirituality’.⁷⁷

Music is such a key element of the Third Wave or Pentecostal-Charismatic movements, that Ingalls argues that ‘pentecostal-charismatic Christianity in the early twenty-first century is inseparable from its unique practices of music and worship’.⁷⁸ In the introduction to the landmark volume, *Spirit of Praise*, on ‘music and worship in global pentecostal-charismatic Christianity’, Ingalls writes:

Corporate worship and music making are important ways in which this broad religious network constitutes itself, represents and replicates its values, and transforms the sociocultural, religious, and economic spheres that its members inhabit. As such, music is an essential lens through which to view pentecostal-charismatic

⁷⁴ Rathe, *Evangelism*, p. 247.

⁷⁵ Ingalls, *The Spirit of Praise*, (Introduction, para. 5, location 124).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Alan Aldrige, *Religion in the Contemporary World* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007), p. 130.

⁷⁸ Ingalls, *The Spirit of Praise*, (Introduction, para. 45, location 476)

movement's growth, ethos, and identity, and a full understanding of this important Christian modality requires close attention to its songs and patterns of worship.⁷⁹

As crucial as music is in Pentecostal-Charismatic contexts, it did not remain in those settings. The exporting of charismatic worship began from a group of affiliated churches within the Third Wave: the Vineyard movement, which began in California with John Wimber and has since spread around the world. Known as much for its music as for its message, the Vineyard movement was the frontrunner in spreading its renewal through charismatic-styled worship beyond its own movement. Thus, churches that do not share the history or confessional theology of the Pentecostal or Charismatic movements have nevertheless imported a paradigm for worship that was shaped by these movements. Contemporary worship—whether the churches who employ it realize it or not—has a ‘Pentecostal genetic code’.⁸⁰ This export of charismatic worship has only accelerated with changes in recording, production, and distribution technology. Combine those technological advances with global migration patterns and Pentecostalism's knack for connecting with ‘people on the move’, and the charismatic worship paradigm becomes something of a global brand.⁸¹ Ingalls writes:

Migration and mobility ensure that worshipping bodies remain a powerful medium of transport for music and worship practices; likewise, through a “secondary orality” (Ong [1982] 1988) brought about by new electronic media technologies, audiovisual media networks increasingly comprise the main conduits along which pentecostal music, songs, and worship practices travel. Internet-based digital media players, stores, and platforms have enabled musical materials and practices to travel not only between pentecostal-

⁷⁹ Ingalls, *The Spirit of Praise*, (Introduction, para. 45, location 477).

⁸⁰ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' On Jesus*, p. 123.

⁸¹ A January essay in *The Economist* explores how ‘Charismatic Christianity thrives among people on the move’, and concludes that ‘wherever people are on the move, and are culturally receptive to Christianity in some form, charismatic religion will surely follow’. *The Economist, Ecstasy and Exodus: Charismatic Christianity Thrives Among People on the Move* (2016) <<https://www.economist.com/news/international/21688880-charismatic-christianity-thrives-among-people-move-ecstasy-and-exodus>> [accessed 22 July 2017].

charismatic communities but also increasingly among international and interdenominational networks.⁸²

The Sacramentality of Pentecostal Praise and Worship

Since the Pentecostal-Charismatic paradigm of congregational worship is being adopted beyond Pentecostal-Charismatic contexts, we must examine this paradigm more closely. Because the Eucharist has historically been the central focus of God's presence in Christian worship, and because the Pentecostal approach to 'praise and worship' places the presence of God as the goal and center of its practice, Lim and Ruth explore what other dimensions of the Eucharist as a sacrament may be found in a Pentecostal paradigm of worship.⁸³ They find at least five corresponding elements.

First, Pentecostal paradigms of praise and worship emphasize the notion of sacrifice in the act of praising God.⁸⁴ This theme can be further parsed out in four particular strands. The 'Latter Rain revival', which was influential in making 'praise' an emphasis among 'Pentecostals and charismatics in the late twentieth century', portrayed the 'sacrifice of praise' as 'the focused, intense, and extensive periods of corporate praising, spoken and sung'.⁸⁵ Other teachers emphasized the obedience involved in the act of praise— making praise an act of the will rather than the fruit of one's feelings. A third strand of the sacrificial dimension of praise underscored the costliness of a sacrifice, which in praise and worship meant that the worshipper was to offer God praise even in the face of 'distress, grief, or great trouble'.⁸⁶ One final subtheme in the sacrificial dimension is the effort to associate praise and worship with the Tabernacle of David— rather than any Temple—

⁸² Ingalls, *The Spirit of Praise*, (Introduction, para. 9, location 158).

⁸³ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, p. 132.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

because of its lack of animal sacrifices. The link is often then further made to worshippers offering themselves as living sacrifices before God.

Secondly, Pentecostal paradigms of praise and worship share the notion of ‘confidence in its instrumental effectiveness’.⁸⁷ Lim and Ruth use this phrase to simply mean that just as the Eucharist is believed to ‘achieve what it symbolizes’, so ‘praise and worship thinkers’ have a similar sort of confidence that when ‘God’s people praise, God will be present’.⁸⁸ They compare the confidence of the instrumental effectiveness of the Eucharist as manifest in the scholastics of the late Middle Ages with the Pentecostal confidence in praise and worship’s instrumentality as manifest in the book titles and statements in the 1980s and 1990s. They give a few samples: ‘*God’s Presence through Music*, “praise and worship is one of the simplest forms of entrance into the presence of God”, and a job search that stated that the church was looking for someone who could “make God present through music”’.⁸⁹ This paradigm derives most often from a reading of Psalm 22:3 as a divine promise, and thus an implicit pattern for congregational worship.

Thirdly, Pentecostal paradigms of praise and worship have an ‘anamnetic’ quality which is one the sacramental dimensions of the Eucharist.⁹⁰ The Eucharist is done ‘in remembrance’ of Christ, the Biblical phrase in which the Greek word *anamnesis* appears. In the 1970s, many Pentecostal preachers and teachers began to distinguish ‘praise’ from ‘worship’. While ‘worship’ was the ‘direct adoration of the person of God’, praise ‘was about remembering God’s nature and activity, past and present, honoring him on that basis’.⁹¹

Fourthly, Pentecostal paradigms of praise and worship also had an ‘epicletic

⁸⁷ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin’ on Jesus*, p. 134.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin’ on Jesus*, p. 136.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

dimension'. Here, Lim and Ruth are referring to the invitation of the Spirit over the elements of bread and wine in the Eucharist, known as the '*epiclesis*'. Ruth draws on his expertise as a historian as he demonstrates the prominence of an invitation for God to come in contemporary praise and worship:

Throughout contemporary worship's history there has been a strong desire (and expectation) that God would come, both in terms of Christ's return and, especially, of God's arrival in corporate worship. The name of one of the original music companies (Maranatha! Music, which means "Come, Lord" in first-century Aramaic) verbalized this dimension.

But the real evidence of the epicletic, sacramental quality of contemporary worship is how common the petitioning in song of God (or Jesus or the Spirit) to come in worship. *Come* is one of the most used verbs in the lyrics of contemporary worship songs. Among the most popular songs, it stands equal with *save* as the most common divine actions.⁹²

Finally, Lim and Ruth note that music— beyond just the Pentecostal paradigm of music— shares a sacramental dimension with not only the Eucharist but also with baptism: its ability to create a sense of unity. This is particularly evident in the way one discerns whether one belongs in a particular church based on its style of worship. 'The style gathers, joins together, and excludes those who have not accepted the style'.⁹³ This is also seen in how churches who employ a multi-site model typically choose to stream only the sermon and not the music.⁹⁴

These various dimensions of sacramentality are not always present in every church which embraces and employs contemporary worship. Even where churches incorporate songs that were written in Pentecostal or charismatic contexts— such as Hillsong or Bethel— they may not import the underlying paradigms or encoded theology of those contexts. These sacramental dimensions are much more likely to be the animating theology in Pentecostal-Charismatic contexts of praise and

⁹² Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, p. 137.

⁹³ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, p. 138.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

worship.⁹⁵

Personhood and Presence

Lim and Ruth's delineation of various sacramental dimensions in the Pentecostal paradigm of praise and worship is helpful. Yet the use of a sacramental paradigm to explain a Pentecostal one is a questionable move. 'Sacrament' is a term alien to Pentecostalism. It is being imported and superimposed over Pentecostal practice to make sense of it. This raises the question of whether it is being imported because liturgical theology is the dominant frame of liturgical scholars or whether it is because liturgical theology is perceived to be the 'correct' paradigm and because Pentecostalism needs legitimating.

Secondly, if one were to listen to Pentecostals or Charismatics themselves explain their own paradigm, the language is deeply personal. 'Encounter' is not framed sacramentally; it is framed personally. Even the notion of the 'presence of God' is not used with all the conscious context of medieval Eucharistic theology or the sacramental concept of 'real presence'. It is used as a way of referring to a Person being present with another person.

I suggest that to understand this paradigm of encounter we turn not to a theology of the Eucharist but to theories of personhood. Alistair McFayden, in his foundational work on personhood, argued that a person is 'formed through social interaction, through address and response'.⁹⁶ In fact a 'dialogical understanding of personhood' is based on the premise 'that we are what we are in ourselves only through relation to others'.⁹⁷ To be a person is to be in relation to another—specifically, to another who sees you as a person. The Jewish philosopher, Martin

⁹⁵ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, pp. 138-139.

⁹⁶ Alistair McFayden, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 9. Google ebook.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Buber, famously used the phrase ‘I–You’ in contrast with ‘I-It’ to show a sacred relation.⁹⁸ For Buber, to fail to treat another human as a ‘Thou’ is to do him or her a great injustice; it is to treat them as an object. A person only ‘becomes an I through a You’.⁹⁹

Praise and worship, for the Pentecostal-Charismatic, is an ‘I-You’ encounter; the human, collective ‘I’ meets the Divine ‘You’ in song and prayer. Though the notion of a ‘personal relationship with God’ is tainted by American individualism and the aforementioned Frontier revival conversionism, Pentecostal-Charismatics do not see the need to legitimate this approach via comparisons with what they would see as human traditions like formal Eucharistic theology. Thus to expound on a paradigm of personal encounter, Pentecostal-Charismatic teachers do not go to the Reformers or the Scholastics or even to the Patristics; they go to Scripture. In Genesis, they find God walking in the garden in the cool of the day with Adam, and God speaking with Abraham as a man speaks with his friend; in the Psalms they find deeply personal, guttural prayers; in John’s gospel, they find a Jesus who has many personal conversations which become life-changing encounters—including one with a Samaritan woman in which Jesus talks about worship and worshippers; and they find in the Book of Acts an outpouring of the Holy Spirit which allows people to hear the Gospel in their own tongue—a profoundly intimate experience. In St. Paul’s letters to the Corinthians and the Ephesians, they find the Spirit’s work in expressing *charismata*, gifts for the edification of the gathered church.¹⁰⁰ A reading of Ephesians 5:18-19 would even suggest that one of the ways which believers are renewed in their experience of the Spirit is through ‘songs, hymns, and spiritual

⁹⁸ Martin Buber, *I And Thou: A New Translation with a Prologue "I and You" and Notes*, trans. by Walter Kauffmann (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 63.

⁹⁹ Buber, *I And Thou*, p. 80.

¹⁰⁰ 1 Corinthians 12, 14.

songs'.¹⁰¹

In Pentecostal-Charismatic practice, the worship 'set list' is designed to facilitate a journey to an encounter, not simply a musical flow. Vineyard leader John Wimber along with one of their worship leaders, Eddie Espinoza, developed a five-stage pattern of forming set lists. It began with an 'invitation', then led to 'engagement', then 'intimacy', then 'visitation', and concluded with the 'giving of substance'.¹⁰² For Pentecostal-Charismatics, the 'presence of God' means the 'activity' of God; one knows or senses God's presence in a service by God's activity within it. Thus, I suggest that the paradigm of encounter—which arises from an understanding of personhood and relationships—is endemic to Pentecostalism while the notion of sacramentality is alien.

1.3. Auto/Theobiography

Before turning to the outline of this thesis, it is necessary to disclose my own relationship to the contemporary worship movement in order to engage in 'reflexivity', the 'turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference'.¹⁰³ My personal history, or what Pete Ward has described as an 'auto/theobiography', is itself data within the research.¹⁰⁴ My relationships, history, or closeness with the context or the people within it is not only something to disclose, but a part of what is to be analyzed. My story as a worship leader and songwriter within the North American context is what allowed both churches in the fieldwork to be open to my

¹⁰¹ The CEB renders these verses with its imperative verb and accompanying participles this way: 'Don't get drunk on wine, which produces depravity. Instead, be filled with the Spirit in the following ways: ¹⁹ speak to each other with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; sing and make music to the Lord in your hearts;' (Common English Bible, 2011). Gordon Fee argues that the experience of the Spirit has a 'renewable' dimension. See Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*, 2011 edn (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), p. 202.

¹⁰² Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' On Jesus*, p. 130.

¹⁰³ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, p. 29.

work with them. I will describe the relationships and the research visits in more detail in the next chapter on methodology.

My introduction to the contemporary worship movement came in the form of a cassette tape. My parents subscribed to the Hosanna! Integrity Music tape of the month club, and deliveries travelled all the way from the USA to Malaysia to reach us. I had some sense that this was a global movement, but at age 8 or 9 was too young to comprehend the market forces involved in distributing worship music from America around the world, let alone the process whereby worship music had been turned into a commodity. Those tapes left an early mark on me; they introduced me to a way of experiencing God and expressing my heart via music. When I was 10, our family moved from Malaysia to America for my parents to attend a Bible college in Portland, Oregon. We attended Bible Temple (now called City Bible), a church which played a key role in the spread of the ‘Latter Rain’ movement particularly through praise and worship. During the years I lived there, one of the leaders in this church, who is also the father of a schoolmate, created Christian Copyright Licensing Incorporated (CCLI). CCLI is responsible not only for helping churches to be able to sing worship songs with the proper permissions and thus avoid copyright infringement; they are also implicated in, though perhaps unintentionally, the rise of worship songwriting as a viable profession, and a potentially lucrative one at that.

Our family returned to Malaysia after three years in Portland, and I spent my teenage years learning to lead worship and discovering a passion for it. When I returned to the United States to go to college, I studied historical theology but also volunteered as a worship leader on the chapel praise and worship team—a team that led worship for the mandatory chapel services which were also televised and

broadcast across the nation on Christian cable stations. This was my first regular experience of worship music as a kind of performance and commodity. After graduating from college and working at the university for a year as the main worship leader, I moved to Colorado Springs, Colorado to be an apprentice to the main worship pastor at New Life Church. New Life Church was founded in 1985 as a non-denominational, Evangelical, Charismatic church. At the time of writing, it has over 8,000 worshippers on a weekend distributed over its 6 congregations in the city. When I arrived in 2000, the church had four paid, full-time worship pastors, and two administrators. Shortly after that, we began producing ‘live’ worship recordings which were purchased and distributed by Integrity Music, one of the largest publishers and distributors of contemporary worship music in the world. I became a contract ‘signed’ worship songwriter with Integrity Music, and our youth band—the Desperation Band, named after our youth conference and patterned after the far more influential group Hillsong United—was also releasing albums with Integrity Music. Over the years, I have been part of over a dozen recordings with Integrity Music, and have published dozens of songs that are in the CCLI catalogue, some of which have charted as high as in the Top 25. In short, I am an ‘insider’ to the contemporary worship movement; contemporary worship music is my native liturgical language.

Yet at the same time, I am also removed from it. After a decade of worship ministry, I began to transition the focus of my ministry life at the church toward preaching and teaching in 2008. As I stepped away from worship ministry, I became more aware of the lack of theological depth in the songs, and in the songwriters and worship leaders themselves. A congregant challenged me to visit churches who employ a formal liturgy and historic Christian worship practices such as weekly

Eucharist and ask what they—specifically, an Anglican, Presbyterian, and Eastern Orthodox church—were doing and why, and what we—nondenominational Evangelicals—had changed and why. The results of these visits were manifold: from the discovery of the Christian liturgical maxim *lex orandi, lex credendi* to the centrality of the Eucharist in Christian practice. As a result of other leaders being on a similar journey of discovery, our church has now adopted the Nicene Creed as its statement of faith, and receives communion weekly as the high point of each worship service. The desire to increase the depth and widen the breadth of my own theological thinking was the impetus for my journey to seminary and, eventually, to pursue this doctorate in practical theology.

I have come to understand worship as a theologically catechetical practice. Therefore, worship songs and worship services must be evaluated for their content and for their impact. Yet it would be impossible in the scope of a single research project to interrogate every dimension of Christian theology in contemporary worship. In order to study the operant theology within a worship song or a worship service, a particular aspect of theology must be chosen, which in my thesis is eschatology. If congregational worship is the context, eschatology is the content.

A personal reason for this choice is that eschatology has become the capstone in my own theological understanding. The early visions of the ‘end times’ that I received as a young Christian were of a sudden rapture, a ‘tribulation’ of unspeakably horrific persecution, and a final judgment where salvation may be unexpectedly revoked. ‘Eschatology’ as it was talked about in the churches I grew up in was theologically marginal with little to no bearing on Christian life and practice. As I began reading N. T. Wright and Jürgen Moltmann in my twenties, my view of eschatology changed. I have come to see eschatology as ‘teleology’—the

purposeful completion of creational design. It arises from the doctrine of creation and gives completion to the doctrine of salvation, with Christology at the centre.

There is another reason for connecting eschatology with contemporary worship. One of the observations already noted about the rise of contemporary worship is about the way it functions like a sacrament in general and the Eucharist in particular within churches and traditions that are not sacramental.¹⁰⁵ The Eucharist carries eschatological meaning. It is ‘the meal at which the messiah feeds his people as a sign of the feasting in the coming kingdom’.¹⁰⁶ As a form of Christ’s coming to His church, the Eucharist is, symbolically, a projection of Christ’s future coming.¹⁰⁷ Even if the comparison between contemporary worship and the Eucharist is problematic, contemporary worship nevertheless holds a central place within Evangelical church services much as the Eucharist does within Catholic and mainline Protestant traditions. For a practice to occupy that space, it becomes subject to scrutiny and theological inquiry. Specifically, if the Eucharist as a central practice has eschatological overtones that rightly shape a Christian’s hope, it is right to examine the eschatological quality of contemporary worship songs and the services to see how this practice shapes the worshipper’s hope.

1.4. Dissertation Outline

Having reviewed the literature on congregational worship and developed a theoretical outline based on the literature of three dominant Evangelical paradigms

¹⁰⁵ In addition to the comparison made by Lim and Ruth, already noted above, this observation has also been made by John Witvliet and Pete Ward. Witvliet compares the language used to describe ‘praise and worship’ times with the language of medieval Eucharistic theology. ‘Sung praise ushers worshipers into God’s presence (we might almost add *ex opera operato*, the phrase used to convey the perceived efficacy of the priest’s words to effect transubstantiation of the elements in the medieval mass).’ (John D. Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding: Windows into Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), pg. 255.) Ward argues that songs are a means of encounter in charismatic worship in a way that is comparable to the Mass in Catholic worship and preaching in Protestant worship. (Pete Ward, *Selling Worship: How What We Sing Has Changed the Church* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, 2005), p. 199.)

¹⁰⁶ Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology* (Akron, OH: OSL Publications, 2002), p. 117.

¹⁰⁷ Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, p. 115.

prescribed for congregational worship in North America, Chapter 2 turns to the discussion of methodology. I name the influences from practical theology and the sociology which shape the approach taken here. Chapter 3 explores models for understanding hope outside a theological framework, drawing from cognitive, affective, virtue-ethics, and phenomenological perspectives. Chapter 4 summarizes early Christian eschatology, culminating in the Nicene Creed as a codified theology of hope. The chapter also includes a detailed outline of the theology of hope as articulated by contemporary theologians Jürgen Moltmann and N. T. Wright, and concludes with a working definition of what I am calling ‘creedal Christian hope’.

Chapter 5 begins the fieldwork portion of my research with a brief account of popular Evangelical eschatologies, including a taxonomy which I propose. The chapter then turns to the two Evangelical churches in my fieldwork— a Presbyterian church and a Pentecostal-Charismatic church— locating each in its theological context. Interviews with pastors and worship leaders from each church sharpen the picture of how hope is understood in each church. Chapter 6 is an analysis of the lyrics and themes of the songs that worship leaders in a national survey said brought them hope. This analysis is repeated with songs which members of the fieldwork churches said brought them hope, setting the fieldwork study within a wider context. Chapter 7 engages in the ethnographic work of participant observation and focus group conversations aimed at discovering how hope is experienced in congregational worship.

The conclusion highlights some of the more remarkable observations, including unexpected outcomes. The songs that brought hope were found to be lacking a clear sense of future orientation. When they did address the future, it was a heavenly vision lacking a sense of the renewal of creation. Furthermore, the

pronouns employed allowed the worshipper to sing as an individual rather than as a community. Yet despite the lack of futurity, materiality, and community in the encoded hope, the level of experienced hope in both fieldwork focus groups appeared to be high. The conclusion addresses this disparity and engages in theological reflection on the role and work of the Holy Spirit in congregational worship.

Chapter 2

Methods for Studying Contemporary Congregational Worship

2.1. Overview of Research Aims and Methodological Influences

My research aims to uncover the theology of hope which is encoded in contemporary worship songs and which is experienced in contemporary worship services by engaging in ‘theological ethnography’. Though the dissertation does not follow the same sequence, I approached my research with Lartey’s version of the pastoral cycle in mind, choosing an experience and moving from situational analysis to theological analysis of the situation to situational analysis of the theology and concluding with a response. I have also been guided through these phases by employing key elements from the hermeneutical, empirical, and strategic perspectives from Heitink’s Triangle. Helen Cameron’s ‘theology in four voices’ serves as the method for naming the kinds of theological content I encounter, from the normative and formal to the espoused and operant. Though the theology is multivoiced, I am not treating each voice with equal weight; to borrow a metaphor from music recording, some voices are louder in the mix than others. I am allowing the normative and formal voices to interrogate the espoused and operant voices.

My fieldwork methodology is shaped by anthropology, phenomenology, and ethnography. Roy Rappaport’s analysis of the ‘obvious aspects’ of ritual along with his delineation between ‘canonical messages’ and ‘indexical messages’ grounds my exploration of lyrics in songs which are said to bring hope. Martin Stringer’s ethnographic study of four congregations and his outlining of four ‘discourses’ within worship shape my approach to focus groups, allowing people to narrate the meaning they make from congregational worship.

This chapter will outline each of the above influences on my methodology. I will focus first on the practical theology research methods of the pastoral cycle, four voices, and Heitink's Triangle, while also noting the influence of Pete Ward's 'liquid ecclesiology' on my fluid approach to analysis. I will then turn to the specific social scientific perspectives mentioned above, outlining the relevant aspects of both Rappaport's and Stringer's work on my research. The chapter will conclude with a more detailed description of how each of these influences shaped my methodology. Interwoven in that description is a reflexive account of my relationship with the two churches in my fieldwork.

2.2 Practical Theology Research Methods

2.2.1. Integrating Theory and Practice

Practical theology was initially understood, due to Schleiermacher's use of the term, as applied theology. Practical theology was the branches that emerged from the trunk of historical theology and the root system of philosophical theology.¹⁰⁸ As the discipline has developed, it can more broadly be understood as a way of relating faith or doctrine with practice.¹⁰⁹ Schleiermacher's model is only one way of relating theory and practice. Ballard and Pritchard outline four dominant models for placing theory and practice in a dialogical relationship, noting the particular shape they take on when integrated in practical theology.

The first is the 'applied theory' model, which views all practice as a form of applied theory.¹¹⁰ The question, in a deductive approach, is which theory to bring to bear upon the practice; or, in an inductive approach, which theory is implicit in the

¹⁰⁸Lartey, Emmanuel, 'Practical Theology as a Theological Form', in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. by James Woodward and Stephen Pattison, First edn. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2000), p. 129.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society*, 2nd edn (London: SPCK, 1996), p. 55.

practice.¹¹¹ The second model is the ‘critical correlation’ model, applied to practical theology most notably by Don Browning.¹¹² Theology is often paired with the social sciences, where social anthropology can help shed light on human experience or behavior and theology can help reflect on how this experience or behavior relates to God. James Whyte describes this as a threefold engagement, rather than a dialogue, between ‘theological disciplines, the social sciences and the actual situation’.¹¹³ Third is the ‘praxis’ model, which is primarily concerned with actions and outcomes that aim to be transformative.¹¹⁴ The praxis model begins with a concrete situation but assumes that no activity is value-free and thus critiques every aspect, including the researcher.¹¹⁵ This analysis is then filtered through a theological imperative in order to develop a new praxis. Finally, there is the ‘habitus/virtue’ model, which draws on classical ethical teaching on virtue as a learned habit. The habitus/virtue model moves the paradigms of theory and practice beyond the cognitive and the active and into the communal.

Ballard and Pritchard warn against choosing one model to the exclusion of others. This would distort or restrict ‘theological activity’.¹¹⁶ Rather, they suggest viewing each model as a pathway into the process, a process that is necessarily complex.¹¹⁷ In fact, for them, these four models are not even to be seen as ‘disparate’, but rather as ‘strands which are often woven together and affect each other’.¹¹⁸ We turn now to a few methods for integrating these models.

¹¹¹ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, pp. 46–47.

¹¹² Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, p. 55.

¹¹³ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, p. 62.

¹¹⁴ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, p. 55.

¹¹⁵ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, p. 66.

¹¹⁶ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, p. 55.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, p. 57.

2.2.2. Pastoral Cycle

The ‘pastoral cycle’ is a ‘methodological tool’ which takes into account the ‘strengths and weaknesses’ of the four models which Ballard and Pritchard list above, while also providing a ‘structure’ which has room for both ‘flexibility and diversity’.¹¹⁹ Though the cycle may have derived from various other models and thus there are other permutations of it, it is given clear definition by Ballard and Pritchard as a series of four phases. The first is *experience*, where a specific situation is chosen and named. The second is *exploration*, where an analysis occurs. Third is *reflection*, where the analysis of the situation is set against the backdrop of beliefs in general and theology in particular. Finally, is *action*, where initiatives for ministry application are outlined and outcomes of those actions are determined.

Richard Osmer provides a list of the four tasks which practical theology must undertake. Though he does not reference Ballard and Pritchard or the pastoral cycle, the list bears a striking resemblance to the four phases of the cycle. The first task is the *descriptive-empirical task*. This is about gathering data or information in order to ‘discern patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situations, or contexts’.¹²⁰ The second task is the *interpretive task*, which employs theories from non-theological disciplines—specifically the social sciences—in order to ‘understand and explain’ the occurrence of particular patterns and other dynamics.¹²¹ Third is the *normative task*. Here the goal is to use ‘theological concepts’ to add another layer of interpretation and to construct an ‘ethical norm’.¹²² Finally, there is the *pragmatic task*, which involves determining ‘strategies of action’ to influence or change the

¹¹⁹ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, p. 74.

¹²⁰ Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), p. 4.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

situation.¹²³ Osmer sums up these four tasks as four questions: ‘What is going on? Why is this going on? What ought to be going on? How might we respond?’¹²⁴

For all of its promise, however, the pastoral cycle has its limitations. Pete Ward points out the irony in the tendency of the cycle to ‘reinforce the dislocation between reflection and the everyday’; ‘experience is effectively distanced and distilled through analytical moves’.¹²⁵ This is largely due to the multi-stage approach, as though each component—experience, analysis, reflection, and action—can be separated from the others. Furthermore, Elaine Graham argues that practical theology in a postmodern context means that theology should function less like disembodied concepts and more like a faith which is enfolded in practices and community. Where practical theology once moved from theory to practice, Graham’s goal is to move from practice to theory. In her words, her proposal is ‘to reconstitute pastoral theology as the theorization of Christian practices’.¹²⁶ The pastoral cycle as Ballard and Pritchard and Osmer articulate it allow theory—or theology—to interrogate practice and experience but do not make room for it to flow the other way around.

Emmanuel Lartey, however, adds a fifth stage to the cycle which addresses the concern to let practice inform theory. His first phase is also called *experience*, and deals with the concrete. His second phase is called *situational analysis*, which explicitly calls for ‘social and psychological analysis’ but also makes room for other perspectives.¹²⁷ In fact, he is clear that this should be ‘multi-perspectival rather than

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Pete Ward, *Participation and Mediation: A Practical Theology for the Liquid Church* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2008), p. 35.

¹²⁶ Graham, Elaine, ‘Practical Theology as Transforming Practice’, in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. by James Woodward and Stephen Pattison, First edn. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2000), p. 109.

¹²⁷ Lartey, ‘Practical Theology as a Theological Form’, p. 132.

inter-disciplinary’, since the researcher cannot adequately represent the complexity of different disciplines.¹²⁸ The third phase, as in Ballard and Pritchard’s model, engages in *theological analysis*. Lartey recommends specific questions for this phases: ‘ “What questions and analyses arise from my faith concerning what I have experienced and the other analyses of it?”; “How has Christian thought approached the issues raised?”; “Is there a prophetic insight which may be brought to bear on the situation?” ’.¹²⁹ Lartey points out that this analysis should engage with both the ‘personal’ and ‘with the traditions of Christian faith’.¹³⁰ The fourth phase is what makes Lartey’s version of the cycle different from Ballard and Pritchard’s and Osmer’s. In what he calls *situational analysis of theology*, Lartey makes ‘faith perspectives...the subject of questioning by the encounter and the situational analysis’.¹³¹ This rests on the premise that such experience and situational analysis ‘may offer more adequate reformulations of Christian doctrine’.¹³² His final phase, like the final phases in Ballard and Pritchard’s model, calls for response.

2.2.3. Heitink’s Triangle

One model which is markedly more complex than the pastoral cycle yet also more flexible is ‘Heitink’s Triangle’. Developed by Gerben Heitink, it involves three sets of cycles, each with five movements—the hermeneutical perspective, the empirical perspective, and the strategic perspective.¹³³ The hermeneutical perspective aims to facilitate understanding on the part of the researcher. It begins with a ‘prejudgment’ and moves to observation. From observation, the quest for understanding moves toward interpretation and then to meaning. The cycle ends

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Lartey, ‘Practical Theology as a Theological Form’, p. 133.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History. Theory. Action Domains*, trans. by Reinder Bruinsma (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999).

with action. The empirical perspective starts with observation, which may seem like an overlapping act to the observation in the hermeneutical perspective. The difference, however, is in the goal. In the empirical perspective, observation is aimed at providing explanation, as is the perspective as a whole. From observation, the researcher moves to ‘induction/supposition’. This stage leads to the forming of a ‘deduction’ or ‘prediction’ which can then be tested and evaluated as the final two stages. The strategic perspective is designed to create change in the situation. It begins, therefore, with defining the problem. It moves to a diagnosis and then to a plan. Next, the intervention occurs, and is followed by the final phase, an evaluation.

Because it involves fifteen different movements clustered in three perspectives, it would seem to be an unwieldy approach. But I have used Heitink’s Triangle in previous research projects, and the reality is the three perspectives overlap. Thus, the perspectives can be employed as different lenses—like trifocals—through which to examine the same situation.

2.2.4. Liquid Ecclesiology

Pete Ward sees the current ‘turn’ toward culture as an important corrective to the rigidity of the pastoral cycle. ‘When ministers preach sermons, design liturgies, choose hymns, make pastoral decisions, plan programs of mission, and so on, they are already participating in the expression and circulation of theology’.¹³⁴ Thus ‘theological reflection’ is not actually a ‘distinct moment’; rather, ‘theology and theologizing of all kinds takes place within and reflects the interests and commitments of individuals and communities’.¹³⁵ Furthermore, what is needed on the part of the researcher is not an objective perspective—as if that were even possible. Instead, theology that seeks to interact with the ‘lived reality of the

¹³⁴ Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, p. 48.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

Church’—as practical theology seeks to do—‘requires a familiarity with the life and expression of the Christian community’.¹³⁶

In many books on the contemporary church and its practices, critiques are all too often thinly constructed even while the theological basis for the arguments and prescriptions are rich. Ward sees this as ‘methodological laziness in ecclesiology’.¹³⁷ ‘We base whole arguments on anecdote and the selective treatment of experience. We are prone to a sleight of hand that makes social theory appear to be a description of social reality—which it of course is not’.¹³⁸

Ward proposes a ‘liquid ecclesiology’ represents a ‘shift in the theological imagination from solidity or from “Solid Church” to fluidity and “Liquid Church”’.¹³⁹ This fluidity is a characteristic of both the ‘divine being’ and ‘human culture’.¹⁴⁰ Thus ‘Liquid Ecclesiology focuses on the way the divine life passes through the walls and links Church with the wider society’.¹⁴¹ It is a ‘cultural theology in the sense that it seeks to interact with patterns of practice and thinking that are operant in the lived expression of the Church. Liquid Ecclesiology is theological and theoretical, but it develops theology through a deep interaction with cultural expression and the lived. Liquid Ecclesiology is a theology that takes cultural expression seriously as one part of the paradox of the Church’.¹⁴²

This proposal is not without objections. John Webster argues that even in empirical study of the church and its practices, there ought to be a ‘hierarchy of understanding between the origin of the Church and the phenomena of the

¹³⁶ Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, p. 49.

¹³⁷ Ward, *Perspectives in Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), p. 4.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Ward, Pete, *Liquid Ecclesiology: The Gospel and the Church* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2017), p. 9.

¹⁴⁰ Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*, p. 10.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*, p. 11.

Church'.¹⁴³ More than a specific methodology, Webster wants a 'hierarchy of knowing': dogmatics over social scientific inquiry.¹⁴⁴ Yet Ward argues that the 'dichotomy between empirical or culturally-generated theological perspective and those developed by scholars working from texts is...a false one'.¹⁴⁵ Taking the perspective of critical realism, Ward maintains that theologians must acknowledge epistemological relativity even in doctrines, negating the notion of a 'fixed reference point for ecclesiology'.¹⁴⁶ Even a 'theologically-oriented epistemology'— whether applied to texts or to empirical data— requires a 'positioning in relationship', which is in essence what is meant by 'faith'.¹⁴⁷ Thus both Ward, like Clare Watkins and Helen Cameron, et. al. repeatedly use Anselm's phrase 'faith seeking understanding' to describe an approach to theology which takes both the theology encoded in text and preserved in tradition and the theology embodied in practice with equal weight.¹⁴⁸ It is to Cameron and Watkins et. al. that we now turn for a methodology which treats practice theologically.

2.2.5. Theology Action Research and Theology in Four Voices

In their book, *Talking about God in Practice* (2010), Helen Cameron, Deborah Bhatti, Catherine Duce, James Sweeney, and Clare Watkins propose a method of relating theology and practice which they call 'Theological Action Research' (TAR), and an accompanying model for doing practical theology which

¹⁴³ Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*, p. 16.

¹⁴⁴ Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*, p. 17.

¹⁴⁵ Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*, p. 25.

¹⁴⁶ Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*, p. 23.

¹⁴⁷ Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*, p. 24.

¹⁴⁸ Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*, pp. 21, 26; and Watkins, Clare (with Deborah Bhatti, Helen Cameron, Catherine Duce, and James Sweeney), 'Practical Ecclesiology: What Counts as Theology in Studying the Church?', in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. by Pete Ward (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), p. 180.

holds in harmony the ‘four voices of theology’.¹⁴⁹ Before describing the four voices, it is helpful to note the five characteristics of Cameron’s TAR method, since the four voices function as a way of delivering on one of these aims in particular.

The first characteristic of TAR is that it is theological ‘all the way through’.¹⁵⁰ Theology cannot appear only after the data has been gathered since ‘the practices participated in and observed are themselves the bearers of theology’.¹⁵¹ This goes along with Ward’s criticism of the Pastoral Cycle as dividing theology from practice artificially. Secondly, TAR is to be located in the heart of the four ‘distinct, but interrelated and overlapping “voices” ’ of theology because of a conviction that within the diversity there is ‘coherence’.¹⁵² This leads to the third characteristic of TAR, that theology must be disclosed through a conversational method where the ‘voices’ are placed in conversation with one another so that they can be heard together. Fourthly, TAR is meant to be a ‘formative transformation of practice’.¹⁵³ Like all practical theology, there must be a change which results. Cameron et. al. see one of the key places of change as being the ‘change of learning and changed attitudes’ of the researcher, which in the case of practical theology is a ‘reflective practitioner’.¹⁵⁴ Finally, TAR is a method which allows practice to ‘contribute to the transformation of theology’.¹⁵⁵ Like Ward and Graham, Cameron moves practical theology out of the paradigm of modern theology where the tradition is largely fixed and unchanging and into the context of postmodern theology where theology is seen as dynamic and fluid.

¹⁴⁹ Cameron, Helen and Deborah Bhatti, Catherin Duce, James Sweeney, Clare Watkins, *Talking About God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London, EC1A 9PN, UK: SCM Press, 2010),

p. 2.

¹⁵⁰ Cameron et. al., *Talking about God in Practice*, p. 51.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Cameron et. al., *Talking about God in Practice*, p. 58.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Cameron et. al., *Talking about God in Practice*, p. 59.

The model that makes this method work is one which views theology as occurring in four voices. These voices are not independent of one another, though they are distinct. The first is what Cameron et. al. call ‘normative theology’. This refers to that which the group that is being studied names as its ‘theological authority’, an authority which informs and corrects ‘operant and espoused theologies’.¹⁵⁶ Some examples of a ‘normative theology’ would be the Scriptures, the creeds, official church teaching, and in some cases, even the liturgy.¹⁵⁷ The second voice is ‘espoused theology’. This is the theology that is ‘embedded in a group’s articulated beliefs’.¹⁵⁸ There is some similarity here with what Jeff Astley has called ‘ordinary theology’—the way people talk about theology ordinarily and in the course of life.¹⁵⁹ Thirdly, there is the voice of ‘operant theology’. This is the theology that is ‘embedded within the actual practices of a group’.¹⁶⁰ Naming it this way helps us take seriously Ward’s claim that every decision, programme, practice, and more within the life of the church is a participation in ‘the expression and circulation of theology’.¹⁶¹ The fourth and final voice is ‘formal theology’. This is the ‘theology of the academy’, of the so-called ‘professional theologian’.¹⁶² It is possible, and in fact likely, that this voice may have resonance with the voice of ‘normative theology’. Yet Cameron et. al. make clear that the voice of academic theology has the ‘distinct role’ of offering an articulation of the faith and of the tradition.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁶ Cameron et. al., *Talking about God in Practice*, p. 54.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening, and Learning in Theology* (Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2003).

¹⁶⁰ Cameron et. al., *Talking about God in Practice*, p. 54.

¹⁶¹ Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, p. 48.

¹⁶² Cameron et. al., *Talking about God in Practice*, p. 55.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

Clare Watkins, writing with Deborah Bhatti, Helen Cameron, Catherin Duce, and James Sweeney in a later work, describes the need for an ‘“authentic ecclesiology”’— one that is able to speak truthfully about concrete realities, and faithfully about the historical and present promise of the work of the Spirit, enlivening what we understand to be “the body of Christ”, the church’.¹⁶⁴ Their proposed ‘four voices’ method was developed in answer to the question of how to give practices their ‘proper place within the theological discourse of the church’ in order to develop an ‘authentic ecclesiology’.¹⁶⁵

The ‘four voices’ method is shaped by a desire to ‘listen’ to practices as ‘embodied works of theology’.¹⁶⁶ Watkins et. al. see the temptation in traditional systematic theology work to only study practice as a way of unearthing a question or a challenge and then to employ the resources of theological tradition to supply the answers.¹⁶⁷ But if practices are themselves ‘bearers of theology’, then these voices must be held in conversation with each other. Even what they call ‘formal’ and ‘normative’ voices of theology must function as ‘one voice in an ongoing conversation, in which all voices, in their distinct and proper ways, are understood as theological’.¹⁶⁸ They ground this approach in the doctrine of the Spirit as both the promised guide for the church and the God who is radically free to act through many means. Thus for the church to be ‘charismatic’, for Watkins et. al., her theology must be ‘multivoiced’.¹⁶⁹ Practical ecclesiology ‘requires ongoing conversation as the appropriate pattern of theology’, where the maxim of ‘faith seeking

¹⁶⁴ Watkins, ‘Practical Ecclesiology: What Counts as Theology in Studying the Church?’, p. 168.

¹⁶⁵ Watkins, ‘Practical Ecclesiology’, p. 169.

¹⁶⁶ Watkins, ‘Practical Ecclesiology’, p. 170.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Watkins, ‘Practical Ecclesiology’, p. 178.

¹⁶⁹ Watkins, ‘Practical Ecclesiology’, p. 180.

understanding’ results in the ‘recognition of an ecclesial faith as something necessarily communal, discursive’.¹⁷⁰

2.3. Sociological Research Methods

‘Genuine attentiveness to people and genuine engagement with the complexities of their lives are only possible through research methods that take theologians beyond the desk and the library and into those lives’, Elizabeth Phillips argues, and therefore the practical theologian must be ‘serious apprentices of sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers, and historians’.¹⁷¹ Ritual studies, traditionally the domain of sociologists and anthropologists, is one way for the practical theologian to gain an illuminating perspective on congregational worship. Because of its communal, physical, and repetitive nature, contemporary Christian congregational worship can be studied as a ritual. Phenomenology and ethnography are also methods from philosophy and social anthropology which may guide the study of congregational worship.

2.3.1. Cultural Anthropology and Ritual Studies

Roy Rappaport, an American anthropologist whose work with the Tsembaga Maring people of New Guinea provides an extensive account of ritual, outlined what he deemed the ‘obvious aspects of ritual’.¹⁷² The first of these ‘obvious aspects’ is formality, an adherence to forms. Formality may range from highly variant—where a person may intersperse particular words or gestures at their own discretion—to highly invariant—where there is nearly nothing for a person to decide.¹⁷³ A range is possible because even though invariance is implied in the adherence to forms, rituals

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Phillips, Elizabeth, ‘Charting the “Ethnographic Turn”: Theologians and the Study of Christian Congregations’, in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. by Pete Ward (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), p. 105.

¹⁷² Roy Rappaport, ‘The obvious aspects of ritual’, in *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1979), pp. 173-74.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

are not absolutely invariant. There are often gaps in what is specified for a ritual, necessitating the exercise of choice of the part of the performer, the most fundamental of which is the choice of whether or not to participate. Performance is a second obvious aspect of ritual. If nothing is enacted, there is no ritual. Performing an act may not merely be an expression of something; a performance of a particular act is itself an ‘aspect of that which it is expressing’.¹⁷⁴ A third aspect of a ritual is that it is non-instrumental; it does not accomplish anything. Though he would not call ritual merely a ‘symbolic statement’, Rappaport views ritual as more communication than action.¹⁷⁵ Yet, drawing on Austin’s work on speech-acts, Rappaport describes ritual as a ‘saying’ which is in itself a ‘doing’.¹⁷⁶ Still, a ritual does not produce a ‘“practical result on the external world”’.¹⁷⁷

In a later work, Rappaport notes a ritual has been *encoded* by someone other than the performer. Performers follow orders that have been established by others—possibly even established by God. Where rituals are seen as being divinely prescribed, change is limited in both scope and content, only what is considered erroneous or inconsequential can be altered. An attempt at invention, rather than reform, is met with resistance, and a new ritual, when introduced, is likely to be seen as a ‘charade’.¹⁷⁸ Thus, rituals composed completely of new elements are not often attempted and fail to be established. This explains one reason why contemporary worship resulted in the aforementioned ‘worship wars’.

If a ritual is an act of communication, then its messages must be analysed.

Rappaport delineates two types of messages that are transmitted in a ritual:

¹⁷⁴ Rappaport, ‘The obvious aspects of ritual’, pp. 176-77.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ This is Homan’s definition of instrumentality. Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 46.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

canonical and *indexical*. Canonical messages are encoded into the ritual and tend to be highly invariant; indexical messages are conveyed by the performers, and refer to their ‘physical, psychic, or even social state at the moment of performance’.

Canonical messages point to an enduring meaning; indexical messages refer to their immediate contexts. In a given performance, other messages may also be transmitted, but they are not likely to be incorporated into the ritual in a future performance.

This aspect of rituals led to my specific focus on song lyrics. Lyrics are an invariant aspect of the contemporary worship ritual. Few worship leaders attempt to change the lyrics of the songs they sing unless a particular line is ill-fitting within their church’s theological framework. Furthermore, lyrics are a canonical message because they are pre-encoded in; no worship song leaves sections with lyrical gaps to be filled by a worship leader or church.

Rappaport also argues that the performer ‘is not merely transmitting messages he finds encoded in the liturgy. He is participating in—become part of—the order to which his own body and breath give life’.¹⁷⁹ Thus, a performer is both participating in and affirming of the ritual he or she performs. This participation and affirmation must be understood not only in terms of the ritual’s convention, but also of its content. By ‘performing a liturgical order the performer accepts, and indicates to himself and to others that he accepts, whatever is encoded in the canons of the liturgical order in which he is participating’.¹⁸⁰ This acceptance is itself a basic indexical message transmitted to the performer. In the act of singing with the congregation, worshippers are affirming the canonical message of the song. Yet

¹⁷⁹ Rappaport, ‘The obvious aspects of ritual’, p. 192.

¹⁸⁰ Rappaport, ‘The obvious aspects of ritual’, p. 193.

even this participation requires more exploration into what meaning is being ascribed to the ritual. For that, ethnography is required.

2.3.2 Phenomenology and Ethnography

The turn toward ethnography in theology gained prominence with the James McClendon's 1974 work, *Biography as Theology*, in which McClendon suggested that the 'task of theology is "investigation of the convictions of a convictional community"' .¹⁸¹ This was followed by George Lindbeck's argument in *The Nature of Doctrine*, which proposed a 'cultural-linguistic model' of theology as a way of understanding religion as a culture with a language.¹⁸² Hauerwas, influenced by McClendon, has 'advocated the narrative description of specific congregations as an important task for both theologians and congregations themselves'.¹⁸³

Such descriptive analysis of practice is part of the discipline of phenomenology. Max Van Manen writes about a 'phenomenology of practice' as 'research and writing that reflects *on* and *in* practice, and prepares for practice', in his own book which he views as itself a 'phenomenology of phenomenology'.¹⁸⁴ Phenomenology begins with a sense of wonder, an awed curiosity, which turns into a question about the nature or meaning of a particular experience.¹⁸⁵ To do phenomenology is to 'start with lived experience, with how something appears or gives itself to us'.¹⁸⁶

Van Manen makes a point to distinguish ethnography from others 'forms of meaning in social inquiry'.¹⁸⁷ In his view, psychological, sociological, ethnographic,

¹⁸¹ Phillips, Elizabeth, 'Charting the "Ethnographic Turn" ', p. 97.

¹⁸² Phillips, Elizabeth, 'Charting the "Ethnographic Turn" ', p. 98.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Max van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice: Meaning-Giving Methods in Phenomenological Research and Writing*, ed. by Janice Morse (Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, Inc., 2014), in, <Kindle> [accessed 27 June 2017], locations 508 and 726.

¹⁸⁵ van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice*, location 850.

¹⁸⁶ van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice*, location 879.

¹⁸⁷ van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice*, location 1142.

biographic, and other forms of the social sciences or human sciences have *explanation* as their aim, while phenomenology seeks to provide *description* and *interpretation*.¹⁸⁸ He concedes that ethnography does share some overlapping features with phenomenology, but maintains that their purposes are different. Even so, it is difficult to imagine doing phenomenology without the aid of ethnography.

Ethnography is the description of a particular people, culture, or subculture with the goal of discovering ‘cultural meanings’.¹⁸⁹ The ‘archetypal form’ of research within ethnography is ‘participant observation’.¹⁹⁰ Charlotte Aull Davies writes that the ‘hallmark of participant observation is long-term personal involvement with those being studied, including participation in their lives to the extent that the researcher comes to understand the culture as an insider’.¹⁹¹ Even so, ethnography relies on more than participant observation; it requires a ‘cluster of techniques’ which grant the researcher access into the culture and meaning-making narratives.¹⁹² Thus ‘key informants’ are needed who can translate, interpret, narrate, or relate their experiences. This can occur through structured, semi-structured, or unstructured interviews. It is important to select people who would be somewhat representative of the larger group. Davies also finds it is better to choose not ‘leaders’ but rather ‘outsiders’ who have become ‘more aware of the assumptions and expectations of their own society, often because they flaunt them or fail to fulfill them’.¹⁹³

Gerardo Marti’s *Worship Across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multiracial Congregation* (2012) is an example of an ethnography of congregational

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice*, location 1145.

¹⁹⁰ Charlotte Aull Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*, 2nd edn (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), p. 77.

¹⁹¹ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, p. 81.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, p. 90.

worship. His work covered twelve congregations in Southern California that were successfully multi-racially integrated. Marti employed ‘participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and examination of available archived sources’.¹⁹⁴

Ethnographies of congregational worship have taken a multi-disciplinary shape in recent studies, with ethnomusicologies featuring prominently. Monique Ingalls is a leading scholar in the burgeoning field. She is joined by a host of younger scholars eager to turn the academic preoccupation with historic Christian worship toward the global phenomenon of contemporary Christian worship. *Christian Congregational Music*, edited by Ingalls, Landau, and Wagner (2013) features contributions from a wide range of fields from music studies to cultural anthropology in order to examine the role congregational music plays in performance, identity, and experience. It became the first in a series from Ashgate (then Routledge) on Congregational Music Studies, which now includes *Congregational Music-Making and Community in a Mediated Age* (edited by Anna E. Nekola and Tom Wagner, 2016), *Contemporary Worship Music and Everyday Musical Lives* (Porter, 2016), and *Congregational Music, Conflict and Community* (Dueck, 2017). Separate from the series, Ingalls also co-edited a book with Amos Yong on Pentecostal-Charismatic congregational worship called, *Spirit of Praise* (2016).

One ethnographic study of congregational worship which provided particular methodological insight into my research is Martin Stringer’s *On the Perception of Worship*. Stringer studied four congregations—an independent church, a Baptist church, an Anglican church, and a Roman Catholic church. In Stringer’s view, the study of congregational worship has usually been undertaken from one of four stances: the ‘informed celebrant’ (Kavanagh), the ‘paranoid altar server’ (Flanagan),

¹⁹⁴ Gerardo Marti, *Worship across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multiracial Congregation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 219.

and the ‘concerned lay person’ (Cotton and Stevenson).¹⁹⁵ Yet few studies attempt to understand worship from the perspective of the worshipper. To accomplish this goal, Stringer took notes on the service as a participant observer, analyzed sermon transcripts, and took notes from discussion groups.

Stringer’s contribution to the ethnographic study of worship is his identification of various ‘discourses’. He names four primary categories: individual discourse, communal or collective discourse, official discourse, and unofficial discourse. The significance of each discourse is found in its relation to other discourses. Stringer concludes that the dialogical relationship between discourses is so complex that it is ‘practically impossible to say what any one liturgical performance means for any one individual at any one time’, let alone trying to decipher ‘what worship means to a particular congregation’.¹⁹⁶ Yet an analysis of the discourses in a congregation about worship is not fruitless. These discourses can shape the kind of meaning and the ways that meaning is generated from within a worship service.¹⁹⁷

The necessity of discourses in providing meaning for the act of worship arises out of Stringer’s belief that the ritualized act contains no meaning on its own. Here Stringer is building on Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw’s analysis of ritual.¹⁹⁸ Unlike Rappaport, Humphrey and Laidlaw find very few common features in what may be called ‘rituals’. Instead, they prefer not to think in terms of ‘rituals’—as a logically separate kind of activity—but rather in terms of ‘ritualization’—a quality that can be applied to wide range of ordinary activities

¹⁹⁵ Martin D. Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship* (Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham Press, 1999) p. 62.

¹⁹⁶ Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship*, p. 75.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship*, p. 76.

‘such that it defines a particular way of doing things’.¹⁹⁹ Thus ‘meaning’ is given to an act by a community. Yet, because meaning is difficult to parse from the multiple discourses mentioned above, Stringer concluded that the focus of ethnographic work ought to be on the experience of worship rather than on its meaning in an abstract sense.²⁰⁰

Stringer’s conclusions shaped my approach to the fieldwork. I designed ways to engage the various discourses at each church. Through interviews with pastors and worship leaders, I interacted with official discourse, while participant observation allowed me to pay attention to unofficial discourse. The focus groups were designed to elicit collective discourse, while also making room for individual discourse to occur. In this way, I allowed the various discourses to shape the meaning of participation in the ritual of congregational worship. In fact, the discourses helped my interpretation of the data from the encoded canonical messages of song lyrics. The meaning-making work of discourse analysis identified not only the ‘espoused’ theology of hope at each church, but also the ‘operant’ theology—or theologies—of hope.

This raises the question of the role of the theological tradition—the ‘normative’ and ‘formal’ voices—in evaluating the ‘espoused’ and ‘operant’ theologies which ethnographic work helps to uncover. While ethnography is a valuable way to study the complexities of Christian practice and to name the theology which is embedded in practice, it provides no framework for evaluating those constructions of meaning. Stanley Hauerwas has argued that social scientific methods are ‘unhelpful to...theologians’ when they ‘“methodologically preclude

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship*, p. 205.

the theological claims necessary for the church’s intelligibility”’.²⁰¹ Thus Phillips sees the challenge of practical theology being now not a question of whether or not theologians can use the social sciences, but rather ‘how theologians can deeply engage with and thickly describe social groups and realities— as social scientists have done— while not accepting the premise of social sciences, but allowing research to be shaped by theological traditions and normative concerns’.²⁰²

Because of this rejection of the premise of the social sciences and because theologians do not engage in ethnography with the kind of comprehensive approach that anthropologists employ, Phillips suggests that the term ‘theological ethnography’ be used to denote ‘ “theological practices of thick description” ’.²⁰³ Theological ethnography belongs to the wider field of study often referred to as congregational studies, where practitioners have theological interests as primary, and are thus often referred to as ‘practical theologians’.²⁰⁴ Theological ethnography requires taking social scientific methods seriously while retaining theological priorities.

2.4. Methodology and Reflexivity

The next two chapters begin Lartey’s first phase in the cycle by naming the experience, specifically the experience of hope. Having already surveyed the literature and engaged critically with the paradigms for understanding congregational worship in North American Evangelicalism in the previous chapter, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 explore ways of understanding ‘hope’. Chapter 3 examines four models of hope from a non-theological perspective. I will explore a cognitive

²⁰¹ Phillips, ‘Charting the “Ethnographic Turn” ’, p. 99.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ Phillips, ‘Charting the “Ethnographic Turn” ’, p. 102.

²⁰⁴ Phillips, ‘Charting the “Ethnographic Turn” ’, pp. 102-103.

model, an affective model, a virtue-ethics model which treats hope as a virtue, and a phenomenological model which analyses the act of hoping itself.

Chapter 4 traces the hope as an eschatological vision from the early Christian centuries until the century after the Council of Nicaea. Because the Creed represents Apostolic Faith and is built on phrases that were passed down through the early centuries and that appear in the New Testament, the Creed represents the authority of both Scripture and Tradition. Thus the Creed's articulation of eschatology is what I have termed 'creedal Christian hope'. While neither church in my fieldwork uses the Nicene Creed as their statement of faith, both churches' statements of faith reflect some overlapping language with the Creed; nothing is contradictory. River Valley—the Presbyterian church in my study—does occasionally incorporate a corporate confession of the Creed during its worship, while Pathway—the non-denominational church—does not. Nevertheless, since the Nicene Creed is affirmed in every tradition of Christianity—variations on the *filioque* notwithstanding—it serves as a 'normative theology'. I then turn to two contemporary theologians who have played prominent roles in the promoting and reshaping of eschatology in North American Christian understanding, Jürgen Moltmann and N. T. Wright. Moltmann's theology of hope came to prominence around the time the contemporary worship movement was beginning; Wright's work on hope is widely popular among pastors and leaders in North America today. I outline key features and overlapping aspects of their eschatology in order to allow it serve as a 'formal theology'. Though both offer compelling articulations of 'creedal Christian hope' which are significant for the contemporary context, they do so from different perspectives. Moltmann works within the frame of systematic and philosophical theology, while Wright works as a

biblical scholar focused on Paul—and thus Pauline eschatology— and a historian of early Christian origins.

Chapter 5 begins the turn toward culture, practice, and ethnography through my fieldwork. This chapter draws on aspects of Heitink’s ‘hermeneutical perspective’ in order to engage in what Lartey calls ‘situational analysis’. The goal is to gain an understanding of each church and its context. I provide a brief description of how popular Evangelical eschatology has been distorted and truncated in America over the past few centuries, proposing a four-part taxonomy for Evangelical eschatology.

I focused my fieldwork on two churches. One is a Presbyterian church—River Valley Church in Denver, Colorado—and the other is a non-denominational Pentecostal-Charismatic church—Pathway Church in Dallas, Texas.²⁰⁵ Both would describe themselves as Evangelical because of their belief in the lordship of Jesus, the necessity of personal faith or conversion, the authority of Scriptures, and the need to let their faith impact their life in the world.²⁰⁶ Chapter 5 also locates each church within particular contextual influences. For example, I briefly examine the ‘prosperity gospel’ movement as a contributing influence on Pathway Church. I also sketch key features of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church as the context to which River Valley Presbyterian belongs.

To discover the ‘espoused theology’ of hope in each church, my research drew from participant observation in worship services, sermons, semi-structured

²⁰⁵ The names of both churches, the suburbs in which they are located, and all people associated with these churches have been changed to protect the privacy of those who granted me access in my fieldwork.

²⁰⁶ This follows the U.S. National Association of Evangelicals’ (NAE) brief description of an Evangelical as people who ‘take the Bible seriously and believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord’ and Bebbington’s quadrangle, which the NAE also cites, of ‘conversionism’, ‘activism’, ‘biblicism’, and ‘crucicentrism’. See National Association of Evangelicals, *What is an Evangelical?* <<https://www.nae.net/what-is-an-evangelical/>> [accessed 22 July 2017].

interviews with pastors and worship leaders at each church, and ‘position papers’ posted on the church’s website. At River Valley, I was able to interview the senior pastor and the worship pastor. At Pathway, I interviewed the campus pastor and the campus worship pastor. I was also able participate in pre-service gatherings with the worship team and song-writing sessions with their writers. I also designed a survey which covered some demographic questions, some multiple choice questions related to a theology of hope, and a few open-ended questions on songs and Scripture verses which bring them hope. This survey instrument was given to the congregational email list at River Valley for the Saturday evening service. At Pathway, I gave it to just my focus group since the responses were comparable in size to the number of respondents at River Valley. Thus my data gathering involved four data points at the fieldwork churches—participant observation, leader interviews, focus group, and a survey. Following Heitink’s Triangle, my approach here moves non-sequentially from prejudice to observation to interpretation to meaning—phases in the hermeneutical circle. This data shaped Chapters 6 and 7.

Chapters 6 and 7 are part of Lartey’s ‘theological analysis’ phase. Each chapter seeks to uncover the ‘operant theology’ of hope by examining songs of hope and worship services. Chapter 6 draws from Heitink’s empirical perspective in order to examine ‘encoded hope’ in contemporary worship songs. I surveyed about 1000 worship leaders in North America. Looking at songs specifically named by these worship leaders as songs which bring hope, I analyse key words, verbs, and pronouns to study space, time, and agency—three specific aspects of hope identified in Chapters 3 and 4. The object of hope is compared to that of ‘creedal Christian hope’ with specific attention given to the aspects of *futurity* and *materiality*. Though I do not include prediction, testing, or evaluation—as Heitink’s empirical

perspective does—I do move from observation to supposition as I offer possible explanations for an encoded hope which is focused on the ‘here and now’. The patterns from the national survey serve as a backdrop to the patterns in the songs which were named from my fieldwork churches.

Chapter 7 is a return to the ‘hermeneutical perspective’ in order to study ‘experienced hope’, another dimension of the ‘operant theology’ of hope. I engaged in participant observation with both churches, making at least three site visits to attend services over an 8-month period with Pathway, and an 18-month period with River Valley. A mutual friend helped introduce me to the worship pastor and associate pastor at River Valley. Both were familiar with me through my worship songwriting, blogging, and books. Additionally, the church where I have been employed for over 17 years is less than an hour’s drive away and is well known in the region. The leaders were open and hospitable to me. I chose to focus on the Saturday evening service because of its use of contemporary worship songs, the relaxed atmosphere, and its expressed purpose of reaching younger families. All these qualities gave it an opportunity to be similar to Pathway in the demographics of the congregation.

At Pathway, the relationships are even closer. The senior pastor at my church came from Pathway; in fact, he was one of the first hires and was a key leader in their church for several years. Additionally, their worship team and the worship team at our church have had a collegial relationship, collaborating on conferences, songwriting, and other ministry events. In my earlier years at my church, my role was primarily in the worship ministry. As a result, I have been part of many of the retreats and conferences that our worship team participated in along with Pathway’s team. Many of their key worship pastors and leaders are acquaintances with whom I

have had a handful of extended personal conversations over the past decade. Prior to beginning my research, I had visited Pathway about four or five times to teach workshops, lead worship, and participate in conferences which they hosted. I am a familiar face to many of their worship team. Pathway is a multi-campus church with services at several different locations. I chose the campus that was their first to open beyond the ‘main campus’. The trust for me built over the years and as a result of the respect for me due to my own career as a worship songwriter and recording artist with our church gave me ‘insider’ access.²⁰⁷

At both churches, the pastors helped me form a focus group designed to be a representative cross-section of the respective congregations. The group at Pathway was larger and more diverse in age, gender and ethnicity; this corresponds to the larger and more diverse congregation at the Pathway campus in my fieldwork. The group at River Valley was smaller, and featured mostly people of European descent over 65 years old. The congregation at their Saturday evening service was also predominantly a white, aging group. At each church, I had two to three 90-minute focus group meetings where we worked through a series of questions about their faith, the church, their experience of worship, and what hope looks like in specific situations. Questions included how they came to faith, what drew them to the church, what they experience when they come to worship, if a positive experience during worship fades during the week, how they experience hope through the worship service, when God has ‘come through’ for them and when God has not, and how they keep hope alive. Drawing from ritual studies, the sociology of ‘feeling rules’, and the psychology of hope, Chapter 7 engages in a description and an

²⁰⁷ The campus pastor gave me financial records, detailed metrics of their growth, and extensive audit report of its various ministries.

appraisal of the kind of hope experienced in each church context and its embedded theology.

In the conclusion, I draw from Lartey's 'situational analysis of theology' to allow the fieldwork to raise important theological questions. Despite giving priority to the 'normative' and 'formal' voices by using them to interrogate the 'espoused' and 'operant' voices, listening to the 'espoused' and 'operant' theologies of hope led to an unexpected discovery. Worshippers experienced a high degree of hope despite the low eschatological content of the songs of hope. Three questions emerged from this discovery: *How could the experience of hope be consistent when the encoded hope was so theologically weak? Why does the experience of God's presence produce hope? In what ways is the Spirit present and active in congregational worship?* Elizabeth Phillips argued, as a theologian, the researcher must keep in mind that the research is being done for 'theological purposes' and must therefore recognize God as an 'actor in the analytical process'.²⁰⁸ It is precisely toward that end that responses to these questions were shaped by the inquiry into how the Spirit is an actor in the process of worshippers experiencing hope in congregational worship. The responses to the first two questions draw from Moltmann and Wright's articulation of Christian hope but are placed in conversation with Gordon Fee's work on a Pauline theology of the Spirit. A theology of the Spirit is also the source for addressing the final question as I attempt to address the apparent tension between a social scientific understanding of congregational worship and a traditionally theological one. Finally, Heitink's 'strategic perspective' allows me to construct what Lartey calls a 'response'. I make three recommendations to songwriters,

²⁰⁸ Phillips, 'Charting the "Ethnographic Turn"', p. 106.

worship leaders, and pastors that enable them to address the chief concerns revealed in this research.

Chapter 3

Models for Understanding Hope

In the previous chapter, I outlined my research methodology along with its influences, from the pastoral cycle to the ‘four voices’ of theology. I also detailed how specific aspects of ritual studies from anthropology and discourse analysis from ethnographic studies of congregational worship shaped my fieldwork approach. I turn now to models for understanding hope.

I have chosen to restrict my focus to four models of hope. For the sake of the scope of this work, I am limiting my exploration of each perspective to one or two voices. They are not meant to be representative of their discipline’s contribution to the study of hope, but rather of the contributions that are relevant to my study. Furthermore, it must be noted that these models are not analyses of different components of hope, as though hope could be disassembled or dissected. I take as a premise that these models are simply perspectives of an idea, not compartments of a machine. As such, there is sure to be overlap between these perspectives. For example, emotions—specifically, hopeful feelings—are a point of reflection from both the psychological and philosophical perspectives, to say nothing about their more obvious role in a phenomenological perspective. The first is a cognitive model, which helps us to explore hope as a ‘positive motivational state’.²⁰⁹ Secondly, an affective model allows us to examine hope as an emotional experience. Thirdly, the model of virtue ethics shows what it takes to develop the character of hope. Finally, a phenomenological model identifies the structural elements of hope as an act.

²⁰⁹ Snyder, quoted in Stobbart, Andrew J., ‘Towards a Model of Christian Hope: Developing Snyder’s Hope Theory for Christian Ministry’, *Theology and Ministry*, 1.7.1-17, (2012), 1-17, p. 3.

3.1. The Cognitive Model: Hope as a State

3.1.1 Agency and Pathway

Psychologist Charles Snyder constructed a cognitive model of hope as the result of agency and pathway. ‘Hope is defined as the perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals, and motivate oneself via agency thinking to use those pathways’.²¹⁰ Snyder has alternatively describe ‘agency’ and ‘pathway’ as ‘willpower’ and ‘way power’, respectively. In those terms, hope is ‘the sum of the mental willpower and way power that you have for your goals’.²¹¹

Snyder and a team of other researchers used this cognitive model of hope to construct the ‘Adult Hope Scale’.²¹² The scale employs a 12-part questionnaire, with each question answered on an 8-point scale, from ‘definitely false’ to ‘definitely true’.²¹³ Four of the questions are related to agency (‘goal-directed energy’), four of the questions are related to pathway (‘planning to accomplish the goals’), and four of the questions are fillers.²¹⁴

3.1.2. Challenges and Possibilities

A critique of Snyder’s model has been that ‘laypeople do not usually include pathways thinking in their understanding of hope’.²¹⁵ In Eddie Tong et al.’s research involving four empirical studies, laypeople connected hope only with agency.²¹⁶ Snyder agrees that agency has primacy in producing hope. Yet, pathway is a significant dimension of hope, and an important contribution to our understanding of hope. Pathway as a dimension of hope shifts hope from being seen only as affective

²¹⁰ Snyder, C. R., ‘Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind’, *Psychological Inquiry*, 13.4, (2001), 249-275, in <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1448867>> [accessed 10 April 2017], p. 249.

²¹¹ Snyder, ‘The Psychology of Hope’, quoted in Stobbart, ‘Towards a Model of Christian Hope’, p. 3.

²¹² Snyder, C. R., *Adult Hope Scale* (2017) <<https://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/resources/questionnaires-researchers/adult-hope-scale>> [accessed 9 April 2017].

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ Stobbart, ‘Towards a Model of Christian Hope’, p. 5.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

to also being cognitive. Hope as ‘way power’ is the ‘ “mental capacity we can call on to find one or more effective ways to reach our goals”, or “the perception that one can engage in planful thought” ’.²¹⁷

The challenge with Snyder’s model is that it has little to say about the grounds or basis for hope. Whether one has any basis for one’s confidence in her own agency seems to be inconsequential. One’s appraisal of agency may be inaccurate, and one’s plan or ‘pathway’ may be flawed, but if one believes agency and pathway are present, hope may abound. Consider, for example the four questions on Snyder’s ‘Adult Hope Scale’ related to agency²¹⁸:

‘I energetically pursue my goals.’

‘My past experiences have prepared me well for my future.’

‘I’ve been pretty successful in life.’

‘I meet the goals that I set for myself.’

The last two contain some element of objectivity, or a measurable reference, but they still rely on one’s own appraisal of things. The four questions on the ‘Adult Hope Scale’ related to pathway seem to require an even more subjective self-appraisal²¹⁹:

‘I can think of many ways to get out of a jam’.

‘There are lots of ways around any problem’.

‘I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are important to me’.

‘Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem’.

This reliance on self-appraisal with relatively little attention to the grounds or basis for hope makes Snyder’s model of hope indistinguishable from optimism.

²¹⁷ Stobbart, ‘Towards a Model of Christian Hope’, p. 3.

²¹⁸ C. R. Snyder, *Adult Hope Scale* (2017) [accessed 9 April 2017].

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Snyder may argue that optimism is merely a wish for something over which one has no control. That is certainly one line of demarcation which Snyder's emphasis on agency and pathway may help draw between hope and optimism. But there are certainly other forms of optimism which result in a positive appraisal of one's own agency and 'planful thought' that does not correspond to reality.

3.2. The Affective Model: Hope as an Emotional Experience

3.2.1. Emotions as 'Concern-Based Construals'

Hope is not, strictly speaking, an emotion, but it does have an emotional dimension. Hope can be experienced as a feeling. Because my research will explore this experiential dimension of hope within congregational worship, it is helpful to note a few things about emotions in general before looking at hopeful feelings.

In more than four decades of study on emotions, psychologist Paul Ekman provides key insights into the nature of emotions themselves. 'Emotion is a process, a particular kind of automatic appraisal influenced by our evolutionary and personal past, in which we sense that something important to our welfare is occurring, and a set of physiological changes and emotional behaviours begin to deal with the situation'. Put another way, philosopher Bob Roberts writes that emotions are a 'concern-based construal', a way of perceiving the world rooted in the concerns one has.²²⁰

Roberts adds that emotions have 'perceptual immediacy'—they arise pre-reflectively. Ekman attributes this to brain functions that he calls 'autoappraisers'.²²¹ It must be noted, however, that emotions do not only arise pre-reflectively. Ekman lists nine 'paths for accessing or turning on our emotions', eight which are additional to autoappraisers: a reflective appraisal, a memory of a past emotional

²²⁰ Robert C. Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), p. 11.

²²¹ Paul Ekman, *Emotions Revealed*, Second edn (New York, N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 2003), p. 74.

experience, imagination, talking about a past emotional event, empathy, being instructed by others about what to be emotional about, social norms being violated, and assuming the experience of emotion.²²² Many of these complex triggers of emotion will be part of the discourse analysis in my fieldwork focus groups which I will explore in Chapter 7. As a construal or perception, emotions also represent a particular interpretation of the scenario. As ‘interpretative perceptions’, emotions help make sense of a situation. Finally, because emotions arise from a ‘concern’—in Roberts’s language—or ‘something important to our welfare’—in Ekman’s phrase—emotions contain a motivational power.

3.2.2. Feeling Optimistic

In his chapter on ‘enjoyable emotions’, Ekman describes several examples, from sensory pleasures to amusement, contentment, excitement, relief, wonder, ecstasy, *fiero*, *naches*, elevation, gratitude, and *schadenfreude*.²²³ Whether or not each of these qualify as distinct emotions or not requires more research. For our purposes, it is important to note that nothing quite like hope is named. The closest quality is optimism, but that is not an emotion. Ekman acknowledges this, and describes optimism as something which appears to be ‘an enduring characteristic rather than a reaction to a specific situation or event’, as an emotion would be.²²⁴

Christopher Peterson, an expert on optimism, posits that optimism is ‘an attitude about the likelihood of experiencing enjoyable emotions’.²²⁵ In a description that is cognate with Snyder’s cognitive model of hope as agency and pathway, Ekman notes that optimism is ‘found in people who have more enjoyment in their

²²² Ekman, *Emotions Revealed*, p. 37.

²²³ Ekman, *Emotions Revealed*, pp. 191-199.

²²⁴ Ekman, *Emotions Revealed*, p. 203.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

lives, greater perseverance, and higher achievements’.²²⁶ This seems to confirm my suspicion that what Snyder calls ‘hope’ relies quite heavily on what may be properly named as ‘optimism’—a positive appraisal of one’s own power and plan. Peterson suggests that optimism results in desired outcomes because it ‘ “produces a general state of vigour and resilience” ’.²²⁷

Further questions remain. Where does optimism come from? Why do some people have more of it than others? Peterson’s hypothesis is that optimism ‘ “may be a biologically given tendency, filled in by culture with a socially acceptable content” ’.²²⁸ What does optimism feel like? This is yet to be answered definitively, though Peterson asks if it may feel like happiness, joy, or merely contentment.²²⁹

3.3. The Virtue-Ethics Model: Hope as a Virtue

In light of this perspective of emotion, how may we understand hope? Roberts sketches a definition:

Hope is a construal of one’s future as holding good prospects. [Hope] is not possible unless an appropriate concern is in place, the object of hope is not just something good, but something the subject perceives as good...and thus it is always something the individual wants...In hoping, a person delights in the future, welcomes it with enthusiasm, tastes it with the pleasure of anticipation, because he sees excellent prospects of having what he wants.²³⁰

A prospect may be regarded as probable or improbable, even while the desire for it remains strong, but absolute desire for a prospect with little to no probability results in despair. ‘Resignation’, then, is a ‘downward adjustment of the concern’,

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions*, p. 148.

beginning to care less for the object or outcome.²³¹ While resignation is a way of ‘tolerating the future’, hope is a way of ‘welcoming it’.²³²

For Roberts, a goal of Christian formation is to transform this base optimism into ‘the solid emotion-virtue of an eternal hope’.²³³ Unlike Snyder, Roberts, operating from a Christian theological framework, makes a point to distinguish hope from optimism. Optimism may lead to a propensity to hope, but it does not in itself rest on any reason for hope. ‘A pre-reflective optimism built into us, and deeply confirmed by a happy childhood, gives us resiliency in the midst of suffering and a tendency to hope in the face of dismal prospects. It is not built on any actual calculation of prospects or even the most cursory reckoning with actual possibilities’.²³⁴

How does the transformation from the experience of optimism to the virtue of hope occur? If emotions are ‘episodic states’, lasting at times for seconds, and at other times for much longer, ‘passion’ is ‘an orienting, integrating kind of concern’.²³⁵ Passion gives a person’s life a ‘centre’ and can ‘integrate and focus the personality and give a person “character”’, and therefore is ‘a concern that defines one’s psychological identity’.²³⁶ If emotions are rooted in concerns, and some concerns are deep enough to be named passions, and if passions are ‘master concerns that deeply characterize a person’, then some emotional experiences may be the expression of character.²³⁷ To put it another way, the feeling of optimism may arise as an experience of emotion, but the feeling of hopefulness has to emerge from a deeper passion.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions*, p. 149.

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions*, p. 159.

²³⁵ Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions*, p. 17.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions*, p. 20.

In order for emotion to develop into a passion, in order for hope to be not just an experience but a character trait, ‘it has to be characterized by “endurance”...by the ability to feel the emotion even in situations that don’t seem very propitious for it’.²³⁸ As a Christian philosopher, Roberts believes that hope moves from an optimistic emotion to a virtue or character trait through the endurance of suffering. Citing Romans 5, Roberts grounds his view in the Apostle Paul, stating that suffering can stabilize the hope of glory—the eternal hope—in us. It is not so much a particular kind of suffering that does this, but rather what we do with the suffering that allows it to teach us hope. Though we are tempted to either wallow in suffering or to flee it, we can welcome suffering as an ally, allowing it to remind us that the world as it stands is not our home. Suffering ought not make us despise the prospects of hope in this life; and yet, it can teach us to not put our deepest heart into prospects which are bound only to this life. The advantages of this kind of Christian hope for Roberts are threefold: one is ‘capable of an honest joy in life’ since one has a real hope which transcends all finite hopes; one has a better prospect of detaching herself from finite hopes; and, one is able to be less wary of her ‘finite hopes’ and can instead gratefully receive the happy prospects that come from this earthly life from the hand of God.²³⁹

Yet while the object of Christian hope is eternal and fixed, the experience of hope often fluctuates, ‘shifting with circumstances and our moods’, or as Roberts quips, ‘with the company we keep and the books we happen to be reading’.²⁴⁰ It is helpful to note briefly here that moods, like bodily sensations, cannot be justified or unjustified; they not subject to rational adjudications. Moods may have causes, but

²³⁸ Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions*, p. 19.

²³⁹ Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions*, p. 152.

²⁴⁰ Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions*, p. 159.

they do not have reasons. This is because moods do not have objects. Thus, when it comes to hope, ‘...being in an optimistic mood is not the same as hoping’.²⁴¹

Thus, Roberts sees it necessary to have a time and even a place to turn our minds toward our eternal future as the object of Christian hope, a regular context within which to perform acts of hope. Congregational worship is just such a context. The specific ‘act of hope’ in Christian worship for Roberts is the Eucharist. ‘Rightly used, the Eucharist becomes at the same time an act of remembrance and an act of anticipation’.²⁴² Yet, even with regular acts of hope in the context of worship, the Christian must dwell on hope in the difficult circumstances of daily life—allowing his hope to be ‘toughened by reflection on the hopelessness of all those earthly hopes that beckon so alluringly to his heart’.²⁴³

3.4. The Phenomenological Model: Hope as an Act

3.4.1. The Structural Elements of Hope

Christian philosopher James K. A. Smith examines hope from the perspective of phenomenology. Hope is seen as a way of ‘“intending” the future’.²⁴⁴ Since ‘consciousness is intentional’, ‘the object intended is constituted by the ego’—by which he means that the ego makes sense or gives meaning to experience. Moreover, the ‘process of constitution can only happen within the horizons of constitution, which provide the context within which I “make sense” of what is before me’.²⁴⁵

²⁴¹ Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions*, p. 155.

²⁴² Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions*, p. 163.

²⁴³ Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions*, p. 164.

²⁴⁴ James K. A. Smith, ‘Determined Hope: A Phenomenology of Christian Expectation’, in *The Future of Hope*, ed. by Miroslav Volf and William Katerberg, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), p. 206.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Within this perspective, there are five key ‘structural elements’ of hope.²⁴⁶ There is a *hoper*, a subject who hopes. There is an *object*, that which is hoped for. Here Smith clarifies that it is only hope if the object is good, for that which is in the future and bad is feared. Thirdly, there is the actual *act* of hope— not an act from hope or out of hope or in hope, but the very act of consciousness which is hope. This flows from Husserl’s description of a cogitation as an intentional act.²⁴⁷ Fourthly, there is a *ground* of hope, a basis for hoping. Finally, there is the *fulfilment* of hope. For Smith, if any of the above elements of hope is missing, it is not really hope, though it would still be a way of intending the future such as wishful thinking, fear, or even anxiety.²⁴⁸

3.4.2. Critiquing Hope in Modernity

This structural framework becomes the premise for a critique of modernity and post-modernity. Smith, working with Charles Taylor’s sweeping analysis of how the ‘Secular Age’ emerged, hypothesises that in modernity, the *object* of hope has not changed—or at least has not radically changed—but the *ground* of hope has. Yet, the *object* of hope did change in a few key ways, most notably with regard to space and time. Smith includes the *when* (time) of hope as a sort of subset of the *what* (object) of hope. But this may downplay the change of the ‘locus of [hope’s] arrival’ in the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe and North America from ‘eternity to future time’.²⁴⁹ This change in timing has necessarily included a change in focus. The shift away from ‘eternity’ has meant an accompanying shift away from divine favour. Human action is no longer concerned with gaining favour from ‘God’ but

²⁴⁶ Smith, ‘Determined Hope: A Phenomenology of Christian Expectation’, pp. 207-209.

²⁴⁷ Smith, ‘Determined Hope: A Phenomenology of Christian Expectation’, p. 208.

²⁴⁸ Smith, ‘Determined Hope: A Phenomenology of Christian Expectation’, p. 210.

²⁴⁹ Rorty quoted in Smith, ‘Determined Hope: A Phenomenology of Christian Expectation’, p. 211.

rather with planning for the ‘happiness of future generations’.²⁵⁰ Only God can secure a desired eternity; but human agency and pathway (Snyder) can secure a desired future. Modernity also modified the space in which this hope will occur. Smith includes the *where* (space) in his structural nomenclature of the *object* of hope. While it has conceptual coherence, such a move risks obscuring the significance of this shift. ‘What modernity hopes for carries on the tradition of Christian expectation, but it diverges from that tradition of Christian expectation...with respect to where those hopes will be realized or fulfilled’.²⁵¹ Modernity has the same general ‘what’, but not the same ‘where’ and ‘when’ of Christian expectation. Smith, employing Charles Taylor’s language on our ‘secular age’, describes this as an ‘immanentization’ of the locus/object of hope’ to a ‘“this-worlds utopia”’.²⁵²

Nevertheless, Smith sees the most notable difference between modern, secular eschatology and Christian hope as the immanentization of the ground of hope. The ground of modern hope is not transcendent. Modern hope arises from human self-sufficiency to fulfil their own hopes. This has been demonstrated in Snyder’s psychological perspective of hope as ‘way power’ and ‘willpower’. Smith suggests possible human grounds for hope in modernity that may have replaced divine agency: Rationality (Kant), Dialectical Materialism (Marx), or Technology and the Market (possibly Fukuyama).²⁵³

3.4.3. Critiquing Hope in Post-Modernity

If post-modernism represents at least in part the crumbling of modernity and with it its sense of optimism, then hope seems to be going out of fashion. Out of the

²⁵⁰ Rorty quoted in Smith, ‘Determined Hope: A Phenomenology of Christian Expectation’, p. 211.

²⁵¹ Smith, ‘Determined Hope: A Phenomenology of Christian Expectation’, p. 212.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

wasteland emerge Rorty and Derrida in order to help humanity not to lose hope. Yet both are critical of Christian hope. Rorty sees the New Testament as promoting an other-worldly hope that leads one to acquiesce to social conditions in the present.²⁵⁴ Derrida views Christian hope as politically violent because of its determination of a particular vision of justice.²⁵⁵

Smith finds both Rorty and Derrida's attempts to rescue hope inadequate. In his critique of Rorty, Smith contends that hope, as opposed to wishful thinking, must have some ground, and that ground must bear some proportionality to the object of hope. Rorty's hope is often without ground, even admitting that there are valid reasons for 'historical pessimism'.²⁵⁶ Smith then argues that Derrida's object of hope is ill-defined and thus the very act of hoping is uncertain. Derrida wants a hope that is 'undetermined', since, in his view, determination is a form of violence because to define what it is, it must by default define what it is not, and therefore enact the violence of exclusion. What is hoped for is a sort of existential eschatology that is 'messianic' without 'religion' or 'messianism'. But Smith rejects Derrida's premise that determination is a form of violence. For Smith, a completely indeterminate hope is not hope. Though hope need not have absolute determinacy, it must have a degree of determinacy in order to be hope. In fact, even Derrida's hope contains too much determinacy by his own theoretical standards. Thus, for Smith, Derrida's horizon-less hope is a philosophical impossibility. Even the wholly other must appear within the horizon of our experience or it cannot be awaited or hoped for.

²⁵⁴ Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, summarized by Smith, 'Determined Hope: A Phenomenology of Christian Expectation', p. 204.

²⁵⁵ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, summarized by Smith, 'Determined Hope: A Phenomenology of Christian Expectation', p. 204.

²⁵⁶ Smith, 'Determined Hope: A Phenomenology of Christian Expectation', p. 216.

3.4.4. The Structural Elements of Christian Expectation

What would it look like to plot out the shape of Christian expectation along the five structural elements in Smith's paradigm of hope? Smith offers a sketch. First, the hoper in Christian hope is the Christian community, not merely the individual.²⁵⁷ Thus the gathered church hopes together. Secondly, the act of hope is done by waiting expectantly, impatiently, anxiously, and eagerly.²⁵⁸ Here Smith notes that it is hope that is a virtue, not merely the act of waiting. This is consonant with Roberts's arguments above that, for the Christian, hope is not simply a feeling, or, in this case, even a one-time act.

Thirdly, for Smith the object of Christian hope is a kind of justice which is 'continuous with the present order' —God will redeem creation— and 'discontinuous'—current structures will be revolutionized.²⁵⁹ In order to fill out the content of the object of hope, Smith directs readers to Moltmann's 'Coming of God', to which we shall turn shortly. For now, we note that Smith counts it important that while there is a 'degree of determinacy', there is also a necessary '*lack of specificity*'.²⁶⁰ A blend of vision and mystery is needed to help Christians 'reject the myth of progress in favour of the narrative of grace'.²⁶¹ To believe in grace is to be open to new possibilities of what God will do. It must embrace both transcendence and immanence while being opposed to 'immanentization' as seen in modern eschatologies.

Fourthly, the ground of hope is the revelation of God in Christ, which reveals the 'faithfulness of God to his creation, his identification with the struggles of creation,

²⁵⁷ Smith, 'Determined Hope: A Phenomenology of Christian Expectation', p. 224.

²⁵⁸ Smith, 'Determined Hope: A Phenomenology of Christian Expectation', p. 224.

²⁵⁹ Smith, 'Determined Hope: A Phenomenology of Christian Expectation', p. 225.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ Smith, 'Determined Hope: A Phenomenology of Christian Expectation', p. 226.

and his power and providence to bring about its restoration'.²⁶² Smith contends that all hope, even that of modernity, rests on faith—a belief in something. Christian eschatology argues that God is the only hope. This represents both a 'scandal and good news'.²⁶³ Smith adds little to the fifth element, as it is simply the fulfilment of that for which one hoped.

3.5. Conclusion and Connections

I have outlined four models which provide a textured understanding to hope. The cognitive model identifies hope as a positive motivational state based on a favourable appraisal of both agency and pathway. The affective model demonstrates how hopeful feelings arise. The virtue-ethics model forms connections between emotion and character, allowing hope to become a habit. Finally, the phenomenological model provides a structural analysis of hope in terms of its subject, object, grounds, and act.

Each of these models offer a fruitful framework for my research. Snyder's description of hope as agency and pathway shaped my focus group interviews and the survey I developed. As will become evident in later chapters, the sense of divine versus human agency, and therefore a divine versus human pathway or plan, was a key element in the experience of hope in worship. The emotional dimension of hope provided a way to explore the experience of congregational worship. From my own participant observation and in my focus groups, I note the aesthetic elements of the service in Chapter 7, specifically the musical elements.²⁶⁴ Conformity to and

²⁶² Smith, 'Determined Hope: A Phenomenology of Christian Expectation', p. 226.

²⁶³ Smith, 'Determined Hope: A Phenomenology of Christian Expectation', p. 227.

²⁶⁴ Jeremy Begbie names at least four ways music and emotion are related. Music can embody emotion by mimicking the vocal features and bodily gestures that accompany emotions; music can concentrate and clarify our emotions by the way that it embodies it; music can evoke emotion by mimicking our vocal and bodily gestures of emotion, provoking the brain to trigger the same sorts of responses through 'proprioceptive feedback'; and music has the power to educate emotion by adding to the repertoire of expression. Begbie, Jeremy 'Faithful Feelings: Music and Emotion in Worship',

deviation from ‘feeling rules’ (Hochschild) are also a key part of the discourse analysis in Chapter 7. The perspective of hope as a virtue to be cultivated through communal practice means that congregational worship is an important context for this act to occur. Moreover, if hope is a virtue which must be cultivated by a lifelong habit of practice, and if virtue is shaped by practices which are both habitual and communal, then congregational worship becomes a key practice for the cultivation of hope.

Yet these models on their own are insufficient for understanding hope in a Christian sense. Though Smith’s use of phenomenology to outline the structural elements of hope is helpful, there are several places where it is inadequate for my research. First, as referenced earlier, space and time ought not be collapsed into the *object* of hope, even though it may make conceptual sense to do so. Because space and time are foundational to experience, a phenomenology cannot ignore it. Furthermore, in Christian eschatology, space and time are the key ways of understanding where and when God will bring about His promise, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter.

Secondly, Smith notes that in Christian hope, ‘the object and ground are identical’, though they operate in different modes.²⁶⁵ God is both the ground of hope and the object of hope. But the Nicene Creed confesses, ‘We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come’. This is not the same as the ground for hope. Furthermore, Smith does not say why Christ is the ground of hope or how the faithfulness of God is revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. In the next chapter, I will draw from N. T. Wright’s work to demonstrate

in *Resonant Witness: Conversations Between Music and Theology*, ed. by Jeremy S. Begbie and Steven R. Guthrie, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011), p. 343.

²⁶⁵ Smith, ‘Determined Hope: A Phenomenology of Christian Expectation’, p. 209.

how the faithfulness of God is revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, making the resurrection itself the ground of Christian hope.

Thirdly, the agency of hope is not clearly outlined. Smith may view agency as included in the *ground*, but one can have a basis for hope— past experience, requisite elements of success or desired outcome— without knowing who will bring it about. From a psychological perspective, agency is one of two critical dimensions of hope. Fourthly, to use Snyder's terms again, the pathway of hope is missing from Smith's elements.

When the elements of hope are listed as a set of pronouns, a clear picture of what is missing from Smith's list emerges. What the list includes are *why* (ground), *who* (hoper), *what* (object), and *that* (act). What is missing is a crucial set of interrogative pronouns: *where* (space), *when* (time), *who* (agency), and *how* (pathway). These specific pronouns are precisely the ones addressed as we take a closer look at the theology of hope.

Chapter 4

Theology of Hope: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

In the previous chapter, I reviewed four models for understanding hope which provide helpful frameworks for my research. Yet these models do not outline a uniquely Christian understanding of hope. Because my research is a theological ethnography, the espoused and operant theologies of hope which my fieldwork will reveal need to be set against a normative and operant theology of hope in order for theological reflection to be integrated.

This chapter provides both a normative and a formal theology of hope by tracing early Christian hope until its formalisation in the Nicene Creed, and by moving to the present to outline the key overlapping features of Christian eschatology in two theologians whose influence among Evangelicals in the past 50 years or so is notable. Jürgen Moltmann and N. T. Wright are widely read, and their eschatological perspectives are held as orthodox. I will conclude by offering a definition of ‘creedal Christian hope’ which will function as standard against which to evaluate the hope uncovered through my fieldwork in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

4.1. Eschatology

The theology of hope is formally called ‘eschatology’, drawing from the Greek ‘*eschatos*’ which means ‘last’. Thus eschatology is often described as being the study of last things. Yet, as many theologians have argued, Christian eschatology is so preoccupied with a particular goal—Greek, *telos*—that it might make sense to call it ‘teleology’. As Kent Brower notes, ‘Biblical eschatology may be defined as

“the direction and goal of God’s active covenant faithfulness in and for his created order”²⁶⁶.

Christian theologians developed an eschatological vision early in the Church’s history. The attention to the subject, however, seemed to taper off as Christianity spread into Europe. Eschatology became a focus again during the European Reformations, as Luther and Calvin drew upon visions of judgment to invoke warnings to the Medieval Church and the hope of justification for the repentant sinner. After the fires of schism and change within the Church burned with less fury, the doctrine once again came to occupy a peripheral role. This began to change in the early 20th century as German theologian Jürgen Moltmann sought to combat the secular eschatologies which were capturing the imagination of the West.

One might argue that eschatology has always been, centrally, a theology of hope. Thus when hope was a pastoral necessity, it became a theological focus; and when hope was not as urgent—because the Church was in a seat of power—eschatology returned to the background. This is a hypothesis we shall return to later in this dissertation. What follows now is a brief survey of early Christian eschatology until the time it becomes codified in the Nicene Creed, and then an exploration of contemporary theological articulations of this ‘creedal’ eschatology in the twentieth century.

4.2. Early Christian Hope

And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. **24** For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? **25** But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Romans 8:23-25 (ESV)

²⁶⁶ Brower, Kent E., ‘ “Let the Reader Understand”: Temple and Eschatology in Mark’, in *The Reader Must Understand: Eschatology in Bible and Theology*, ed. by Kent E. Brower and Mark W. Elliott (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997); p. 119.

The New Testament orients the Christian forward on the basis of an event in the past. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ have brought about a new and firm reason for hope. Paul writes of future bodily resurrection (1 Corinthians 15); Peter of a new heavens and new earth (2 Peter 3:13); and John catches a vision of the joining together of heaven and earth, filled with the presence of God (Revelation 21). The theological exposition of New Testament texts is important for shaping a theology of hope, and will occupy the majority of this chapter. But the historical question of how subsequent Christian writers and church fathers understood Christian hope is an important backdrop for such theological study.

4.2.1. Diversity and Commonality

Brian Daley provides a comprehensive survey of early Christian hope in his book *The Hope of the Early Church*.²⁶⁷ Yet the diversity of perspectives covered in the book make it difficult to speak of a singular hope.

The range of images and ideas we have seen among early Christian writers, expressing their expectations for the future of the planet and individual, saint and sinner, suggests that one might perhaps better speak of many facets of a rapidly developing, increasingly detailed Christian view of human destiny, of many hopes—and many fears—enveloped within a single, growing, ever more complex tradition of early Christian faith and practice.²⁶⁸

But for all its variation, Daley is still able to discern a clear trajectory in the evolution of eschatological vision:

from a sense of imminent apocalyptic crisis to a well-developed theology of creation, a future-oriented cosmology and anthropology; from a vivid expectation of the end of this historical order, followed by the raising of the dead and the creation of the wholly new human world, to a systematic doctrine of ‘last things’ as the final piece in a Christ-centered view of history’s whole; from an early focus on the community’s hope for survival in the coming cosmic catastrophe, to a

²⁶⁷ Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology*, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010).

²⁶⁸ Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, p. 216.

later preoccupation with the hope of the individual as he or she faces death.²⁶⁹

Daley qualifies even this evolution of thought as being too general to sufficiently account for the uniqueness of context which led ‘philosophers and polemicists, poets and spiritual writers, bishops in times of peace and prophets in times of persecution’ to place different emphases on different aspects, and to assimilate various elements in their own way.

Despite the limitations of general statements about dozens of different writers in different contexts, it can be helpful to identify common threads. It is the places of overlapping vision that provide clues as to the core of Christian hope. Daley points out that it is ‘clear from the beginning of Christian literature’ that ‘hope for the future is an inseparable, integral dimension of Christian faith, and the implied condition of possibility for responsible Christian action in the world’.²⁷⁰ In other words, while the specifics of what is being hoped for and how or when it will come about may vary, the presence of hope is undeniable within Christianity; it occupies a central place. Secondly, the Patristic writers insist ‘in a crescendo of consensus’ that a Christian lives with this hope ‘*within history*’, and thus carries a sense of ‘realism’.²⁷¹ Thus the centrality of hope and its quality of realism, which locates it within history, are part of the fabric of the Christian faith common to the early Church.

4.2.2. Common Doctrine

Daley goes beyond this general common ground and attempts to outline common elements of early Christian eschatology as an emerging doctrine. The first

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, p. 217.

²⁷¹ Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, p. 218.

is what may be called a ‘ “linear” view of history’.²⁷² This stands in contradiction to the Gnostic repudiation of the temporal world, and in contrast to Origen’s musings about cyclical time. Orthodox Christian writers maintain a firm conviction that history has both an origin and an end, both ‘rooted in the plan and power of God’.²⁷³

The second common element of Patristic eschatology is ‘*the resurrection of the body*’.²⁷⁴ From second-century apologists, through Methodius, to Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine, early Christian theologians insisted on taking the biblical promise of resurrection literally.²⁷⁵ Indeed, as Christopher Hall outlines in his work on the theology of the Church Fathers, many of these writers—particularly Athenagoras and Augustine—went to great lengths to show how God could take decomposed and even digested remains of a human and reconstitute it in an act of new creation to bring resurrection about. The body, because it was created by God, will be redeemed by God.

The resurrection of the body is closely related to the following common element in early Christian eschatology, the prospect of ‘*judgment*’. This judgement, however, would be pronounced by God at the moment of death. This view is the seedbed for what in modern theology is thought of as an ‘interim state’ between death and resurrection. Yet for the Patristics, the details were less clear. Early theologians like Justin and Irenaeus rejected the immortality of the soul, and thus view the interim state as a sort of ‘shadowy existence in Hades’—the domain of the dead—or a kind of ‘ “sleep of souls” ’—as in the Syriac tradition.²⁷⁶ Later theologians from Tertullian on suggest that the person destined for eternal judgment begins experiencing it as a ‘soul’ prior to bodily resurrection.

²⁷² Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, p. 219.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁴ Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, p. 220.

²⁷⁵ *ibid.*

²⁷⁶ *ibid.*

Nevertheless, because judgement was a common element of early Christian eschatology, so too was the related but distinct concept of ‘*retribution*’.²⁷⁷ Drawing from Jewish apocalyptic imagery while modifying it, ‘early Christian writers almost universally assumed that the final state of human existence, after God’s judgment, will be permanent and perfect happiness for the good, and permanent, all-consuming misery for the wicked’.²⁷⁸ By the fourth century, it becomes clear that the blessed and the damned received fates that relate to their proximity to God. Because humans are made for union with God, one is blessed is for and with loving fellowship with him, and damned for and with the decisive turn away from him.²⁷⁹

One final common element which Daley identifies in the doctrine of hope in the early Church is the ‘*communion of the saints*’. While it is Augustine who would develop this view most clearly in *The City of God*, even early Christian theologians had a ‘general sense’ that the departed were still somehow involved in the life of the Church, whether by ‘praying for the living’ or in ‘experiencing the benefit of their prayers’.²⁸⁰ The point here is that salvation is communal and ‘ecclesial’.²⁸¹

4.2.3. Disputed Views

There are also common threads to the disagreement in Patristic eschatology. Daley outlines five. First, there was a variety of opinions about the ‘*time and nearness of the world’s end*’.²⁸² One peculiar facet of this ambiguity about the timing of the end had to do with whether or not there would be a literal period of ‘earthly reward for the just before the dramatic denouement of history’—a

²⁷⁷ *ibid.*

²⁷⁸ Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, pp. 220-221.

²⁷⁹ Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, p. 221.

²⁸⁰ *ibid.*

²⁸¹ *ibid.*

²⁸² *ibid.*

Millenarian hope.²⁸³ Yet while this view surfaced from time to time, it is worth noting that the majority of orthodox Patristic writers rejected millenarianism as an overly literal reading of the scriptures.²⁸⁴

Secondly, there was also continuing controversy about the ‘*materiality and physical character of the resurrection*’.²⁸⁵ Origen was the strongest proponent of a ‘spiritual body’, while Methodius and Jerome were strong opponents of such a view. Though this has been the subject of various debate in the Middle Ages, and, as we shall see below, even in our day, the debate is not about whether or not there will be a resurrected body, but rather, what the resurrected body will be like.

Thirdly, another disputed element of Patristic eschatology is the ‘*extent of eschatological salvation*’.²⁸⁶ Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Evagrius held out hope that all ‘spiritual creatures’ would be saved. Augustine took the other end of the discussion, assuming that the ‘majority of human beings will not be saved’, and that even the ‘perseverance of believers in the life of grace’ is not assured.²⁸⁷ Jerome falls between the two poles, arguing that all ‘Christian believers will experience the final mercy of God’.²⁸⁸ It is important to note that after Origen’s day the hope of a wider salvation for all does not appear in the mainstream of theological thought, and where it does appear, it is hotly contested.

Fourthly, a variance of opinion emerges on the question of the ‘*possibility of change and progress for those whose final destiny has been determined*’.²⁸⁹ Once again, Origen and Gregory of Nyssa depart from the view of the majority of ancient Christian writers. Origen and Gregory posit that since the state of blessedness is a

²⁸³ *ibid.*

²⁸⁴ Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, p. 222.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

‘continual progress towards deeper union with God’, souls after death could move from damnation to blessedness.

Related to the above issue is the fifth area of disagreement, the possibility of *purgatory*. Before purgatory is thought of as a separate, interim state in Western medieval theology, the concept of a ‘purgation from sin’ emerges in the Patristic era in the writings of Origen. Since suffering, in general, serves a medicinal purpose to gain wisdom and expiate sin, God might use a period of suffering after death to prepare souls for the presence of God. Gregory the Great—in the late sixth century—argued that souls who die in imperfection in ‘faith and virtue’ must be ‘purged for a time in fire’ before coming before God. Augustine, chronologically between Origen and Gregory, took a theological middle ground, considering such a view plausible but not promised.

4.2.4. Different Questions

Christopher Hall’s summary of theology of the Church Fathers explores early Christian hope only in its focus on the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.²⁹⁰ From Hall’s survey of Justin Martyr, Polycarp, Athenagoras, and Augustine, it becomes apparent that the Church Fathers were approaching the subject with particular questions. My reading of Hall’s selections suggests a priority of four questions, listed here in no particular order: What will the resurrected body be like? How will God accomplish this given some peculiar and unusual circumstances? On what basis can the Christian hope for resurrection? And, finally, what is bodily resurrection for?

Because the latter two questions relate closely to the paradigm of hope I am constructing for my research, I will give further attention to how early Christian

²⁹⁰ Christopher A. Hall, *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p. 249.

theologians responded to them. One question has to do with the ground or basis for the hope of resurrection; the other has to do with the purpose for such a hope. The responses to the question on the basis for belief in bodily resurrection are rooted in the belief in both the incarnation and the resurrection of Jesus. Joanne E. McWilliam Dewart summarizes the argument made by Clement, one of the apostolic fathers: since Christians received salvation ‘in the flesh’, and since Christ who is ‘the means of salvation’ was himself ‘enfleshed’, then it is right that the ‘future reward should also be “in the flesh”’.²⁹¹ Ignatius, an early bishop and martyr, wrote that just as Christ ‘“was truly raised from the dead, when His Father raised him up, [so] in similar fashion his Father will raise up in Christ Jesus us who believe in him...”’.²⁹² These early writings form the seedbed of theology which will be developed by later theologians of the Church. The grounding for hope never wavers from the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The other question concerns to what end or for what purpose will God bring about bodily resurrection. Augustine rises to the task with particular eloquence and poetry. For him, the whole purpose of new resurrected bodies is to behold God in his glory and beauty. With new physical bodies of the new creation, we shall ‘“observe God in utter clarity and distinctness, seeing him present everywhere...”’.²⁹³ Even if this vision is mediated through the ‘“lives of believers and through creation itself”’, we will see God as he is. God will be ‘“will be seen in the new heavens and the new earth, in the whole creation as it then will be; he will be seen in every body by means of bodies, wherever eyes of the spiritual body are directed with their penetrating gaze.”’.²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ Hall, *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers*, p. 250.

²⁹² Quoted in Hall, *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers*, p. 251.

²⁹³ Quoted in Hall, *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers*, p. 272.

²⁹⁴ *ibid.*

4.3. Normative Theology: The Nicene Creed

The hope of the early Church, as with other crucial aspects of early Christian theology, was codified by the Council of Nicaea in what we call the Nicene Creed. To understand Christianity in its own context is to see it as a movement that grew from Jewish roots. Luke Timothy Johnson, writing on the Nicene Creed, demonstrates that the Creed began as a variation of the *Shema*, the Deuteronomic confession of God as one. Johnson argues that the Creed is not ‘a late and violent imposition upon the simple gospel story’, but rather ‘a natural development of the Christian religion and the crises it faced from the start’.²⁹⁵ He outlines three specific challenges that occasioned the formulation of the Creed:

The first challenge was to define the experience of Jesus within and over against the shared story of Israel. The second challenge was to clarify the complex understanding of God that was embedded in the resurrection experience. The third challenge was to correct misunderstandings of the newly emergent ‘Christian narrative’ that was, at heart, a ‘story about Jesus’.²⁹⁶

These challenges account for the Creed’s Trinitarian structure, and the length of the section on Jesus. Thus, the Creed is not a document of what a modern might call ‘systematic theology’. Not only would such a designation be anachronistic, it would lead one to misconstrue it, and even to mis-critique it. Thus, looking for ‘eschatology’ within the Creed may be fraught with pitfalls. My hope is that by providing a survey of early Christian writing from the church fathers, there is the necessary context for identifying eschatological phrases within the Creed. By that qualification, there are two key eschatological phrases in the Nicene Creed, one in the article related to Christ, and the other in the article related to the Church.

²⁹⁵ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why It Matters* (New York: Image, Doubleday, 2003), p. 10.

²⁹⁶ Johnson, *The Creed*, pp. 10-11.

'He will come again in glory to judge the living and dead, and His kingdom shall have no end'. This first Creedal eschatological statement affirms the return of Christ—or his 'appearing'—and the reality of a final judgment, which will not only occur, but will be at least one of the reasons for Christ's appearing. It goes on to affirm that the reign of Christ, which is understood to have been inaugurated in his earthly life—though this is not made explicit in the Creed—will be consummated with a reign that will know no end.

'We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come'.

This second eschatological statement in the Creed addresses the posture of the Church. The Church is to be a people who are straining forward even while our feet are in the moment. We *look* because we have reason to believe that things will not always be this way; we have hope. The content of this hope is made explicit in the final phrase: bodily resurrection and a new world. It should be noted here that while resurrection has received attention—even if it has been speculative—from the church fathers and modern systematic theologians alike, the nature of the 'world to come' with relation to the physical universe has been largely ignored. This is the claim scientist and theologian David Wilkinson makes in his book *Christian Eschatology and the Physical Universe* (2010). This may be due to a lack of understanding of science, the difficulty of speaking about the cosmos from within it, or the perceived lack of practical value that such a study would produce.²⁹⁷

Nevertheless, these two phrases taken together provide a summation of early Christian eschatology, which I am calling 'creedal Christian hope'. The Creed confesses a future-oriented hope for the return of Christ, the full reign of Christ, the final judgment of the human race, the resurrection of the believer, and the new

²⁹⁷ David Wilkinson, *Christian Eschatology and the Physical Universe* (London, UK: T&T Clark International, 2010), pp. 24-25.

creation. Of particular interest to my research is the observation that the eschatology of the Creed contains both *futurity*—Christ ‘will come again’; we look for the life of ‘the world to come’—and *materiality*—the body will be resurrected.

4.4. Formal Theology: Jürgen Moltmann and N. T. Wright

‘Creedal Christian hope’ needs to be articulated and explicated in each day for its day. Two scholars in the last several decades are notable because of both their scholarship and the influence of their work on eschatology in the academy and in the church. Renowned in the past century as being the theologian of hope, Jürgen Moltmann made eschatology no longer marginal but central to Christian theology. Wright took the next step, giving the New Testament vision of a redeemed creation such a wide exposure that he was even featured on the mainstream television show, *The Colbert Report*.²⁹⁸ Arguably, no biblical scholar has done more for this view in terms of widening its reach than Wright.²⁹⁹

Each scholar approaches the subject from the perspective of a different discipline. Moltmann writes as a systematic theologian, Wright as a New Testament scholar with particular emphasis on Pauline theology. He has written extensively on subjects related to what may be called ‘Christian origins’. As such, the topic is treated more directly by Moltmann than by Wright, though eschatology is a key feature in Wright’s reading of Paul in particular and of the New Testament as a whole.

Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope* was his first significant theological work, and it reflected on how the resurrection of Jesus is central to Christian theology.

Moltmann would write even more extensively on eschatology in his work, *The Coming of God*, focussing on ‘personal eschatology’, ‘historical eschatology’, and

²⁹⁸ *Colbert Report*, (June 19, 2008), <http://thecolbertreport.cc.com/videos/m7daav/bishop-n-t-wright>.

²⁹⁹ J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), p. 310.

‘cosmic eschatology’. Wright’s most widely-read work on Christian eschatology is called *Surprised by Hope*. His most direct writing on eschatology, however, comes in the context of his exposition of Pauline theology. Wright outlines the key feature of Judaism as ‘monotheism, election, and eschatology’, and explores how Paul re-shapes them around Jesus the Messiah and the Spirit. Though they appear in smaller books on Paul, these three themes provide the main structure of his two-volume work, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*. The rest of Wright’s eschatology must be read in his analysis of resurrection—both of Jesus and of Christians in the future—in his tome *Resurrection and the Son of God*.

4.4.1. Overlapping Views

Despite their different disciplines and approaches to the subject of Christian eschatology, there is considerable overlap in their thinking. One might liken this to two people observing a city square from the windows of two different buildings; they are looking at the same scenes, but from different perspectives and angles, thus giving attention to different details and movements. I will outline six planes on which Moltmann and Wright overlap in their respective eschatologies.

The Primacy of Jewish Eschatology

Moltmann builds on the foundation of Jewish eschatology, carrying forward the theme of God’s presence. ‘The central expectation of Jewish and Christian eschatology has always been the coming of God to his creation and the coming presence of God in his whole creation’.³⁰⁰ Moltmann employs the Jewish theological concepts of *sabbath* and *shekinah* to delineate God’s presence now from God’s eschatological presence. Sabbath is God’s presence in Time, and Shekinah is God’s

³⁰⁰ *God Will Be All In All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*, ed. by Richard Bauckham (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2001), p. 24.

presence in Space.³⁰¹ Creation-in-the-beginning is finished in God's sabbath; creation will be created anew so that it may become home of God's *Shekinah*.³⁰² Sabbath and *Shekinah* thus are 'related to one another as promise and fulfillment, beginning and completion'.³⁰³ Time and space also are connected in this way. 'Creation begins with time and is completed in space'.³⁰⁴

Moltmann summarizes the Old Testament's vision of resurrection as an 'unequivocal salvific hope' (Isaiah 24-26), and as judgment (Daniel 12), with the two perspectives found 'side by side unharmonized'.³⁰⁵ This is nuanced slightly by resurrection in the books of Maccabees as a 'two-edged expectation, because one does not know to which side one will be called to account on Judgment Day'.³⁰⁶ Moltmann surmises that the Jewish vision of hope is not about resurrection, *per se*, but rather what resurrection stands for: 'the universal victory of God's righteousness and justice'.³⁰⁷

Wright outlines three positions regarding the afterlife as seen in the Old Testament, and proposes an explanation for how resurrection relates to each. While early Jewish eschatology taught that the dead were either resting with the ancestors or received by YHWH into some continuing life, the later Jewish hope of resurrection is not a development out of the latter but rather a 'radical development from within' the former.³⁰⁸ This resurrection hope does not deny that the person goes to *Sheol* or 'the dust' or 'the grave', nor does not it affirm that a 'non-bodily post-mortem existence in the presence of YHWH is the final good' for which we

³⁰¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, trans. by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1996), p. 266.

³⁰² Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, pp. 265-6.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, p. 68.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁸ N. T. Wright, *Resurrection and the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), p. 124.

hope. Furthermore, Wright argues that resurrection as ‘bodily resurrection for dead humans’ and resurrection as ‘national restoration for exiled/suffering Israel’ are so closely intertwined that ‘it does not matter that we cannot always tell which is meant, or even if a distinction is possible...’.³⁰⁹

This is evident first from the ‘servant’ passages in Isaiah where ‘the belief that Israel’s god will restore the nation after exile’ becomes the belief ‘that he will restore the nation’s *representative* after death’.³¹⁰ ‘The earlier national hope thus transmutes, but perfectly comprehensibly, into the hope that Israel’s god will do for a human being what Israel always hoped he would do for the nation as a whole’.³¹¹ Eventually, this belief is also applied to the Messiah’s people, which Wright grounds in Daniel 12, ‘where the nation’s representative has become plural’.³¹²

Wright refutes the claim that the hope of resurrection was a derivative of ancient Zoroastrianism or from Canaanite mythology. He argues that because the thrust of the resurrection passages is on Israel’s unique status as the chosen people of the one creator god, to borrow imagery to say this would be undermining the message. Even the relative lateness of resurrection in Jewish thought is itself a demonstration that they were not borrowing an image from pagan religions; instead, Wright sees resurrection as an imaginative contrast to the empires of Babylon and Syria and an evocative way of the prophets speaking of the end of exile and the renewal of covenant.³¹³ Wright argues that resurrection in Jewish thought is both metonymy and metaphor. When resurrection refers to a ‘literal prediction’ of one element in that restoration, it is a metonymy. When the ‘belief in resurrection’

³⁰⁹ Wright, *Resurrection and the Son of God*, p. 124.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

³¹² *Ibid.*

³¹³ Wright, *Resurrection and the Son of God*, pp. 124-27.

serves as ‘an image for the restoration of nation and land’, it is functioning as a metaphor, such as in Ezekiel’s vision of God breathing life into dry bones.³¹⁴

The Centrality of Christ’s Resurrection

‘Christianity stands or falls with the reality of the raising of Jesus from the dead by God’, wrote Moltmann in his *Theology of Hope*.³¹⁵ As a systematic theologian, Moltmann links Christology with eschatology, viewing the two doctrines as existing in a ‘mutually interpretative relationship’.³¹⁶ For Moltmann, eschatology begins with Christology, and Christology is completed or consummated in eschatology.

Theology of Hope outlines two key strands that explicate the essential meaning of the resurrection: identity and divine action. By ‘identity’ Moltmann means that it was the same Jesus who was crucified who is now raised.³¹⁷ Cross and resurrection represent total opposites—‘death and life, the absence of God and the nearness of God, godforsakenness and the glory of God’.³¹⁸ Yet it was the same Jesus who experienced both. Thus, by ‘raising him to life, God created continuity in this radical discontinuity’.³¹⁹

‘Divine action’ refers to the resurrection as the fulfillment of God’s ‘eschatological promise’ in the person of Jesus.³²⁰ Resurrection ‘represented the point at which Jewish hopes for the future became thoroughly eschatological, in envisaging a future in which even death will be overcome in God’s new creation’.³²¹

³¹⁴ Wright, *Resurrection and the Son of God*, p. 128.

³¹⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. by James W. Leitch, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1993), p. 165.

³¹⁶ *God Will Be All In All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*, ed. by Richard Bauckham (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2001), p. 2.

³¹⁷ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark Ltd, 1995), p. 33.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

³²¹ *Ibid.*

In raising Jesus from the dead, God ‘guaranteed’ his promise by ‘enacting’ it in Jesus. Furthermore, because Jesus ‘has been raised for the sake of the future eschatological resurrection of all the dead, the new creation of all reality, and the coming of God’s kingdom of righteousness and glory’, one must view the resurrection of Jesus as becoming the cause and grounds of this ‘universal future’.³²² Almost thirty years after writing the above statement in *Theology of Hope*, Moltmann underscores it again in *The Coming of God*: ‘Christian faith in God is shaped by the experience of the dying and death of Christ, and by the appearances of the Christ who was raised’.³²³

Wright also roots his theology of hope in the resurrection of Jesus, particularly as Paul understood the resurrection. Paul believed two things, which, for Wright, are only comprehensible as mutations within the Jewish worldview and not combinations of Jewish eschatology and something else. The first is that Paul believed the resurrection as a historical moment had divided in two: the resurrection (first) of the Messiah, and the resurrection of his people (at his *parousia*). Secondly, Paul argued that the resurrection of the body would be bodily and would involve a transformation.

Resurrection is at the heart of the New Testament Christianity. ‘All the major books and strands, with the single exception of Hebrews, make resurrection a central and important topic, and set it within a framework of Jewish thought about the one god as creator and judge’.³²⁴ In the centuries that followed, resurrection was ‘foundational to early Christianity in all forms known to us’ with few exceptions.³²⁵ Against the pagan view that death was the end, Christianity ‘affirmed...the future

³²² Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, p. 34.

³²³ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, p. 69.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ Wright, *Resurrection and the Son of God*, p. 551.

bodily resurrection of all god's people'.³²⁶ And in contrast to the Jewish views of resurrection, Christianity 'affirmed in great detail [a] the belief that resurrection involved going through death and into a non-corruptible body the other side'; [b] that the Messiah was raised from the dead ahead of everyone else; and [c] it allowed for an intermediate state of the denatured person being with the Lord until the resurrection.³²⁷ Furthermore, it is remarkable that Christianity never seems to have developed 'even the beginnings of a spectrum of belief' influenced by the spectrum in paganism or Judaism.³²⁸ It stuck to one point within Judaism. More remarkable still is the fact that Christianity found 'new ways of speaking about what the resurrection involved and how it would come about', which Jewish texts and thought would not have envisioned.³²⁹ Why did this happen? Wright concludes it was due to being 'decisively launched by, and formed around, the resurrection of Jesus himself'; the theology of resurrection was a result of early Christian witness that said that Jesus of Nazareth had been raised from the dead.³³⁰

The Paradigm for the Resurrection of the Dead

For both Moltmann and Wright, the resurrection of Jesus is paradigmatic for the resurrection of believers; it is how we understand what our resurrection bodies may be like. Furthermore, both see the future resurrection of the believer as central to Christian hope just as the resurrection of Jesus is central to Christian theology. Future bodily resurrection is set in contrast to the immortality of the soul in Moltmann's writing, and in contrast to 'going to heaven' in Wright's work. With a preacher's conviction and cadence, Moltmann writes:

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

³²⁸ Wright, *Resurrection and the Son of God*, p. 552.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

The immortality of the soul is an opinion—the resurrection of the dead is a hope. The first is a trust in something immortal in the human being, the second is a trust in the God who calls into being the things that are not, and makes the dead live. In trust in the immortal soul we accept death, and in a sense anticipate it. In trust in the life-creating God we await the conquest of death — ‘death is swallowed up in victory’ (1 Cor. 15.54) — and an eternal life in which ‘death shall be no more’ (Rev. 21.4). The immortal soul may welcome death as a friend, because death releases it from the earthly body; but for the resurrection hope, death is ‘the last enemy’ (1 Cor. 15.26) of the living God and the creations of his love.³³¹

For Moltmann, the crucial difference between a belief in future bodily resurrection and the belief in the immortality of the soul is the locus of trust. Resurrection requires trust in God; the immortality of the soul is the result of trust in self. One might also add that the first is an active hope—in an active object—while the other is a passive hope in a static state of being.

Moltmann understands the resurrection of Christ to mean the ‘transformation of his whole, bodily, form’ rather than the ‘survival of some eternal part of him’, and therefore this physical bodily resurrection is the paradigm for the new creation of all things.³³² Eschatology, then, is ‘emphatically not about the transcendence of immaterial and eternal aspects of creation [soul/spirit] over the bodily and mortal aspects. It is the new creation of the whole of this transient and bodily creation’.³³³

Wright’s thesis on the redemption of our bodies is simply this: ‘The risen Jesus is both the *model* for the Christian’s future body and the *means* by which it comes about’.³³⁴ Like Moltmann, Wright finds ‘modern Westerners’ to have more in common with Plato’s dualism of material and immaterial than with Jewish creation theology which affirmed the physical. Wright expounds on 1 Corinthians 15 as a

³³¹ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, p. 65-66.

³³² *God Will Be All In All*, p. 6.

³³³ *God Will Be All In All*, p. 7.

³³⁴ N. T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), p. 149.

key text, within which there are two crucial phrases: the ‘physical body’ and the ‘spiritual body’. Wright finds the translation misleading:

The contrast is between the present body, corruptible, decaying, and doomed to die, and the future body, incorruptible, undecaying, never to die again. The key adjectives, which are quoted endlessly in discussions of this topic, do not refer to a physical body and a nonphysical one...

The first word, *psychikos*, does not in any case mean anything like “physical” in our sense. For Greek speakers of Paul’s day, the *psyche*, from which the word derives, means the soul, not the body.³³⁵

The deeper point linguistically for Wright is in the ending *-ikos*, which does not describe ‘*the material out of which things are made but the power or energy that animates them*’.³³⁶ Thus the contrast is really between the body which the soul powers versus the body which the spirit—God’s Spirit—powers. As Wright puts it, the contrast is between ‘*corruptible physicality*’ and ‘*incorruptible physicality*’.³³⁷

The Paradigm for the Renewal of Creation

The resurrection of Jesus is also paradigmatic, in both Moltmann’s and Wright’s views, for the new heavens and the new earth. For Moltmann, ‘[t]here is no beginning of the world without the end of this old one, there is no kingdom of God without judgment on godlessness, there is no rebirth of the cosmos without “the birth pangs of the End-time”’. Moltmann rejects both the view that creation will be annihilated and re-created, and the new creation will develop out of the old. Just as Christ was truly dead and his resurrection body did not develop out of the dead Christ, so the ‘new creation of all things does not issue from the history of the old creation’.³³⁸ Instead, the end ‘hides a new beginning’,³³⁹ while the new beginning is a genuinely ‘new creative act’.³⁴⁰

³³⁵ Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, p. 155.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

³³⁷ Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, p. 156.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

In Moltmann's thought, the future bodily resurrection of the believer is connected to the renewal of the cosmos; one cannot happen without the other. 'The two sides belong together: there is no resurrection of the dead without the new earth in which death will be no more'.³⁴¹ 'Hope for the resurrection of the dead is therefore only the beginning of a hope for a cosmic new creation of all things and conditions'.³⁴² This forms the bridge in Moltmann's thought from 'personal eschatology' to 'cosmic eschatology'.³⁴³ Without this bridge, Christian eschatology would devolve into a 'gnostic doctrine of redemption', which advocated a 'redemption *from* the world' not a 'redemption *of* the world', a 'deliverance of the soul from the body' and no longer 'redemption of the body'.³⁴⁴

Moltmann invokes the doctrine of God as Creator and as Redeemer as the basis for the link between personal eschatology and cosmic eschatology. The Creator God who rested from work of creation will redeem his creation and renew it in such a way that his presence can one day fully rest in his creation. The connection between creation and redemption, as between the aforementioned concepts of *sabbath* and *Shekinah*, is God himself. 'There are not two Gods, a Creator God and a Redeemer God. There is one God. It is for his sake that the unity of redemption and creation has to be thought'.³⁴⁵

Wright emphasizes the practice of early Christians looking back at the first Easter in order to see what was coming. It was 'precisely because of their very Jewish belief in God as creator and redeemer, and because they had seen this belief confirmed in the totally unexpected event of Jesus' resurrection, they also looked

³³⁹ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, p. 234.

³⁴⁰ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, p. 68.

³⁴¹ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, p. 69.

³⁴² Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, p. 70.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁴ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, p. 259.

³⁴⁵ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, p. 259.

forward eagerly to an event yet to come in which what began at Easter would be completed'.³⁴⁶ The resurrection of Jesus as a paradigm of the renewal of the cosmos is clear in Wright's mind: '...what God did for Jesus at Easter he will do...for the entire cosmos'.³⁴⁷

In contrast to Moltmann's move from personal eschatology outward to cosmic eschatology, Wright begins with what Easter means for the cosmos and moves inward to personal hope. Where Moltmann sketched the vision of bodily resurrection and then constructed a backdrop befitting it, Wright paints the horizon of new creation and sets a new kind of human against it. Both see the bridge between resurrected bodies and a renewed creation, but they work toward the bridge from different sides.

Expositing 1 Corinthians 15, Wright links Paul's 'first fruits' language to Passover and Pentecost. In this light, Jesus's resurrection is both a kind of passing through the 'Red Sea of death' and the defeat of sin and death as spiritual 'slavemasters'.³⁴⁸ Both the Exodus and the resurrection are 'an act of pure grace', not the result of some sort of progress.³⁴⁹ This is consonant with Moltmann's claim that the new does not emerge from the old as if it were latent within it as a possibility. Wright sums things up with one rather full sentence. 'What I am proposing is that the New Testament image of the future hope of the whole cosmos, grounded in the resurrection of Jesus, gives as coherent a picture as we need or could have of the future that is promised to the whole world, a future in which, under the sovereign and wise rule of creator God, decay and death will be done away with and a new creation born, to which the present will stand as mother to

³⁴⁶ Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, p. 79.

³⁴⁷ Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, p. 99.

³⁴⁸ Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, p. 98.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

child'.³⁵⁰ Creation will experience redemption and renewal, both of which are 'promised and guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead'.³⁵¹

The Insufficiency of Secular and Modern Christian Eschatologies.

If a common enemy makes two parties allies, then Moltmann and Wright would be comrades in arms in the fight against alternate eschatologies, specifically, the secular ideal of progress and the popular Christian notion of a disembodied escape. Moltmann names the utopian myth of progress, *millenarianism*, referring to the belief that humans can achieve peace. He names the dystopian fear of an inevitable end from which one seeks to escape, *apocalypticism*. Peace and destruction come together in the Christian vision of death and resurrection.

Bauckham sums up Moltmann's view this way:

In relation to human history...the hope of redemption enables the future to be perceived neither in terms of ***goal without rupture*** (the one-sided secularization of the millenarian hope) nor in terms of ***end without fulfillment*** (the one-sided secularization of the apocalyptic expectation of catastrophe). It promotes neither then "***messianic presumption***" of utopian progressivism nor the "***apocalyptic resignation***" of fatalistic acceptance of inevitable catastrophe [citing Moltmann in *Coming of God*, p. 192.], both of which in their opposite ways aid and abet the modern historical project in deadly and destructive progress. By awakening hope in the power of God's redemptive future, it enables resistance to the power of history, anticipates a different future, alternative to that which the trends of past and present project, and in this way proves redemption already.³⁵²

Wright calls Moltmann's *millenarianist*, 'progressivist', but does not have an exact analog to Moltmann's *apocalypticist*. Instead, Wright uses the term 'dualist' to denote the hope of escape. The progressivist hopes for the fittest to survive, the strongest to conquer, and the best to win out. Though this can become a way to justify empire, it cannot account for evil. The dualist, on the other hand, is

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

³⁵² *God Will Be All In All*, p. 20.

unconvinced that humans can change the world. Wright is far more scathing in his criticism of disembodied and escapist visions of Christian hope than he is of the secular myth of progress. Wright dismantles the largely American fixation on a 'rapture' with a blow-by-blow exegesis of the misunderstood texts.

The Basis for the Mission of the Church.

For both Moltmann and Wright, eschatology is not an esoteric or irrelevant doctrine partly because of their belief about its impact on how the Church understands its mission. Both scholars derive a kind of political theology from their eschatology, and Wright builds his vision of Christian ethics from the *telos* of Christian eschatology. Bauckham argues that Moltmann's interpretation of eschatology became widely influential precisely because of its 'strongly practical thrust'.

[Moltmann] 'made Christian hope the motivating force for the church's missionary engagement with the world, especially for Christian involvement in the processes of social and political change. By opening the church to the eschatological future, it also opened the church to the world, casting the church in the role of an agent of eschatological unrest in society, whose task is to keep the world on the move towards the coming kingdom of God'.³⁵³

This has been criticized by those who oppose liberation theology or who are uncomfortable with what they may perceive to be too much emphasis on the social over the moral or personal dimensions of salvation. Nevertheless, what must be noted is how action and vision are connected for Moltmann. If one knows what is coming, one is compelled to work in anticipation of it.

Wright makes a similar case in *Surprised by Hope*. Attempting to reframe mission, he writes:

³⁵³ Bauckham, Richard, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark Ltd, 1995), p. 30.

Living between the resurrection of Jesus and the final coming together of all things in heaven and earth means celebrating God's healing of his world not his abandoning of it; God's reclaiming of space as heaven and earth intersect once more; God's redeeming of time as years, weeks, and days speak the language of renewal; and God's redeeming of matter itself, in the sacraments, which point in turn to the renewal of the lives that are washed in baptism and fed with the Eucharist.³⁵⁴

This mission cannot juxtapose 'saving souls' and 'doing good'; evangelism and justice belong together when mission is shaped by anticipation of the future.³⁵⁵

In an appendix critiquing what he believes are the two typical Easter sermons, Wright offers hints of what an Easter sermon *should* say, and, by doing so, suggests how Christian mission might be reimagined in light of a more robust hope.

[E]very act of love, every deed done in Christ and by the Spirit, every work of true creativity—doing justice, making peace, healing families, resisting temptation, seeking and winning true freedom—is an earthly event in a long history of things that *implement* Jesus's own resurrection and *anticipate* the final new creation and act as signposts of hope, point back to the first [resurrection] and on to the second [resurrection].³⁵⁶

4.4.2. Notable Differences

The reasons for renewing creation

As mentioned above, Moltmann's 'cosmic eschatology' includes a death and new beginning of creation. But Moltmann's more radical claim is that the renewal of creation is not restoration, but the perfection of creation. Moltmann presents two scenarios. The first is that creation was perfect from the beginning, but was spoiled by human sin. In this scenario, grace is 'the divine expedient designed to remedy the predicament of sin'.³⁵⁷ Eschatology in this scenario is *restitutio in integrum*— 'a return to the pristine beginning'. The second scenario is that creation in the beginning was 'very good', which 'does not mean that it was in the Greek sense

³⁵⁴ Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, p. 264.

³⁵⁵ Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, p. 265.

³⁵⁶ Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, pp. 294-5.

³⁵⁷ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, p. 262.

perfect and without any future’, but rather the Hebrew sense ‘that it was fitting, appropriate, corresponding to the Creator’s will’.³⁵⁸ Hope is beyond redemption from sin and its consequences. Eschatology is *incipit vita nova*— ‘here a new life begins’.

Even though the first scenario is the interpretation of cosmology that has been passed down by the theological tradition of the Western church, Moltmann finds it lacking because of its circularity. If one took circularity to be strictly true, ‘the circle of Christian drama of redemption would have to repeat itself to all eternity. The restoration of the original creation would have to be followed by the next Fall, and by the next redemption— the return of the same thing without end’.³⁵⁹ Furthermore, Moltmann raises the question of how such a cyclical view would correspond to Paul’s teaching that where sin abounds, grace abounds more. (Rom. 5:20). Moltmann argues that the ‘added value of grace is its power to end, not just actual sin, but even the possibility of sinning, not just actual death but even the being-able-to-die, as Augustine said.’³⁶⁰ Hope, then, is ‘not directed to the “restoration” of the original creation’ ...but rather to ‘creation’s final consummation’. The ‘end is much more than the beginning’.³⁶¹

For Wright, creation needs to be renewed for three reasons. First, ‘the world is created good but *incomplete*’. This is, as seen above, an area of agreement—even in language and perspective—with Moltmann. A nuance, though, is that Wright sees death as not being part of the original good creation, but rather as an enemy that has its role as the result of sin. This view is in keeping with Christian tradition, and belongs in Moltmann’s ‘Scenario 1’. Secondly, creation is subjected to slavery.

³⁵⁸ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, p. 264.

³⁵⁹ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, p. 263.

³⁶⁰ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, p. 264.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Here, again, there are parallels for Wright with the children of Israel in Egypt.

Creation will be free from its slavery when the people of God are glorified.

Employing Pauline texts, Wright explains, ‘This is where Romans 8 dovetails with 1 Corinthians 15’.³⁶² Thirdly, creation is divided. One day, heaven and earth, as John the Revelator envisioned and Paul declared, will be joined together at last.³⁶³

The overlapping of two ages and the inauguration of the Kingdom of God.

Both Wright and Moltmann believe in an ‘inaugurated eschatology’, a Kingdom of God that is both ‘now and not yet’. But for Moltmann, the rule of Christ from resurrection to new creation happens in two stages: the messianic rule now, and the millennial reign then.³⁶⁴ During the millennial reign, two key things will occur: the martyrs who have died with Christ will live with him; and Israel will be raised and redeemed and form the messianic people of the messianic kingdom—along with Christians.³⁶⁵ Moltmann sees this as a ‘transitional kingdom leading from this transitory world-time to the new world that is God’s; it is not yet the ‘kingdom of glory’ that Christ will hand back to the Father. Moltmann argues that the ‘transitional role of the millennium in historical eschatology’ is parallel to ‘the intermediate state (between death and resurrection) in personal eschatology’, though it must be noted that Moltmann rejects a ‘purgatory of any kind.’³⁶⁶ Moltmann also has no such parallel of a transitional role in cosmic eschatology as he does for his ‘personal’ and ‘historical’ eschatologies.

Wright is largely silent on a millennial period, leading many to conclude that he is an *amillennialist*. The best one could infer would be that Wright reads the description of a millennial reign in Revelation as ‘symbol’ and not ‘code’—a

³⁶² Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, p. 103.

³⁶³ Revelation 21; Ephesians 1:10.

³⁶⁴ *God Will Be All In All*, p. 22.

³⁶⁵ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, pp. 195, 198-9.

³⁶⁶ *God Will Be All In All*, p. 23.

metaphor for living in the in-between that does not have a concrete referent.³⁶⁷

Wright's refusal to map out anything that might resemble a timeline is a significant difference from Moltmann whose 'process theology' is as developed as it is controversial.

Universal Salvation

Though it is not overtly expressed, Moltmann leans toward a belief in ultimate universal salvation. In his view, God's redeeming act must be as comprehensive as his creative act if we are to see God as being faithful and gracious to his creation. God, Moltmann argues, would cease to be the creator if he left parts of his creation to perish; he would be a destroyer.³⁶⁸

Wright, however, does not even leave the door open for such a hope. Judgment, Wright says, is the 'sovereign declaration that *this* is good and to be upheld and vindicated, and *that* is evil and to be condemned'; furthermore, judgment is 'the only alternative to chaos'.³⁶⁹ Yet Wright is uncomfortable with the traditional view—or distortions of it—that judgment is a sort of eternal torture chamber. He argues that when a being made in the image of God ceases to worship God, he or she gradually ceases to reflect the image of God. What results is a being that is less than human, and therefore not only 'beyond hope but also beyond pity'.³⁷⁰ He acknowledges the ambiguity about what this state of being would be. What is not left unclear, however, is the tragedy that some will in fact reject God's redemption and receive judgment as a result. This is not a contradiction to Christian hope, but is, in a sense, a corollary to it.

³⁶⁷ N. T. Wright, *Revelation and Christian Hope: Political Implications of the Revelation to John* (2014) <<https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/revelation-christian-hope/id447840163?i=167437316&mt=2>> [accessed 4 October, 2014].

³⁶⁸ Richard Bauckham offers a rebuttal of this in his summary of Moltmann's eschatology *God Will Be All In All*.

³⁶⁹ Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, p. 178.

³⁷⁰ Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, p. 182.

4.4.3. Challenges with Their Views

This is not the place to provide a detailed critique of Moltmann's and Wright's respective eschatologies. I will only provide some general comments on the challenges with each of their views from my perspective and as it relates to my research. To begin with, the use of Scripture for each has some weaknesses. Moltmann relies heavily on a philosophical or conceptual reading of Scripture, drawing meta-themes out of key stories, rather than examining a text in its particularities of context and culture. The *sitz im leben* of Exodus, for instance, means less for Moltmann than the theme of liberation. This decontextualized reading may be the reason for Moltmann's sweeping claim that the redeemer must redeem all creation or else he would be unfaithful to his creation. A closer reading of the Exodus narrative might force one to grapple with judgment and evil and the finality of justice.

Wright's readings of the eschatological passages in the Gospels are emphatically preterist, though he does not use this term. Found in his 'For Everyone' commentaries on the Gospels and his other more academic volumes (see, *Resurrection and the Son of God*), Wright directs passages like Mark 13 exclusively toward the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Such an approach, however, does not take with sufficient seriousness that quality of prophetic and apocalyptic passages that refers *predictively* to events in the immediate future and *figurally* to events in the later future.

A critique that is frequently levelled against Wright specifically is that his description of how to live in light of Christian hope comes very near to an 'over-realized' eschatology. Though Wright would deny such an accusation, many of his practical suggestions—such as forgiving debt in the Global South, condemning war

as a response to global terrorism, and more—have been criticised as too idealistic. Not many would disagree with his premise that Jesus has indeed ascended to the throne room and is reigning over the earth; but there are questions as to how much that rule has come to bear upon reality at present. Wright's apparent belief that it is the Church who must bring Christ's rule to bear upon the events of this world, saying little about our limits to act in this age, adds fuel to the critique.

One final challenge might arise from an admittedly speculative exploration of the sociological dimensions of both Wright and Moltmann's thought. For instance, Wright might be called an 'establishment man', as a former Bishop in the Church of England; Moltmann might be considered an 'anti-establishment man' as one who fought in a war he did not agree with, a war that his 'state church' endorsed. Could this be why Wright stays squarely in line with his tradition with regard to final judgment, while Moltmann freely questions it? Wright's status as a 'public figure' in Western evangelicalism might further prohibit how controversial he can be.

4.4.4. Summary

The two theologians have overlapping yet different centres to their vision of Christian hope. The core of Christian hope for Moltmann is the presence of God; for Wright, it is the faithfulness of *God*. Moltmann, the systematician, emphasizes the coming of God—the title of his book on eschatology—as the great *Shekinah* that will fill the cosmos—hence the reason Bauckham's book on Moltmann's eschatology is called, *God Will Be All In All*. The focus is on the presence of God coming and filling of all things. The cosmos will be completed and renewed to be fit for such a filling. Wright, the Pauline scholar, emphasizes the faithfulness of God. The covenant narrative is paramount for Wright. It is within that narrative that he

finds God being faithful not only as YHWH but on behalf of unfaithful Israel as well. It is this faithfulness that is good news for the whole world: God does not scrap his project (creation), forget his promise (the covenant with Abraham to bless all nations through his family), or abandon his people (Israel). While he certainly draws out themes like victory (see *Jesus and the Victory of God*) from the resurrection, the resurrection is, for Wright, the consummate picture of the faithfulness of God.

4.5. Conclusion and Connections

From the beginning, Christian hope was Christ-centered: it was an expectation of a sure future secured by Christ's death and resurrection. The return of Christ would bring about the resurrection of the dead and the judgment of the living and dead. This belief is articulated in the Nicene Creed's confession that Christ 'will come again in glory to judge in the living and the dead', and that the Church in the present looks forward to 'the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come'. Brower's words provide a helpful distillation of the unity in Christian eschatological vision amidst its variations:

Even if countless details of biblical eschatology are open to different interpretations, its central principle is clear enough: that God's good purposes for his created order are fulfilled in Christ, the perfect representative of redeemed humanity. 'As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him, but we do see Jesus' (Heb. 2:8–9). Herein lies the Christian hope.³⁷¹

Moltmann and Wright make clear how Christian eschatology builds upon a Jewish eschatology which is rooted in the faithfulness of God as both Creator and Covenant-Keeper. Yet both Moltmann and Wright also demonstrate how radically new and different Christian eschatology is, precisely because it is shaped by the life, death, and specifically the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In a manner not altogether unlike Augustine's musings on the qualities of the resurrection body, Moltmann and

³⁷¹ Brower, IVP, p. 465

Wright extend the work of early Christian theologians by reflecting on the nature of new creation and its relation to space and time.

To review the ground we have covered thus far, hope can be understood from several models. From a cognitive model, hope is a ‘positive motivational state’; it is oriented upward and forward.³⁷² Hope is based on ‘agency’ and ‘pathway’, which Snyder sometimes calls ‘willpower’ and ‘waypower’.³⁷³ Agency answers the question of who will bring about the desired goal; pathway answers the question of how. Agency requires a ‘goal-directed energy’, while pathway requires planning. Within an affective model, hope is the experience of positive emotions that result in a kind of optimism which functions as a motivation. The virtue-ethics model provides a link for the emotional experience of hope to lead to the virtue or character of hopefulness. The phenomenological model provides a way of naming the structural elements of hope, focussing particularly on the grounds, the object, the hoper, and the act of hope. Theologically, hope has to do not only with *who* and *how*, but also *where* and *when*. Following Moltmann and Wright, God’s eschatological promises can be understood in terms of space and time. Drawing on historical Christian affirmations of hope, the most succinct line from early Christian communities is the one which ends the Nicene Creed: ‘We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come’. This provides the *what* of hope.

For the purposes of my research, I am defining ‘creedal Christian hope’ in the contemporary context as follows: Christian hope is a confident assurance (act), grounded in God’s promise and faithfulness as revealed in the Scriptures in general and in Christ in particular (grounds), that the Triune God (agency) will bring about the ‘resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come’ (object) at the time of

³⁷² Snyder, quoted in Stobbart, ‘Towards a Model of Christian Hope’, p. 3.

³⁷³ Snyder, ‘Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind’, p. 249.

Christ's 'appearing' (time), making heaven and earth new and one (space), by means of what has already been accomplished at the resurrection of Jesus (pathway). To put it another way: The *who* is the Triune God; the *what* is the resurrection of the dead and the world to come; the *how* is the resurrection of Christ; the *why* is the faithfulness of God in Christ; the *where* is both heaven and earth, made new; the *when* is to come, and yet already.

With this as the working definition of hope, I turn now to culture, practice, and ethnography through my fieldwork.

Chapter 5

Fieldwork Context: Popular Eschatology and Evangelical Churches

In the previous chapter, I traced early Christian eschatology to the Nicene Creed to represent a ‘normative theology’ of hope that pulls together the authority of both Scripture and tradition. I also drew from Moltmann and Wright fresh articulations of ‘creedal Christian hope’ as a ‘formal theology’ of hope today. I concluded that Christian hope is a confident assurance, grounded in God’s promise and faithfulness as revealed in the Scriptures in general and in Christ in particular, that the Triune God will bring about the ‘resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come’ at the time of Christ’s ‘appearing’, making heaven and earth new and one, by means of what has already been accomplished at the resurrection of Jesus.

This chapter will now examine how pastors, worship leaders, and parishioners in the two churches in my fieldwork talk about Christian hope. This ‘espoused theology’ provides the backdrop for understanding why they view certain songs as being songs of hope, and how they experience hope in congregational worship. I will begin with a brief sketch of prominent themes in popular Evangelical eschatology, providing a taxonomy of four different visions of eschatology. I will then turn to a thick description of both churches in my fieldwork, recounting the ‘origin story’ of each and identifying and interpreting key themes, shared language, and even a few unofficial rules. The final sections will then explore the espoused theology of hope from leaders and from congregants, paying attention to sermons, interviews, and official statements for the former, and focus group conversations for the latter.

5.1. Popular Evangelical Eschatology

5.1.1. Searching for the Roots of Popular Evangelical Eschatology

Although theologians and Biblical scholars of various denominational stripes affirm a restored and renewed creation, the theology at work in the lives of everyday Christians is a distorted version of ‘creedal Christian hope. History professor Gary Scott Smith notes a surge in books on heaven between 1970 and 2000, joining a growing number of books on near-death experiences.³⁷⁴ In fact, the very choice to focus Christian expectation on heaven is a shift from the materiality of ‘creedal Christian hope’ outlined in the previous chapter. No more is bodily resurrection or a redeemed and renewed creation the centre; instead it is a disembodied existence in an other-worldly place. Smith notes that throughout American history various authors have portrayed heaven as ‘the antithesis of earth’, highlighting its beauty, safety, abundance, and more. Bound up with the hope of heaven is the joy of being in God’s presence and the comfort of being with loved ones.³⁷⁵

How did this come to be? Richard Middleton offers a brief overview of eschatology in the history of the Western Church. In his view, the first major unravelling of the hope of a renewed cosmos came through Augustine’s reading of the millennium as a metaphor for the entire history of the church. The influence of Neoplatonism on his thinking can hardly be overstated, and thus ‘there is simply no redemption of the cosmos in Augustine’s eschatology’.³⁷⁶ This resulted in a shifting centre of Christian expectation. Caroline Walker Bynum writes that the hope of a ‘reconstituted universe’ was completely absent by the fifth century, and

³⁷⁴ Gary Scott Smith, *Heaven in the American Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 2.

³⁷⁵ Smith, *Heaven in the American Imagination*, p. 227.

³⁷⁶ Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, p. 292.

‘eschatological yearning’ was no longer for a millennial age but was instead ‘increasingly focused on heaven’.³⁷⁷

The hope of a redeemed cosmos is difficult to find in the theology of the Middle Ages. Walker Bynum again writes, ‘Most late medieval Christians thought resurrection and the coming of the kingdom waited afar off in another space and time’.³⁷⁸ Though the hope of a new earth makes sporadic appearances in the works of both Luther and Calvin, there is not a conscious reflection on it; moreover, the preoccupation is with the redemption of people rather than creation as a whole.³⁷⁹ The revivals of the 18th and 19th centuries featured a ‘postmillennial’ eschatology. This view came to flower in the United States, and looked for a thousand-year period of perfection—or at least of an ‘amelioration of social conditions’.³⁸⁰ Taught by Edwards, Whitefield, Finney, and others, it was only a temporary period leading to a final state ushered in by the return of Christ. Middleton notes that even though the language of ‘new heaven and new earth’ is used to describe this final state, it was more of a ‘picturesque way to speak of an acosmic final state than anything to be taken literally’.³⁸¹ Historian Richard Tarnas surmises, ‘The early Christian belief that the Fall and Redemption pertained not just to man but to the entire cosmos, a doctrine already fading after the Reformation, now disappeared altogether: the process of salvation, if it had meaning at all, pertained solely to the personal relation between God and man’.³⁸²

Perhaps no teaching has done more damage to the hope of bodily

³⁷⁷ Carolyn Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 13.

³⁷⁸ Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity*, p. 14.

³⁷⁹ Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, p. 295.

³⁸⁰ Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, p. 296.

³⁸¹ Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, p. 297.

³⁸² Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), pp. 306-307.

resurrection and a renewed creation than the ‘rapture’ doctrine. Rapture teaching arose from a framework for interpreting the Bible known as ‘dispensationalism’. Developed by the Irish clergyman John Nelson Darby in the early 1800s, dispensationalism divided human history into seven distinct time periods, or dispensations. Darby also taught a ‘premillennial’ view of the end times—the belief that Christ will return to initiate the thousand-year reign, and that there would be no peace before it. The rapture, however, was a secret and supernatural evacuation of all Christians on earth so that would not have to endure the ‘great tribulation’ which preceded the return of Christ. This view was spread by Darby himself at various ‘prophecy conferences’ in North America and Britain, and by the American evangelist D. L. Moody who used this belief to provide a sense of urgency at his revival meetings.³⁸³ These end times teachings were also intertwined with advocacy for the Jewish restoration to Palestine, as evidenced by the booklet *Jesus Is Coming*, written by William Blackstone, a wealthy friend of evangelist D. L. Moody’s in the later 1800s. In the early 20th century, it was the publication of the Scofield Reference Bible by Oxford University Press which ‘gave near canonical status’ to a dispensational premillennialism framework and the interpretation of biblical prophecies about the last days or end times.³⁸⁴ One theologian from Dallas Theological Seminary even called the Scofield Bible ‘God’s gift to the Church in the last days’.³⁸⁵ Such a view is largely responsible for the current other-worldly and escapist views of North American Evangelicals. This mix of rapture teaching and Zionist zeal featured prominently in my fieldwork at Pathway church, as will be evident later in this chapter.

³⁸³ Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, p. 301.

³⁸⁴ Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, p. 302.

³⁸⁵ Quoted by Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 28.

Historian Matthew Sutton also sees premillennialism as a key factor in contemporary Christian visions of hope, but Sutton makes a much bolder claim. For him, apocalypticism—which began at the beginning of the 20th century with prophecy conferences in New York and Chicago, and became the raw materials for evangelists like Moody and, later, Billy Graham—‘provided radical evangelicals with a framework through which to interpret their lives, their communities, and the future, which in turn often inspired, influenced, and justified the choices they made’.³⁸⁶ This end times fervour helped American Christians make sense of the turmoil in the world in the 20th century—two world wars, and then the threat of nuclear war—by situating it within the language of ‘biblical prophecy’. All these were simply ‘birth pangs’ preparing the world for judgement and the return of Christ. This apocalyptic doom was only the backdrop for a ‘blessed hope’: escape was possible through Christ.³⁸⁷ Yet, paradoxically, this premillennial expectation did not lead to apathy or indifference but rather to ‘inspired fervent, relentless’ action in the present.³⁸⁸ In fact, Sutton’s thesis is that apocalypticism is the key lens for understanding the rise of modern American Evangelicalism with its pro-America, pro-Israel, right-wing worldview, politics, and social engagement. Though I found this precise conflation of influences at Pathway Church, this is too simplistic; the rise of modern Evangelicalism cannot be explained through one lens. Nevertheless, the apocalyptic end of the world and the hope of a premillennial escape cannot be dismissed as a aberrant belief occurring on the margins of American Christianity.

5.1.2. Taxonomy of Evangelical Eschatology

Escapism is not the only paradigm of Evangelical eschatology. As part of structuring my research, I created a taxonomy of Evangelical eschatology. It began

³⁸⁶ Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, p. 4.

³⁸⁷ Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, p. 22.

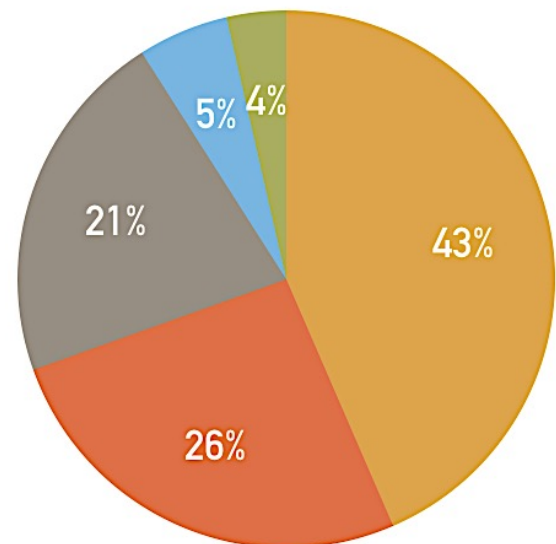
³⁸⁸ Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, p. 25.

as a hypothesis, culling phrases from various end-times talks, popular Christian books, funeral sermons, and conversations with Christians over the course of nearly two decades in pastoral ministry, and clustering them into four categories. I then used these categories in the survey taken by 966 worship leaders in North America. To get a sense of the denominational breakdown of the worship leaders, the survey provided the following options for church affiliation: Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Assemblies of God, and Vineyard. I clustered Anglicans, Lutherans, and Methodists as ‘Mainline Protestant’, and Assemblies of God and Vineyard as ‘Pentecostals/Charismatics’ for my research focus. Even so, note that Baptists remain the largest demographic. A breakdown by denominational cluster is in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1

DENOMINATIONAL AFFILIATION (CLUSTERED)

- Baptist
- Mainline Protestant
- Pentecostal/Charismatic
- Prebyterian
- Catholic



My taxonomy of Evangelical eschatology marks out four different yet potentially overlapping views: *new creation*, *explanation*, *evacuation*, and *compensation*. Smith's research on heaven in the American imagination confirms this taxonomy by providing summaries from various sermons and books on heaven. Hint of a *new creation* view of hope is in the contexts of reunited relationships. Heaven is the place where the joy of being with loved ones is restored in a glorious 'reunion'.³⁸⁹ The hope of *explanation* has come to the forefront as many Americans have experienced troubles, worries, and anxieties. Smith cites a prominent Evangelical leader's assurance that 'God would lovingly explain the reason' for every pain experienced on earth.³⁹⁰ Smith also repeatedly points out the consistent assertion in American preaching and teaching that heaven is a 'destination', a 'place' and not 'merely a state or a condition'.³⁹¹ That heaven is viewed as an other-worldly place is underscored by the imagery used when talking about heaven: 'celestial city', 'refuge', 'home', 'haven', and more.³⁹² These are all examples of the view of hope which I have called *evacuation*; they reflect a hope of escape, a hope which requires a different 'space' than 'here'.³⁹³ The hope of *compensation*, which includes the notion of retribution for wickedness, is related to a desire for justice. This was more of a feature in the American imagination of heaven during the Civil War era, and arose mostly from slaves. I will say more about this in contrast to the hope formed in comfortable contexts in the next chapter, but for now it is enough to note that it was the oppressed and abused in America—slaves—who expected heaven to provide 'justice and compensation for their earthly exploitation and

³⁸⁹ Smith, *Heaven in the American Imagination*, p. 227.

³⁹⁰ Smith, *Heaven in the American Imagination*, p. 297.

³⁹¹ Smith, *Heaven in the American Imagination*, p. 227 and p. 4, where he is quoting both R. A. Torrey and Billy Sunday.

³⁹² Smith, *Heaven in the American Imagination*, p. 3.

³⁹³ See Chapter 4 for an outline of the dimensions of hope, including 'space'.

suffering'.³⁹⁴ Yet even those who did not experience the same depth of suffering as the slaves did looked to heaven as an eternal 'reward'.³⁹⁵

I did not use the terms from my taxonomy in the survey to reduce the tendency to give the perceived right answer. For example, my suspicion was that no one would willingly say their vision of hope was 'evacuation'. Thus, I developed statements that reflect each of these terms. For *new creation*, I used the sentence, 'God will set it right one day'; for *explanation*, I said, 'God will explain it to me one day'; for *evacuation*, I chose the sentence, 'God will get me out of here one day'; and finally, for *compensation*, I said, 'God will make it up to me one day'. Because it is possible to hold more than one of these views, I designed the question to allow each respondent to rank the statements in the order of which brought the most hope. Here are the responses, showing the breakdown of percentages of each group according to which statement they ranked number one:

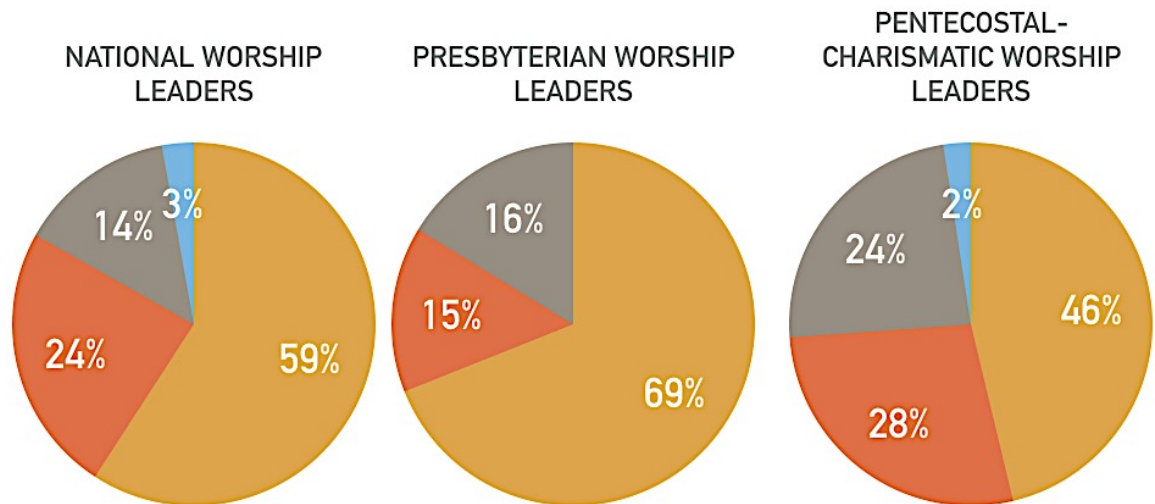
³⁹⁴ Smith, *Heaven in the American Imagination*, p. 228.

³⁹⁵ Smith, *Heaven in the American Imagination*, p. 227.

Figure 2

TAXONOMY OF HOPE: EVANGELICAL WORSHIP LEADERS

- NEW CREATION: "God will set it right one day."
- EXPLANATION: "God will explain it to me one day."
- EVACUATION: "God will get me out of here one day."
- COMPENSATION: "God will make it up to me one day."



First, on a relatively minor note, it seems that no one is looking for God to ‘make it up to them’. Evangelicals have a strong sense of the sovereignty of God. Their own emphasis on personal faith leads them to a posture of surrender. Secondly, it is striking that in what they claim to believe, Evangelical worship leaders all prioritize the hope of new creation above all others. One reason for this may be that Evangelicals hold a view of heaven that involves justice and restoration, even if it does not involve the redemption of materiality. Of course, it could also be that respondents were less comfortable with the other statements as they implied a vision of heaven that had the self at the centre, since the other statements included the word ‘me’. As noted above, throughout the centuries, even phrases like ‘new heaven and new earth’ have been treated as a metaphor for paradise beyond this world and not

as a description of the redemption and renewal of this world. As I will demonstrate through my fieldwork below, it is possible to believe in *new creation* without believing in the redemption of this world and therefore of materiality. To put it in Cameron's terms, one's espoused theology of hope may be of *new creation* while one's operant theology of hope is actually evacuation. Thirdly, it appears that Presbyterians are more likely to believe in new creation than the overall national worship leader group. More Presbyterian worship leaders ranked it as number one than their Pentecostal-Charismatic counterparts. Fourthly, Pentecostal-Charismatic are more likely to believe in evacuation than other worship leaders. Though it was ranked third by most Pentecostal-Charismatic respondents, more Pentecostal-Charismatic worship leaders chose evacuation as the number one statement of hope than any other group of worship leaders. The last two of these observations are significant as a backdrop for my fieldwork. The themes of new creation and evacuation surface in the espoused theologies of River Valley and Pathway, respectively, as a later section in this chapter will show. I turn now from theoretical taxonomies to ethnography.

5.2. Church #1: Evangelical Pentecostal-Charismatic Non-Denominational

5.2.1. The Blessed Church: The Story of Pathway Church

Pathway Church began as a desire in Bob Norriff's heart in the Fall of 1999 to see a 'Bible-based, evangelistic, Spirit-empowered church in Swiftwater, Texas'.³⁹⁶ Yet even then, Norriff's vision was bigger than one location; he wanted to see his church 'impact the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex and beyond'.³⁹⁷ In February of 2000, Norriff began meeting with about 30 people in his living room to 'pray for

³⁹⁶ *Gateway's History* (2017) <<http://gatewaypeople.com/ministries/life/our-history>> [accessed 1 July 2017]; city names have been changed to fictitious names.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

direction for the ministry, worship the Lord, and study the Word'.³⁹⁸ Then, two months later, Pastor Johnny Edmonds—whom Norriff had already reached out to for 'wisdom and guidance' in the Fall of 1999—and the elders from his church in Ainsworth, Texas, released and commissioned Norriff to officially start the church in the Swiftwater area. Two weeks later, Pathway held its first public serve at the Hilton Hotel on Easter Sunday. 180 people showed up. It only took a month before they needed to find a different location, meeting at a different church's building on Saturday nights.

As the young church continued to grow, they found a 300-seat auditorium in the summer of 2001, and quickly were running as many as five services to accommodate the more than 2000 people who were attending. But they were not finished. May of 2002 saw the church break ground on a 64,000 square-foot facility, with the first services taking place there in June the following year. It did not take long for the 700-seat auditorium to require five services each weekend just to keep up.

It became evident that extension campuses—locations that carry the same 'brand identity' of Pathway—were the path toward future growth. In November, 2007, Pathway began the East Prairie campus.³⁹⁹ This was the beginning of implementing a 'franchise model' for Pathway, where 'extension campuses mirror [the services] in [Swiftwater] with live worship, personal ministry, and a live simulcast of the message from [Swiftwater]'.⁴⁰⁰ The strategy worked. By January, 2009, average weekly attendance at Pathway reached 10,468.⁴⁰¹ Over the next four years, Pathway would add three more campuses—in 2010, 2012, and 2013—and

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁹ The name of the campus has been changed to a fictitious name.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*

build a new facility for the main Swiftwater campus which includes a 4000-seat auditorium. By the early Fall of 2013, average weekly attendance had reached 24,000 people. The following April, attendance had eclipsed 36,000. On Easter 2016, the year of my fieldwork with Pathway, they had over 53,000 people in attendance. Those are staggering numbers, even by mega-church standards.⁴⁰²

Swiftwater, Texas, is not like an average suburb. On one of my visits, the church generously paid for my stay at a Hilton hotel in the heart of the Swiftwater shopping centre. While walking around on a Saturday morning, I noticed a Maserati, parked next to a Mercedes, with a Lexus and an Audi nearby. Upscale shops and restaurants were filled well-dressed people.

Pathway has benefited from the wealth of its ‘parish’. I attended a Pathway pastors conference where Pastor Norrif casually mentioned that their giving the previous year had exceeded \$50 million. During my fieldwork, I was invited to tour a facility that Pathway had recently outfitted to be the campus of a Christian university with whom they are in partnership. The church had launched a ‘Worship Team Academy’ in connection with the university where teenagers could learn to play worship music as preparation to joining the Pathway worship team. Though they only launched their academy in the past year, they had over 400 students taking classes of some kind that semester. The classrooms with outfitted with Apple iMacs at each station—two dozen or so per classroom—with a keyboard or guitar. There were piano practice rooms that each had their own iMac to play tracks, or the guided video tutorial of a song in Pathway’s repertoire.

⁴⁰² The average attendance at an American megachurch is 3943. Megachurches of over 10,000 people account for only 5.8% of all megachurches in America. Hartford Seminary, Hartford Institute for Religion Research, *2012 Profile of All North American Megachurches* (2014) <http://www.hartfordinstitute.org/megachurch/megastoday_profile.html> [accessed 20 September 2017].

This cutting-edge technology, not just in church services but in training up future worship team members, is consonant with Kate Bowler's work on prosperity gospel megachurches. Bowler finds many of these churches to be 'monuments to techno-lust'. For Bowler, such an environment makes it easy to teach 'relatively wealthy Americans about God's invisible economy'—the more you give to God in faith, the more God blesses you.⁴⁰³ These environments are also the expression of a deliberate culture of excellence at Pathway. Excellence is seen as a way of offering God your very best. With over 800 full-time staff—about 100 of which work for the worship department—Pathway gives attention to detail.⁴⁰⁴

As noted above, the campus of East Prairie (EP), where I focused my fieldwork, was the first extension campus Pathway launched. It is notably smaller, though that itself is relative. After all, during my year of fieldwork, the EP campus averaged 3600 people in attendance. Nevertheless, Evan Osmond—the worship pastor at the EP campus—stressed how much the EP campus thrives on being connected to on another. When I asked him how to describe the culture or context of the EP campus compared with Pathway as a whole, he answered unflinchingly. 'I would say in a word, family' he began. He qualified that this is more than his appraisal, but adding that this is the most consistent feedback they receive from congregants and volunteers at the EP campus. 'It's a much smaller venue so people come there because it's a smaller venue, and it's more intimate and a little more of a family there. They feel like they know the family there.'

⁴⁰³ Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 235.

⁴⁰⁴ Embracing excellence, however, may well be part of an Evangelical frame that adopts the values of capitalism, specifically one which conflates 'capitalist creativity' with 'the creativity of God'. See Mathew Guest's critical engagement with William Connolly's *Christianity and Capitalism: American Style*: Guest, Mathew, 'Evangelicalism and Capitalism in Transatlantic Context', *Politics and Religion*, 4.2, (2010), pp. 257-279, <https://www.academia.edu/371938/Evangelicalism_and_Capitalism_in_Transatlantic_Context> [accessed 21 September 2017].

Osmond attributes much of this ‘family vibe’ to the campus pastor, Bryson Coachman. ‘We both share that kind of heart; we both have a heart for the people to be a family. He's incredibly proactive, week-in and week-out; with our staff even, to pour in, and love each other keeping it really, really personal. He's very transparent which is a huge thing for a leader and we love that about him. It's taught me to be even more so’.

5.2.2. Where the Spirit of the Lord Is: Pentecostal and Charismatic

In a sermon series in early 2016 on the Holy Spirit, Pastor Bob Norriff preached a sermon titled, ‘Is He [referring to the Holy Spirit] Pentecostal?’ Norriff addressed up front the question of what sort of church Pathway is. ‘Just to let you know, we’re kind of “Bapticoctal” ’. Norriff refers to his Baptist roots as a Christian, and to Pathway’s (and his) affirmation of the work of the Holy Spirit. He clarifies that Pathway is ‘non-denominational’, meaning that Pathway is not part of Baptist or Pentecostal denominations. This distance from Pentecostalism appears an important one for Norriff and Pathway. He takes the time define what is meant by the term ‘Pentecostal’: ‘If by Pentecostal we mean the Biblical definition of the word Pentecost, and that we believe fully in the Person and work of the Holy Spirit, and we believe that Pentecost was the fulfilment of the Feast of Pentecost, and we believe that every believer needs a vital relationship with the Holy Spirit, then, yes [Pathway is a Pentecostal church]’. But if the word is meant to refer to ‘some historical or cultural, or even denominational definitions’, then the answer would be a ‘no’. Norriff preached on the Old Testament feast of Pentecost, acknowledging that the Spirit lives in every believer, and inviting everyone to ‘fully’ receive the Holy Spirit. His goal, he states, with a blend of pastoral authority and tenderness, is ‘to take the mysticism’ and ‘fear’ away from the subject.

This theme of taking the ‘weirdness’ out of an openness to the Holy Spirit is a defining characteristic of Pathway’s culture, and one which both the focus group and some of the leaders I interviewed picked up on in some way. When I asked Evan Osmond, the worship pastor at the EP campus, what is unique about Pathway, he responded easily: ‘That’s a fun one to answer. It’s a Spirit-filled environment that isn’t weird.’ Comparing Pathway to a ‘Spirit-filled church’ he had attended as a teenager, Osmond notes that his early experience with Pentecostal-Charismatic church services was that the ‘messages were so great’ but that the worship time was ‘as Pastor [Norriff] would say now...a little hokey and stuff.’ He expresses gratitude for Pastor Norriff’s insistence that the work of the Holy Spirit ‘doesn’t have to be weird’.

This almost self-conscious attempt to not be weird was also evident in a prayer and ‘prophetic ministry’ time led by two pastors from Pathway—one is Pastor Norriff’s right hand man, the other was a former staffer who had been sent out to plant a church in Arizona—at my church. At the beginning of one of the sessions, the associate senior pastor of Pathway warmly promised the people gathered that the evening of prayer and prophetic words would be ‘weird-free’. It was his guarantee. ‘Weird’ is meant to refer to the strange and sometimes theatrical flair often added to the expression of spiritual gifts. The ‘neo-charismatic’ movement, as outlined in the Introduction, attempts to distance itself from some of these elements of Classic Pentecostalism.

‘Don’t be weird’ was one of three spoken but unofficial rules I perceived in my time at Pathway. The other two are, ‘Don’t be fussy’, and ‘Don’t be boring’. The perceived fussiness of many Baptist churches in the region had left an obvious bad taste in their mouths. This was set in contrast, as will be shown below, to the

‘freedom’ they found at Pathway. The quiet singing, often by choirs, in their childhood churches had also left them feeling that church was boring. Thus, Pathway is noted for its joy and energy. Osmond recalled his ‘granddad’ who was a ‘devout Christian man’, but ‘law-based’; an ‘amazing, godly man, but...very somber and serious’. He was an ‘old country boy; who would ‘witness to people’—tell others about Jesus—by scaring them to with the impending fires of hell. Osmond sets his granddad in contrast with his grandmother on the other side of the family who was ‘the reflection of unconditional love’. He viewed her influence as being far beyond conversion stories by showing people what Christ is really like. It makes sense, then, that Osmond encourages his worship team to ‘reflect the joy of the Lord’. Pathway embraces the presence and power of the Holy Spirit found in both Pentecostal and charismatic theology. This distinguishes them from the ‘fussy’ and ‘boring’ worship services of Baptist or non-Pentecostal-Charismatic worship. Yet, as noted, Pathway is careful to also distance itself from the style and culture of many Pentecostal and charismatic services, particularly those that seem ‘weird’.

5.2.3. The Blessed Life: A Soft Prosperity Gospel?

Pathway Church appears on Bowler’s list of ‘prosperity megachurches’. No one at Pathway would describe the church as being part of prosperity movement; no one would claim to be a prosperity preacher. Bowler would counter that few preachers within the movement self-describe as being a ‘prosperity preacher’.

The prosperity gospel in the twentieth century America is hard to define in part because it is not bounded strictly by region, denomination, or even church size. It cannot be ‘conflated with fundamentalism, Pentecostalism, evangelicalism, the religious right, the so-called black church’, or other labels, though Bowler qualifies

that it ‘certainly overlaps with each’.⁴⁰⁵ Though the movement is hard to hem in, Bowler finds a consistent message: ‘God desires to bless you’.⁴⁰⁶ Bowler identifies four unifying features of the prosperity gospel:

- Faith: an ‘activator, a power that unleashes spiritual forces and turns the spoken word into reality’;
- Wealth: faith is demonstrated in material increase;
- Health: faith is demonstrated in physical well-being (thus ‘material reality is the measure of success of immaterial faith’);
- Victory: faith is to be marked by victory.⁴⁰⁷

Bowler also distinguishes between ‘hard prosperity’ and ‘soft prosperity’ by how outcomes are evaluated: ‘hard prosperity’ evaluates faith by immediate and specific outcomes; ‘soft prosperity’ evaluates faith more gently and with a more ‘roundabout’ approach—a general sense of victory and blessing without the specifics like physical healing or financial increase.⁴⁰⁸ Pathway would fit under the ‘soft prosperity’ designation. Norriff’s best-known book is called, *The Blessed Life*, and is now a programme on a Christian television station. Norriff warns against transactional interactions with God, but still maintains that certain material blessings will result from a life of faith and generosity.

During my year of fieldwork at Pathway, it was evident that there was a shift occurring. For example, on Palm Sunday, Pastor Norriff’s son, Josiah, preached a Palm Sunday message in which he traced the journey of Jesus through John’s Gospels, highlighting the risk Jesus took in raising Lazarus from the dead. Then, Pastor Josiah began to redefine ‘blessing’. He challenged the congregation to answer

⁴⁰⁵ Bowler, *Blessed*, p. 4.

⁴⁰⁶ Bowler, *Blessed*, p. 6.

⁴⁰⁷ Bowler, *Blessed*, p. 7.

⁴⁰⁸ Bowler, *Blessed*, pp. 7-8.

if Jesus was still considered blessed on his way to the cross, and if so, how that might reconfigure our notion of blessedness. When he cross-referenced Jesus's cries on Golgotha with Psalm 22, he admonished the congregation to never feel guilty for giving voice to their lament, questions, or doubt. Such admonition is nearly unheard of in contexts where 'faith', 'victory', and 'blessing' are given centre stage. In fact, the affirmation of lament as an acceptable part of worship seems to contradict the 'upbeat' 'energy' that drew so many in my focus group to start attending Pathway.

The most powerful part of the sermon, however, was the final 10-minutes, in which Pastor Josiah recounted, with emotional detail, his wife's struggle with seizures. He described the pain of praying repeatedly for healing, and believing that it had occurred, only to watch his wife go through another bout of seizures. It felt like they were 'losing'. Yet in the midst of it, he sensed God speaking to him reclaiming the definition of what it means to call God 'good'. The story of a dramatic encounter with God—one that includes affirmation and rebuke, correction and intimacy—is a long-standing fixture in the charismatic movement. We will say more later about worship songs as narratives of encounter themselves. For now, it is enough to note that Pastor Josiah used this template to drive home his sermon. By the end of his sermon, Norriff the younger had radically challenged standard paradigms, and effectively reconfigured how the 'blessing', 'victory', and 'goodness' are to be understood. Closing his sermon with that story of God speaking to him was not simply a poignant story with which to end the sermon; it was also a way of showing his charismatic credentials, showing the church he was still 'one of them'.

5.2.4. The American Gospels: Prosperity and Civil Religion

Bowler links the prosperity gospel with its ‘pentecostal twin’, the American civil religion.

At times, the prosperity gospel hovered so closely to its nationalistic alter ego, American civil religion, that it appeared to be its pentecostal twin, each offering an account of transcendent truths at the core of the American character. But rather than sacralizing the founding of the United States or visions of manifest destiny, the prosperity gospel was constituted by the deification and ritualization of the American Dream: upward mobility, accumulation, hard work, and moral fiber. The two shared an unshakably high anthropology, studded with traits that inspire action, urgency, a sense of chosenness, and a desire to shoulder it alone.⁴⁰⁹

My visits to Pathway came during a presidential election year, giving me a particular insight into how Pathway integrates its soft prosperity gospel with pro-America rhetoric, which seemed to result in a Christianized version of American exceptionalism. In my first official site visit, a guest speaker was preaching at Pathway. Greg Laurie, the well-known evangelist who has been called the successor to Billy Graham by some, was promoting an upcoming event in a large stadium in Dallas months before the election. One of his opening lines tapped into the deep angst congregants were feeling about the state of their nation. ‘America is in trouble right now... There is a place for political process... [But] America needs to turn back to God’. Huge applause broke out.

In my next visit, Pastor Bryson Couchman—the campus pastor of the EP campus—came up after worship to ‘transition’ the service from the singing to the sermon. He opened with a story about watching the violence at a Trump rally and going to bed ‘heavy’ that night, ‘concerned for our nation’. To offer a counterpoint to his concern, Couchman also told a story that had given him hope. That morning he had done a funeral for an 8-year old boy. The procession to the gravesite included

⁴⁰⁹ Bowler, *Blessed*, p. 226.

a police escort, and several motorists stopped out of respect. Couchman concluded from this that ‘there is hope for us’. He repeated this phrase twice. I paid special attention to his use of the word ‘hope’. He went on to proclaim that Jesus is alive in us, but then appended the disjointed theological declaration by saying, ‘respect is still in us’. The association of hope with Christ’s resurrection is consistent with creedal Christian theology. But the conflation of Christ’s presence in us with what may be called ‘civil decency’ is confusing. In his prayer following these stories, Couchman declared the Lord as the answer, and asked God to ‘sweep across our nation’, and to ‘bring respect back in us’.

Couchman is not alone in this concern about the perceived moral decline in society. Pastor Johnny Edmonds—an overseer and influential voice in Pathway—had preached a sermon series the previous year on the ‘end times’, called ‘Tipping Points’.⁴¹⁰ To demonstrate that a ‘worldwide falling away from truth’ is occurring, Edmonds reminisces about growing up praying in public school with the 10 commandments hanging up on the wall in that public school. Painting with a broad brush, he says that everyone you knew was ‘basically a Christian’. This all changed, according to Edmonds, after prayer was banned in 1962.⁴¹¹ He alludes to a few cases of people in the military and in ‘other instances’ being charged with crimes for quoting Bible verses. No specific case or date is mentioned. He concludes: ‘What we’re seeing is an apostasy in the world against Judeo-Christian morality and against the Bible’.⁴¹² Unlike Couchman, Edmonds sees this as setting the stage not

⁴¹⁰ In Pathway’s context, an overseer is a pastor of another church who is a trusted leader or mentor to the senior pastor of the church he ‘oversees’. His role would be to advise the senior pastor and to hold him accountable from misconduct.

⁴¹¹ The ruling, in fact, is more complex than that, and was largely motivated by the desire to keep particular religions from enjoying special privileges in a public, government-funded space such as schools.

⁴¹² The claim, of course, is problematic on many levels, not least of which because the word ‘apostasy’ can hardly be applied to a vague moral code of which people are generally aware.

for revival but for the return of Christ. We will return to the subject of Christ's return and what Pathway says about its significance for Christian living and for hope in a later section in this chapter. For now, it is sufficient to show how the streams of the prosperity gospel and American civil religion—a vision of a strong, safe, and prosperous America— mingle at Pathway.

5.3. Church #2 Evangelical Presbyterian

5.3.1. The Story of River Valley Presbyterian Church

River Valley tells their story as a story of ‘great faith in a great God for great things that would honor His great name!’.⁴¹³ The church began with a conversation between three men over lunch in 1980, sketching their ideas on a napkin. Their faith was evidenced by their decision to rent out the 800-seat auditorium of River Valley High School in southeast Denver.⁴¹⁴ By this point, the group of three families that had begun meeting for prayer on April 11, of that year had grown to a ‘steering committee’ of more than 30 people meeting in homes to pray and plan. All three of the families had been part of a different Presbyterian church in the city, and one of the men served on a committee to strategize long-range outreach opportunities.

On September 7, 1980, River Valley held its first public service. 324 people gathered for worship. The service included a choir and a Sunday school for all ages. By their recounting of it, these early days had the cultural marks of the pioneering West. In their brief written story, they make mention of that the fact that each week about 50 volunteers set up the Sunday school and nursery areas using a congregant's horse trailer to transport equipment.⁴¹⁵

With a large gift from their sending church and donation pledges from their

⁴¹³ Text from the bulletin on their 35th anniversary weekend sent in an email. Evan Mazunik, *Email correspondence* (15 October, 2015).

⁴¹⁴ The name of the high school has been changed to a fictitious name.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*

members, the church eventually purchased five acres of land for a building. In November, 1984, just over four years after its first service, they broke ground on their current facility. On Thanksgiving weekend of 1985, River Valley Presbyterian Church gathered for worship in their new building. The church eventually purchased adjoining parcels of land, and completed a 'Community Life Center' in 2006.

The Saturday evening service on which I chose to focus my fieldwork functions like its own micro-congregation. Launched in early 2015, it is called 'Word and Table' to highlight both its simplicity of service structure—which is in contrast to the more formal and complex Sunday morning services—and its connection to the shape of Christian worship in the early centuries. This is a significant move because in its reach backward in history, it hopes to emphasize more than a Presbyterian identity. This is not simply a theological move, but also a missional one. The service was launched 'with young families in mind', Allan Moody, the worship pastor at River Valley, told me. Though it has not quite hit that mark, as my own observations confirmed, it has become a significant place of belonging and formation for the people who attend.

The Saturday evening service is held in the same sanctuary where Sunday morning worship occurs, but in one side of the room. The room is dimly lit, candles adorn the far left side, between the pipes of the massive organ and the pews. A giant, single stained glass window forms the focal point of the angled room, but in this service, it is seen only in peripheral vision, off to the right. The wood beams and brick walls betray the age of the building, a fitting fixture of a neighborhood that was booming about two decades earlier. River Valley is located in what is still a wealthy suburb of Denver, even if its residents are aging.

The ambience of the service is designed to mitigate the largeness of the

sanctuary. The worship leader leads from a grand piano located stage right, and the accompanying instruments are an upright bass, hand percussion, and an acoustic guitar. This is striking in comparison with both the 8:45am Sunday morning service which features a large, robed choir, and the 10:30am Sunday morning service which has a full rock band. The preacher preaches from the floor, utilizing a music stand and not the grand pulpit. These features of informality—both in the ordinary sense of the word and in the technical sense which Rappaport uses of rituals—are a significant part of how worshippers experience God, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 7. It is the departure from the perceived fixed conventions of Presbyterian worship that is part of the appeal of the service.

5.3.2. Pioneering, Renewal, and Faithfulness: The Evangelical Presbyterian Church

It is important to briefly trace the history of Presbyterian denominations in the United States to understand the context to which River Valley belongs. Three new Presbyterian denominations began in the United States in the 20th century. The first was the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), which was established in 1936. The second was the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA), formed in 1973. The third, and the one to which River Valley belongs, is the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), which was organized as a denomination in 1981 and appears to be growing. Over 400 churches have joined the EPC since 2007.⁴¹⁶ The ‘Stated Clerk’ of the EPC, Jeffrey J. Jeremiah, views the formation of each of these new denominations as a response to a particular ‘gap’.⁴¹⁷ Each of these, in their own way, in their own day, and with their own particular emphases, were ‘created in reaction to the

⁴¹⁶ S. Donald Fortson the Third, *Liberty in Non-Essentials: The Story of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church* (Livonia, MI: Evangelical Presbyterian Church, 2016), p. xi.

⁴¹⁷ Fortson, *Liberty in Non-Essentials*, p. x.

increasing liberalism of the mainline Presbyterian denominations.⁴¹⁸

Fortson tells the story of Presbyterianism in America as a pioneer story of dreams and division. The Presbyterians who came to America in the early 17th century found common ground with the New England Congregational churches in their shared Calvinist convictions.⁴¹⁹ A massive immigration of Scots-Irish began in the early 18th century, populating the Middle Colonies so that by 1776 almost 500,000 Scots-Irish had come to America.⁴²⁰ But this swell of growth soon led to a divergence of opinions, first about the requirements for theological training in preparation for ordination, and then about the revival now known as the First Great Awakening. What is renewal to one group can look like division to the other; often it is the ‘old’ group who values unity over change, as was the case in this split between the ‘Old Side’ and the ‘New Side’ in mid-18th century American Presbyterianism.⁴²¹ These debates and division surface again a century later as the Second Great Awakening brought a new wave of revival, this time resulting in a splinter between ‘Old School’ and ‘New School’.⁴²² The proponents of the ‘Old School’ were skeptical of the revivals, fearing they were a ‘man-centered, manipulative approach to evangelizing the masses’, while the ‘New School’ embraced it.⁴²³ The differences extended to debates about the approach to missions and to theological seminaries.

These early roots form the backdrop from why division within the denomination is such a delicate issue. Despite the ‘theological drift’ in the denomination which led to the ‘mainline decline’ in the first half of the 20th century,

⁴¹⁸ Fortson, *Liberty in Non-Essentials*, pp. x-xi.

⁴¹⁹ Fortson, *Liberty in Non-Essentials*, p. 2.

⁴²⁰ Fortson, *Liberty in Non-Essentials*, p. 4.

⁴²¹ Fortson, *Liberty in Non-Essentials*, pp. 7-8.

⁴²² Fortson, *Liberty in Non-Essentials*, p. 13.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*

Fortson reports that Evangelicals within those mainline bodies ‘tried to resist those trends’.⁴²⁴ But after decades of little to no results and worsening theological compromise, it ‘became ever more apparent that the trajectory of liberal revisionist Christianity was continuing unabated—and becoming more radical as each year passed’.⁴²⁵ Fortson is not mincing words with his analysis. His strong account of the denomination’s failure is followed by an impassioned defense of the EPC’s founding generation’s patience:

The founding generation of EPC ministers and churches were among those evangelicals who fought long and hard for mainline renewal in the mid-20th century. They were committed to staying the course, having been encouraged as young ministers to join the cause for renewal. These evangelicals of the WWII generation were sons and daughters of the Presbyterian Church, convinced that God was not yet finished with the mainline. Time and resources were sacrificially given to serve Christ within the mainline Presbyterian Church, along with fervent prayers that the Holy Spirit would bring revival.⁴²⁶

The chapter abruptly ends. It is clear now that instead of bringing revival, the Spirit brought disruption.

Fortson works hard to depict this disruption not as a division but as a return. Fortson calls the liberal drift in the 20th century a ‘dishonest subscription to the Westminster Confession’, the normative theological document for the Reformed Tradition, citing issues of doctrine such as ‘revisionist theologies’ and ‘universalism’ along with social issues such as ‘support for abortion and gay marriage’.⁴²⁷ By contrast, the EPC ‘returned to the orthodox Presbyterian path’.⁴²⁸ But this return is also about something bigger. The opening chapter of Fortson’s broader history of the Reformed Tradition, entitled *The Presbyterian Story*, opens with a chapter called, ‘Church History Matters: “Tradition” Is Not A Four-Letter

⁴²⁴ Fortson, *Liberty in Non-Essentials*, p. 26.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁷ Fortson, *Liberty in Non-Essentials*, p. 233.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*

Word'.⁴²⁹ The closing section of his book on the EPC is headlined 'Looking Back to Move Ahead'.⁴³⁰ These are signs that the narrative of 'returning' is meant to refer to a return not only to its own American Presbyterian roots, but also to the Church's history and tradition.

The EPC is not simply a return; it also bears its own marks. Jeremiah used the Foreword in this history to define the denomination with four words: 'Presbyterian, Reformed, Evangelical, and Missional'.⁴³¹ By 'Reformed', Jeremiah means being 'unapologetically biblical and orthodox'; by 'Evangelical', he means 'joyfully and boldly' proclaiming 'the good news of Jesus Christ' and the 'salvation in this life and in the life to come' 'found in Christ'; and by 'Missional', he means treating the local community as a mission field.⁴³² Fortson also records three distinguishing marks of the EPC: 'its position on women officers' (pro), its 'openness to the charismatic movement', and 'moderate Calvinism'.⁴³³

5.4. Espoused Theology: Pastors and Worship Leaders

In the previous chapter, I concluded that 'creedal Christian hope' is the confident assurance, grounded in God's promise and faithfulness as revealed in the Scriptures in general and in Christ in particular, that the Triune God will bring about the 'resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come' at the time of Christ's 'appearing', making heaven and earth new and one, by means of what has already been accomplished at the resurrection of Jesus. This provides six dimensions of hope with which to examine the espoused hope in my fieldwork churches: *agency*,

⁴²⁹ S. Donald Fortson the Third, *The Presbyterian Story: Origins and Progress of a Reformed Tradition* ([n.p.]: Presbyterian Lay Committee, 2013), p. 11.

⁴³⁰ Fortson, *Liberty in Non-Essentials*, p. 233.

⁴³¹ Fortson, *Liberty in Non-Essentials*, p. xi.

⁴³² Fortson, *Liberty in Non-Essentials*, p. xii.

⁴³³ Fortson, *The Presbyterian Story*, pp. 197-198.

pathway, object, grounds, space, and time. I will refer to these six dimensions and to the four terms in my taxonomy of Evangelical hope in the sections below.

5.4.1. Pathway Church: Hope as Escape

‘Part of the reason for this series,’ the preacher said in a confident, calm Texas accent, ‘is to give us hope’. He was about halfway into a sermon which was the first in a series about the end times. His opening remarks had provided his qualifications: ‘I’ve studied the end times for over forty years, and been preaching on it for thirty-three years...I don’t just believe we’re living in the end times; I believe we’re living at the end of the end times...I’m going to prove that to you through Scripture’.

Johnny Edmonds is not the pastor at Pathway Church, but he’s a regular guest and one of the ‘overseers’ of the church. In fact, Edmonds was the pastor who commissioned Pastor Bob Norriff to found Pathway Church. Naturally, he was trusted enough to be given a four-week series between high church attendance season in non-denominational churches—the weeks between Mother’s Day and Father’s Day.

The following week, Edmonds began his sermon with an announcement: *‘I want to talk about the falling away from Judeo-Christian values...that we’re seeing in society around us, and how that is one of the major signs of the end times...’* His text is 2 Thessalonians 4:15, explaining that Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians to comfort them. He then outlined three events in the end times: a worldwide falling away, the appearance of the antichrist, and the rapture. Edmonds considers this text to be ‘the clearest description in the Bible of the rapture of the Church’. The rapture is central to Edmonds’s picture of future Christian hope. The previous week, when he had told the congregation he would be preaching about the rapture the following Sunday, he

confidently assured them that ‘a lot of this stuff that’s about to happen we won’t be here for. Jesus is coming; we’re going’. While this kind of preaching may be considered by some as folk views or theologically low-brow, only a few decades earlier Evangelical icons like Billy Graham and Harold Ockenga had preached very similar sermons referencing the political turmoil and global conflict of their own day through an unabashed America-centric lens.⁴³⁴ It should have been no surprise then, that the congregation at Pathway erupted in applause. It was their first vocal response and, by far, the loudest response of that entire sermon.

When I asked Evan Osmond, worship pastor for the EP campus of Pathway where my research focused, what he thought about Edmonds’s series on the end times, he was honest. ‘That was a very conflicting series’, he said. ‘I felt from discernment of the congregation that it was not a unified, overwhelming feeling of hope, that maybe he had hoped for. It was very conflicting in my opinion’. Osmond backed off his strong appraisal by calling into question his own theological presuppositions, in a way that is consonant with the self-deprecating habit of the American South. ‘He’s infinitely more theologically brilliant than I am, for sure’. Yet, he circled back to his core claim: ‘It was a confusing, complicated, complex outcome...It was out there’.

‘Out there’ is not a bad way to put it. Hope, for Edmonds, is all out *there*. As Edmonds’s sermon on the rapture continues, he asserts that the ‘only restraining force in the world is the Church.’ He affirms that this role has been served by Pathway Church and by his own marriage ministry.

Turning his attention to the tribulation, Edmonds loosened up the crowd with jokes about Top 10 candidates to be the Antichrist, and then turned to Luke 17. ‘The

⁴³⁴ See Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, pp. 326-333.

purpose of these messages is to comfort us that Jesus is coming...And the other purpose of these messages is, we're not going to be here during the Tribulation period of time'. This is the clearest he had been in the series so far. Having given people a collective sigh of relief, he underscored his point in case some may have doubts: 'Noah and Lot did not go through judgment, and we're not either'. He then encouraged them to 'just go about life as usual...Just go on loving Jesus, go to school, get married...just be ready'. Applause again erupts.

His tone is almost paternal now, and his light Southern drawl adds to its appeal. 'There's no way in the world that you can comfort me by telling me I'm going through the Tribulation'. 'Amen's rise from people. One wonders if anyone considered that 'tribulation' might be relative depending on where you live. This sermon was preached, after all, while millions of Syrian Christians were being driven from their homes on the other side of the world.

As if anticipating an objection, Edmonds wraps up his sermon with an anecdote. 'Anytime you preach on the rapture, people will say, "You're just an escapist, but I'm a spiritual Marine; I'm ready for the Tribulation". No, you're not'. Laughter. 'Jesus said pray that you're worthy to escape. I'm not an escapist; I'm just doing what Jesus said. I want to escape it'. 'Amen's again follow.

Edmonds's conclusion seems almost out of place. 'We need to be looking for the return of Jesus'. These words nearly echo the credal confession that 'we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come'. But for Edmonds, the return of Christ is conflated with our escape from tribulation. Such a conflation was evident in my closing questions with worship pastor Osmond. I asked Osmond if he thought most people in his congregation believed in the rapture, or if they believed in Christ's return but not necessarily a rapture. 'Oh sure, I would think

everyone who is a Christ-follower [believe]s that the Rapture is coming; but I don't hear that taught a ton. As far as that specific, the Rapture itself. I would certainly think that most Pathway Christ-followers would believe that Christ is coming again...' 'But is there a rapture?' I clarified. 'Yeah. I would certainly think so', he replied. Our formal interview ended moments later, but Osmond had a brief moment of panic off-tape, realizing that he had possibly confused the return of Christ with the rapture of the believer. Despite his clarification, it was evident that the mistake was not simply a verbal misstep; these two concepts are so closely intertwined, they are used almost interchangeably.

5.4.2. River Valley Church: Hope as Extended Faith

Pastor Bob Slate has been the senior pastor of River Valley 2011. With a doctorate in theology and graduate degrees in counselling, Pastor Slate also teaches leadership and spiritual formation at Denver Seminary. I knew going into the interview that the challenge might be in getting behind the 'textbook' answers to my questions. I was surprised by his candidness and vulnerability about his story of coming to faith and his challenges as a leader. His training as a counsellor has made him attentive and open. These skills have also been leveraged for the good of the community in Denver. Pastor Slate serves on the board of the Denver Rescue Mission, as chaplain to several fire and police departments in the community, and as Chaplain for the Colorado House of Representatives. These roles provided him the opportunity to be present with first responders and victims of two horrific acts of mass violence in Denver: the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School and the 2012 shooting at an Aurora movie theatre.

When I asked him about what he does in those moments, in hospital rooms with parents whose children had been shot, he said, 'Most of what you do is a

ministry of presence'. He continued by saying that it is not often the time to quote Scriptures or offer explanations. In fact, he said that even when people ask directly why God would let a particular tragedy happen, he would say, 'I don't know. But I really believe that God is good and I just have to tell you that I've been through this before and often, we're just amazed at how good it can turn out, in the midst of horror'. This is significant in light of my taxonomy of hope above; Pastor Slate was refusing even human versions of the hope of explanation, pointing instead to the hope of redemption.

Hope is something Pastor Slate uses to mark the experience of worship at River Valley each week. Pastor Slate wants there to be 'a sense of joy, and a sense of hope' because 'what Satan markets most is desperation'. He unpacks this more, talking about despair and paranoia. 'Despair is really a sense that there is no hope'. Paranoia, as he sees it, is 'the sense that no matter what I see, no matter what, it will all go bad'. By contrast, 'faith is no matter what I see, it will all go good, it will all be fine'. Both are related to a present circumstance; one is bent by Satan toward 'paranoia, despair, condemnation', and the other shapes it in light of God's sovereignty. 'God is never caught off guard. God never says, "Boy, I didn't see that coming"'. That's just not part of His nature. So even if *we* say that, there is this belief in me that there is a sovereign God who ultimately has got all of this figured out and plays to the win'. Here sovereignty is linked to victory. But in contrast with the prosperity gospel, this victory is in the future; in fact, it may be so far in the future as to be obscured by the trouble of the present.

This way of speaking about sovereignty and victory make clear the futurity of hope in Pastor Slate's view. Because the conversation had clustered faith and hope together, I asked him how he would distinguish the two concepts. His answer

was clear and confident. ‘Faith extended into the future is hope’. He gave a winsome metaphor of a fishing rod which shortens to a ‘backpacking rod’. Faith is the shorter version; hope is when it extends to become an 8-foot rod. ‘So, hope is really my faith extended as far as I can extend it into the future. The picture is that God is at work now, but He’s pushing us to trust Him for tomorrow, too’.

Despite the clear delineation of a futurity of hope, Pastor Slate was ambiguous about the materiality of hope. He did not talk about new creation, or a new heaven and a new earth, or the restoration of all things. In fact, when he mentioned songs that epitomize Christian hope in part of his response to my question about the difference between faith and hope, he referenced ‘Before the Throne of God Above’, and ‘We Shall Dance on the Streets that are Golden’. I took the opportunity to follow up by asking about what he sees as the ‘location of hope’, since he had already addressed the timing of hope. He responded by talking about the experiential. ‘Hope in a lot of ways is an emotion and a realization. And that realization happens currently, here.’ Though he referenced the eschatological, he returned to the conviction that ‘Jesus is in charge and is on the throne’ and therefore ‘I’m pretty sure tomorrow is going to be fine’. ‘That’s a statement of hope, isn’t it?’ he concluded. It may be that he misunderstood the question, or it may be that as a self-described ‘Christian mystic’, he focuses on the experience of the ‘person, presence, and activities of Jesus’.⁴³⁵

How the experience of hope occurs in a service at River Valley involves both the ‘head’ and the ‘heart’. ‘We need to use both the mind and the heart, and never forget the heart is the goal’, he explained. Moving beyond the paradigm of the cognitive, Pastor Slate embraces the role of emotions in worship, and is attentive to

⁴³⁵ Strait, Brad, ‘What is a Christian Mystic?’ (2015) <<https://bradstrait.com/what-is-a-christian-mystic/>> [accessed 30 June 2017].

emotions even in his sermon writing and delivery. ‘I really believe that feelings are essential to emotion. When I preach I start at the mind and move to the heart’, he told me. The distinction between ‘feelings’ and emotions—parallel, perhaps, to the distinction I noted in Chapter 3 between ‘moods’ and emotions—reveals an understanding of emotions and human experience. He also described putting ‘parameters’ on worship leader Allan Moody. Speaking about a closing song or a worship response song, Pastor Slate has told Moody that ‘...even if it matches the theology of what I preach – it can’t be in a minor key’ or a song ‘that people don’t know the words to’. If it is sad or unfamiliar, the congregation ‘won’t feel hopeful; they’ll feel confusion; or they’ll feel a bit of dissonance of life’. That does not mean the song cannot be used; it just cannot be at the end of the service because he wants that to be a moment where they ‘can abandon a little bit of their brain’ and be ‘engaged at a heart level’.

But this desire to end with a positive and familiar song is more than service aesthetics for Pastor Slate. It is part of a ‘Gospel liturgy’. When I asked him at the end of the interview how often in his estimation people are conscious of their need for hope, he responded:

I think they have need of it all the time, I think that they’re not always conscious. But again, part of our Gospel liturgy is that we start in the pit. Why is that? Because we need to see our situation in reality before we can see how amazingly helpful it can be. So, the whole movement of the liturgy [starts] in confession, in the brokenness, and then [moves] toward what Christ has done, and into what that means for us.

5.5. Espoused Theology: Worshippers and Discourse on Hope

5.5.1. Pathway Focus Group

I asked the group how they would describe ‘Christian hope’. Josh was the first to answer. ‘For me, it’s seeing people who are older than me, who deal with the same

stuff as me, who show me that [...] there is still a way, and there's something to still look forward to, and that I'm [...] not going to be defeated'. Christian hope for him is a kind of assurance that we will overcome, though the emphasis seems to be more in this life than eschatological.

Mark had echoed this sentiment in the question comparing comfort with hope. '...hope is that I know one way or another it's going to work out; it's going to be alright'. Mark's own response to the direct question about Christian hope, however, added a deeper layer. 'Hope for me is...' He pauses and switches his approach. '...things don't always work out the way we want it to work out, but we know that God's with us. The promise of His presence, that He's always going to be with us, to me, that's hope'.

Jonah, saved out of drug addiction, speaks with a kind of gentle authenticity. 'Christian hope for me...simply put...just takes the burden of worry away from everyday life, you know...When I find myself in something that I'm worried about...I'm like, "You know, I'm not going to be here very much longer"...well, you know...like, compared to eternity'.

Sid, the oldest member of our group and a Christian for over 60 years, roots hope in the 'Word of God'. Comfort, for Sid, was 'based on circumstances' and could come and go because 'it's an emotional thing; it affects our emotions'. 'Hope, on the other hand', Sid insists, 'is something that we can have in spite of circumstances. And it's eternal, cuz it says so in the Word'. He choked up with emotion while saying this.

Cindy, a Christian of over 25 years, echoed the necessity for Christian hope to be grounded in the Scriptures, '[Hope is] grounded in every word that God has spoken. It is...you know, cuz you can have an empty hope...' Giving an example of

this, she mimics a voice, ‘ “Oh, I hope for the best..” There’s nothing to it...or you can hope for what God’s Word consists of...’

Christian Hope, for the people of Pathway, seems to be about choosing to believe what the Bible says—that things will work out, that God is with us, and that we are not going to be here long anyway. To put it in terms of the six dimensions of hope, the people in my focus group grasp the *act* of hoping as a confident assurance, even in the face of overwhelming odds. This *act* is possible because it is *grounded* in the faithfulness of God—though this character of God was never specifically named, it was implicit in their references to God’s ‘promises’ in His Word. The *agency* is attributed to God, though not in a Trinitarian or explicitly Christian sense.

The *object* of their hope shows the greatest contrast with what has been outlined as ‘creedal Christian hope’. Much of the content of their hope had to do with things working out in the here and now, even if at some later date. It was about the stuff of their daily lives, not abstract or eschatological in any way. Only one member of the group referred to hope in relation to judgment. Bill, a Christian for over 12 years, 3 years of which were spent in ‘full-time ministry’ as a pastor, is a student at a Christian university at Pathway offering mostly Bible and theology degrees, had this to say about hope: ‘[When] I think of Christian hope...[...] I think of the finality of it all...the fact that we are never going to cease to exist, in one way, one form or another... Hell is hot, and heaven is real’. This is a well-worn saying, particularly in American Pentecostal circles. Bill added his own words to draw the connection between final judgment and hope. ‘And so, when I think of hope, I think of the hope in salvation, the hope of Jesus Christ...He’s coming back for us. That’s Christian hope’. If this view is shared among the congregation at Pathway, it would make sense why at the close of Pastor Johnny Edmonds’s sermon about the rapture,

he gave an ‘altar call’ for salvation. The object of hope is salvation from judgment—gaining heaven and escaping hell.

Bill’s statements may contain the most content related to eschatological hope because of his experience in ministry, or his status as a student at the Christian university hosted on Pathway’s campus. If so, we may be observing the shift from ‘ordinary theology’ to a more ‘formal theology’. Pathway’s official statement of faith includes a final article entitled ‘Eschatology’. It states:

We affirm the bodily, personal, second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the saints, the millennium, and the final judgment. The final judgment will determine the eternal status of both the saints and the unbelievers, determined by their relationship to Jesus Christ. We affirm with the Bible the final state of the new heavens and the new earth.⁴³⁶

One might make the case that this is what the church officially believes as the *object* of their hope. Yet only one person in my focus group—the one undergoing formal theological training at a school affiliated with Pathway—referenced something like the content of this article, matching his ‘espoused theology’ with the ‘normative theology’ of his church and tradition. This may be due to the general lack of value Pathway—and the nondenominational Pentecostal-Charismatic context to which it belongs—places on formal theological education. One former senior staff member remarked to me that other than a handful of staff members, most of the 800 staffers have a business background with no theological training. Thus the cultural norm at Pathway is not to speak in traditionally theological terms.

The *time* of hope for the people I interviewed at Pathway had to do largely with their lives now. Hope was about particular personal promises in their life—job, family, promotions, healing, and the like—coming to pass eventually, despite

⁴³⁶ Gateway Church, *Eschatology* (2017) <<http://static.gatewaypeople.com/position-papers/Eschatology.pdf>> [accessed 22 July 2017].

apparent opposition in the moment. It has a futurity to it, but only in a limited sense. The future was marked by months and years, not by the end of the eschaton. When hope was related to a far ahead future, it was only in reference to heaven and hell, as noted above.

The *space* of hope—the place where hope will come about—is also seen to be related to their daily lives. It was here, in their homes and workplaces, that God was going to come through for them. This is an important theme among charismatic Christians—that the power and promises of God can be active and applied in our lives today. Worship Pastor Evan Osmond explained it to me this way when describing his understanding of Christian hope:

Christian hope is rooted in the eternal. But not only that, we have hope in heaven with God but we can have abundant life today, here. It's not just living for that—it's not just scaring them into being a Christian so that when they die they go to heaven. When I was younger that was a lot of times where the message stopped. But instead there's so much more to having abundant-living today.

But Osmond was quick to add what he means by the abundant life here. Rather than referencing a bigger house, a nicer car, a better job, or any of the other material markers of a 'blessed life' we are used to associating with a prosperity gospel, Osmond explains that what abundant living means to him is 'a life that is giving, that is loving to others, kind; it's family'. In fact, that is what shapes his approach to ministry at Pathway. Rather than the worship team functioning simply as a group of professionals gathered to do a job, Osmond wants them to be a family. 'I want us to love each other and support each other. That's what Christian community should be like. That's what the Church should be like and I think we do a great job of that at Pathway'.

5.5.2. River Valley Focus Group

I asked the same question to my group at River Valley: ‘What would you say is hope, as a Christian?’ Darren, an older gentleman with a southern drawl, ventured a response. ‘I haven’t thought this out very good, but I’ll throw it out there’, he laughed as he began. ‘To me, hope is positive. Hope is that we’ll someday be in heaven with the Lord...hope is a way we can live our lives and feel good about it because we know we have our salvation’. He had already said some key phrases. The location of hope was ‘heaven’. The reason for it was being ‘with the Lord’. This identification of hope with the presence of the Lord is a consistent theme which showed up in my fieldwork, with both Presbyterians and Pentecostal-Charismatics. Even though each group may mean something slightly different by the term, it is clear that God’s presence—both as it is felt in worship and as it will be known in an ultimate sense in heaven—is the primary focal point of hope.

Darren continued, speaking of hope now as a synonym for optimism, a tendency as I showed in Chapter 3 which derives from psychological perspectives of hope. ‘You can either choose to be sad all the time, or you can choose to be positive. And I think hope gives us the positive way to go about our lives’. Greg, another older man offered a similar response. ‘Hope to me is that knowledge that no matter what happens...you will come out of it OK, to the best it can be...’. Not only was Greg speaking of hope as a kind of optimism, he also focused its aim at heaven. ‘[Hope is the] knowledge that in the end of where you’re [sic] gonna’ go... You say, “If I die tomorrow, I know where I’m going”; and it’s a whole lot better than what we have here’. Optimism about life in the present is ultimately justified because of their final destination: heaven. This represents a kind of evacuation view in my taxonomy, a

generally positive attitude about life because we are not going to be here too long anyway.

Vicki provided a more God-centric rather than a heaven-centric response. ‘For me, I think hope is to really get it that God is control no matter what your circumstances are, no matter what diagnosis you get, no matter what treatment you have to go through, no matter who you lose, no matter what your children are doing or not doing, or how messed up your grandchildren are, or having a fire and losing— all those things, everything that can just pull you down so much. To really know and hold on that God is in control, and that He blesses, and He is good, and He will work it out for our good— that to me is what hope is’. This came from a place of conviction. For Vicki, hope was rooted in God’s sovereignty and goodness. This theme will show up again in Chapter 7, when I describe how hope is experienced. The sense that God is ‘in control’ is what anchors the people in my River Valley focus group; it is what makes their hope resilient. This view contains a strong sense of futurity while offering assurance in the present that God is both sovereign and good.

Milton and Diana, an older couple with a remarkable story of redemption, add another layer by describing a hope of deliverance. Milton recited a favorite piece of Scripture of his and his wife Diana’s: ‘It’s Isaiah 41:13 “For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand, and says, ‘Do not fear. I will help you’ ”’. Diana chimed in. ‘My feeling of hope is being on my knees and just reaching up, and, you know, “Help!” Feeling like there’s a hand of Christ come down, “I gotcha. I have you”. ...And that’s Isaiah 41:13’, she says as she quotes it again dramatically and with deep conviction. ‘That’s hope’. Here was a picture of hope that looked like confidence in God’s deliverance. This is a theme which is consonant with Pastor

Slate's description of God's redemption. Though it is not quite the *new creation* view in my taxonomy, it is a view which contains futurity and which has some connection to the present situation. Where Darren and Greg have a hope which is oriented toward the future but without implications for this life and its struggles, Milton and Debbie have a view of hope which relates to God's salvation even as takes place in the present. It is future and redemptive. At the same time, the emphasis is on God's 'hand' gripping them in the moment. Where Vicki speaks of God holding the situation in his hands, Milton and Diana derive hope from a personal picture; God is holding them in his hands. Thus, the stress here is not on God's sovereignty, and therefore his transcendence; rather, it is on God's deliverance, and therefore his immanence. God is near.

'I think it's a blessed assurance', Vicki chimed in at the very end, alluding to the words of the well-loved Fanny Crosby hymn. 'Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. Oh what a foretaste of glory divine'. Indeed, for the group at River Valley, hope is found in the presence of Jesus, the sovereign and good God who is with them and who is holding them; this is the experience in advance of heaven.

5.6. Conclusion and Connections

I began by providing a brief overview of the roots of popular Evangelical eschatology, and then proposing a taxonomy for understanding popular Evangelical eschatology today. I then turned to the two churches in my fieldwork, introducing each by their church story, context, and theological influences. In the final two sections, I examined the espoused theology of each church, beginning first with leaders and then focusing on the worshippers in my focus groups.

I discovered different though overlapping visions of hope in each church context. The kind of hope espoused in the Presbyterian church is closer to the *new*

creation view, though it lacks a strong statement of materiality—of the renewal and redemption of creation. The kind of hope espoused in the Pentecostal-Charismatic church leans heavily toward the evacuation view, particularly because of the rapture teaching from the pulpit and because of the repeated focus on heaven and hell. In both churches, heaven was the word of choice when speaking of eternal hope. No one in either context brought up resurrection or a new heaven and a new earth.

What I discovered in each church were differences not only the type of hope but in the correlation between what was espoused by leaders versus what was espoused by congregants. In the Presbyterian church, the pastor articulated a fuller version of Christian hope, even using key theological phrases like ‘now, but not yet’. The congregants in my focus group, however, did not articulate a vision of hope in ‘formal’ or ‘normative’ theological language; they spoke mainly of heaven and of God’s deliverance and presence. In the Pentecostal-Charismatic church, the language of hope used by leaders and by congregants seemed to be from the same lexicon. There was little discrepancy between a sermon on ‘the end times’, and the way congregants spoke about ‘eternity’ when asked about hope.

The distinction between espoused theology and operant theology is significant, particularly when doing ethnographic study. When a belief is asked about directly, people tend to give rehearsed answers, or responses which they have inherited from church leaders. The desire to conform to group norms diminishes the chance of getting variegated answers within the same context. In order to examine the operant theology of hope in each church context, I designed my fieldwork to give greater attention to the hope encoded in worship songs and experienced in worship services. It is to songs that I turn next.

Chapter 6

Hope Encoded

In the previous chapter, I provided a taxonomy for popular Evangelical eschatology. I then introduced the churches in my fieldwork within the context of each church's community, culture, and tradition. I provided a sketch of the espoused theology of church leaders and congregations in each church, particularly as it related to one or more of the terms in my taxonomy, through an engagement with official and unofficial discourses.

I turn now to the operant theology of hope in contemporary worship by focusing on the way hope is encoded in worship songs. This approach is grounded in Roy Rappaport's work, described in Chapter 2, which differentiates between the formal and invariant 'canonical' messages of a ritual and the variant and often informal 'indexical' messages in the performance of the ritual. Though interviews with the worship leaders at the fieldwork churches in the previous chapter and participant observant in the following chapter note a few observations of the indexical messages, the focus of this research is on canonical messages. Furthermore, I have limited the scope of my research to the canonical messages encoded in lyrical content. Song lyrics are the most invariant aspect of contemporary worship songs. A worship team may change the key signature or even the chord progression as part of the creative musical expression; but lyrics are nearly never changed and are thus the most reliable way to examine canonical messages.

The majority of the chapter analyses songs that worship leaders in North America say bring them and their churches hope, which I am referring to as 'songs of hope'. The national data is then compared with responses from worship leaders in a Pentecostal-Charismatic churches and with responses from worship leaders in

Presbyterian churches. The analysis of encoded hope is broken into sections that explore various dimensions of hope which were identified in Chapters 3 and 4. I examine *encoded space* by looking at key song lyrics such as ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’; I assess *encoded time* by a detailed analysis of verbs for divine and human action. After noting a significant emphasis from these songs on the ‘here and now’, I then take an excursus to offer possible explanations for why. I return to the analysis by investigating *encoded agency* as revealed by the nouns and pronouns used in the songs, paying attention to ratios of nouns and pronouns used for God versus for the worshipper. I also compare the use of individual versus communal nouns and pronouns for the worshipper. In the final sections of the chapter, I examine the encoded hope based on responses to the same questions from the churches in my fieldwork.

6.1. Songs of Hope: Survey Data

6.1.1 Survey Method and Demographics

Several analyses of contemporary worship songs have been done. Pete Ward analysed songbooks in *Selling Worship*;⁴³⁷ Lester Ruth has analysed verbs and themes in the songs that have been listed in the CCLI Top 25 since the list began to be published over twenty-five years ago;⁴³⁸ and Matthew Westerholm has analysed the eschatology of CCLI Top 25 songs in his recent dissertation.⁴³⁹ While these studies have provided insight into contemporary worship music, the challenge with these lists is that they are influenced by market forces and consumer dynamics. A

⁴³⁷ Ward, *Selling Worship*.

⁴³⁸ Lester Ruth, ‘Some Similarities and Differences between Historic Evangelical Hymns and Contemporary Worship Songs’, *Artistic Theologian*, 3, (2015), 68-86, in <<http://artistictheologian.com/journal/artistic-theologian-volume-3-2015/some-similarities-and-differences-between-historic-evangelical-hymns-and-contemporary-worship-songs/>> [accessed 20 March 2017].

⁴³⁹ Westerholm, Matthew, ‘The Hour is Coming and is Now Here: The Doctrine of Inaugurated Eschatology in Contemporary Evangelical Worship Music’, (doctoral dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), <<http://digital.library.sbts.edu/handle/10392/5172>> [accessed 18 July 2017].

list like the CCLI Top 25 may be representative of a particular era of worship music because it documents the popularity and widespread use of a song, but it lacks the kind of specificity my research required. I am not looking at how hope is manifest in popular worship songs; I wanted to know what songs people associate with the experience of hope. Furthermore, as Pete Ward noted, ‘The analysis of songbooks’—and I would add of CCLI Top 25 lists—‘in and of themselves is...slightly artificial, because in practice churches pick and choose from a range of sources.’⁴⁴⁰

I employed a method known as ‘free recall’. Psychologists Carey Morewedge (Harvard), Daniel Gilbert (Harvard), and Timothy Wilson (UVA) have demonstrated that ‘free recall’ uncovers the best of times and the worst of times, rather than the most typical of times.⁴⁴¹ CCLI lists and worship songbook collections can show what the most typical songs are, but a free recall question can reveal the most memorable song in terms of the hope the worshipper felt. In partnership with Integrity Music, I asked worship leaders from their email distribution lists across North America to name a song that brought them hope in a time of despair. I also asked them to name a song they sing at church that brings them hope.

6.1.2. Songs of Hope: National Worship Leader Responses

Question 15 asked, ‘Name a worship song that brought your hope in a time of despair’. Question 25 asked, ‘Name a song you sing at church that usually brings you hope’; The breakdown of respondents for each question are shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4.

⁴⁴⁰ Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*, p. 153.

⁴⁴¹ Carey K. Morewedge, Daniel T. Gilbert, and Timothy D. Wilson, ‘The Least Likely of Times: How Remembering the Past Biases Forecasts of the Future’, *Psychological Science*, 16.8, (2005), 626-630, in <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40064281>> [accessed 15 August 2016], p. 626.

Figure 3

“NAME A WORSHIP SONG THAT BROUGHT YOU HOPE IN A TIME OF DESPAIR.”

- 966 WORSHIP LEADERS
- 752 RESPONSES
- 844 SONG RESPONSES
- 414 UNIQUE SONGS
- 33 SONGS MENTIONED 5 TIMES OR MORE

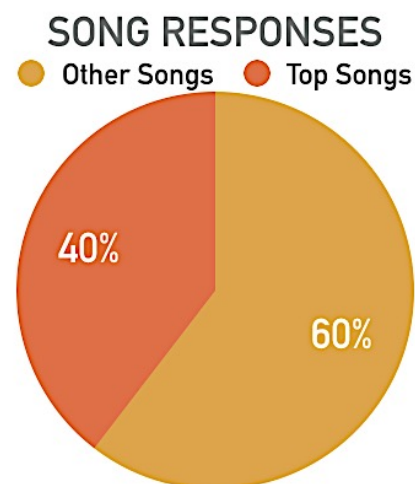
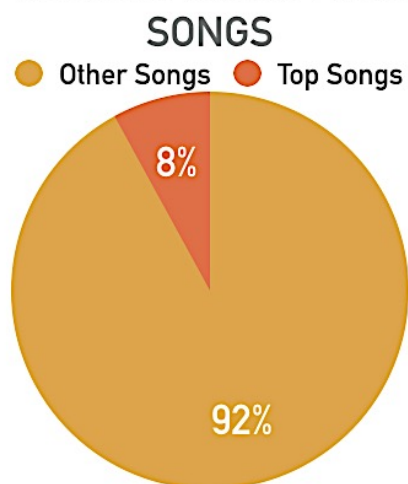
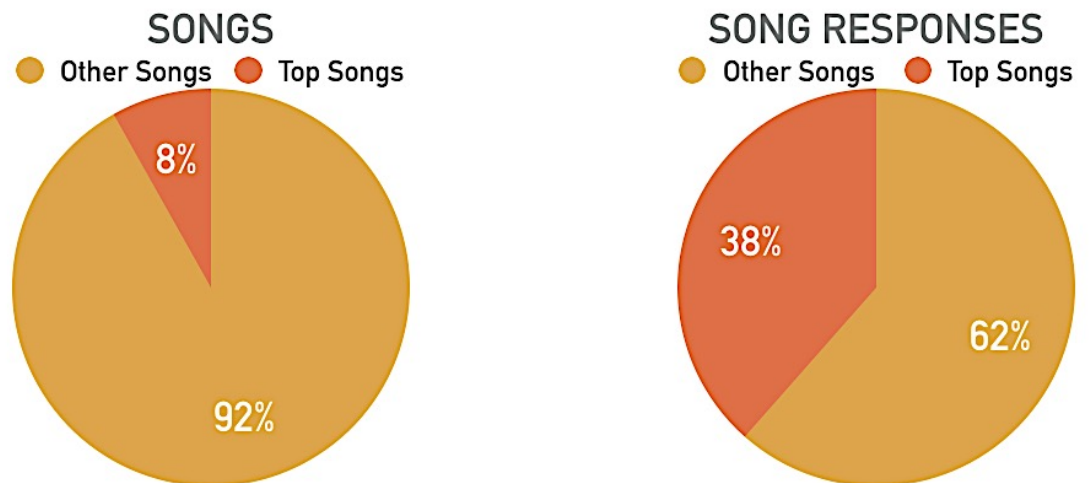


Figure 4

“NAME A WORSHIP SONG YOU SING AT CHURCH THAT USUALLY BRINGS YOU HOPE.”

- 966 WORSHIP LEADERS
- 648 RESPONSES
- 704 SONG RESPONSES
- 319 UNIQUE SONGS
- 26 SONGS MENTIONED 5 TIMES OR MORE



Taking the top responses to both question 15 and question 25 together, I discovered that each list had the same songs in the top five most mentioned songs, albeit in slightly different rank. Aggregating the mentions in these two lists, the top five worship songs which bring hope both at times of despair and in congregational worship, are as follows in Figure 5:

Figure 5

“NAME A SONG THAT . . . BROUGHT YOU HOPE IN A TIME OF DESPAIR/YOU SING AT CHURCH THAT USUALLY BRINGS YOU HOPE.”

SONG TITLE	MENTIONS
GOOD GOOD FATHER	40.5
IT IS WELL	24
IN CHRIST ALONE	22.5
NO LONGER SLAVES	19.5
CORNERSTONE	19

6.1.3. Songs of Hope: Pentecostal-Charismatic Responses

In order to explore the responses from Pentecostal-Charismatic worship leaders and Presbyterian worship leaders, I created comparisons of each sub-group with the larger survey respondents. I filtered out all responses except those from Assemblies of God and Vineyard churches, and clustered my findings of these Pentecostal-Charismatic worship leaders. Repeating the same analysis as above, the summary of Question 15 is seen below in Figure 6, and the summary of Question 25 is shown in Figure 7.

Figure 6

“NAME A WORSHIP SONG THAT BROUGHT YOU HOPE IN A TIME OF DESPAIR.”

- 104 ASSEMBLIES OF GOD AND VINEYARD WORSHIP LEADERS
- 88 RESPONSES
- 88 SONG RESPONSES
- 76 UNIQUE SONGS
- 7 SONGS MENTIONED MORE THAN TWICE

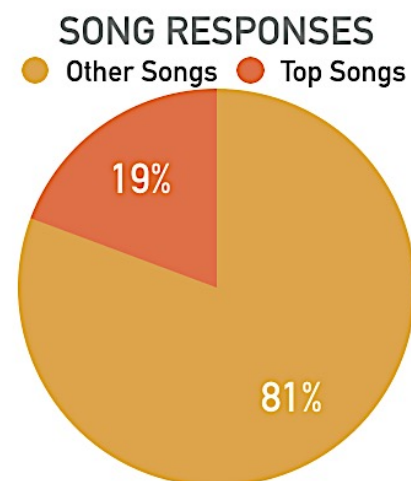
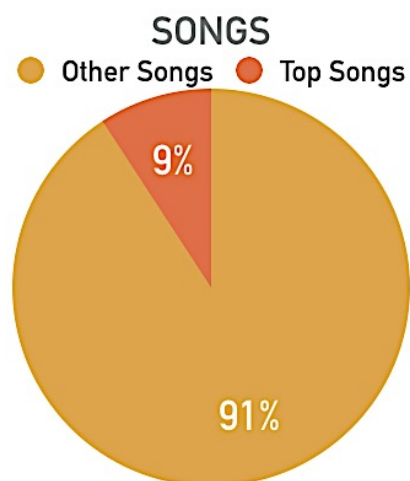
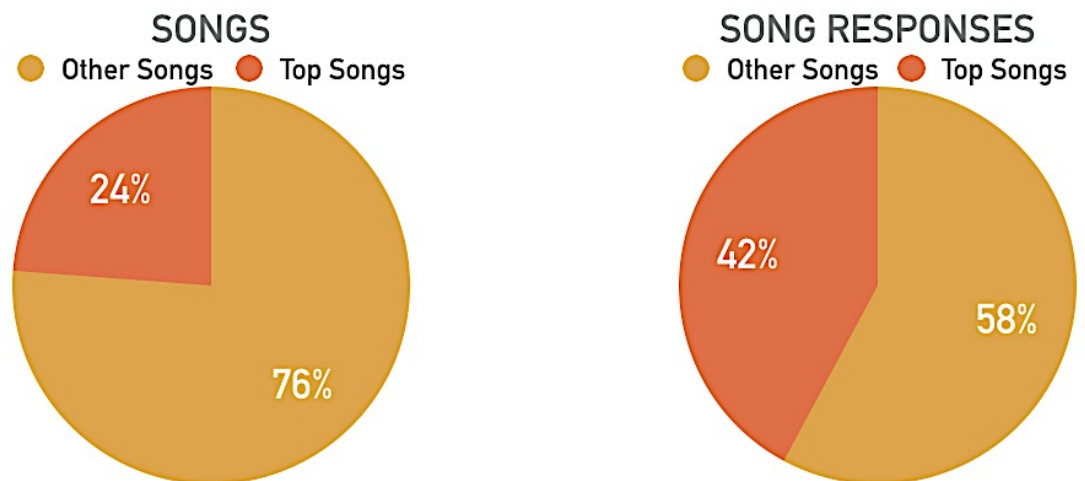


Figure 7

“NAME A WORSHIP SONG YOU SING AT CHURCH THAT USUALLY BRINGS YOU HOPE.”

- 104 ASSEMBLIES OF GOD AND VINEYARD WORSHIP LEADERS
- 85 RESPONSES
- 83 SONG RESPONSES
- 63 UNIQUE SONGS
- 15 SONGS MENTIONED MORE THAN TWICE



Aggregating the lists of songs mentioned two times or more in response to questions 15 and 25, six songs rise to the top. Note that four songs from the above list in Figure 5 appear on this list seen in Figure 8 below: ‘Good Good Father’, ‘It Is Well’, ‘No Longer Slaves’, and ‘Cornerstone’.

Figure 8

“NAME A SONG THAT . . . BROUGHT YOU HOPE IN A TIME OF DESPAIR/YOU SING AT CHURCH THAT USUALLY BRINGS YOU HOPE.”

SONG TITLE	MENTIONS
IT IS WELL	3.5
GOOD GOOD FATHER	3
GREAT ARE YOU LORD	3
STILL	3
CORNERSTONE	2
NO LONGER SLAVES	1.5

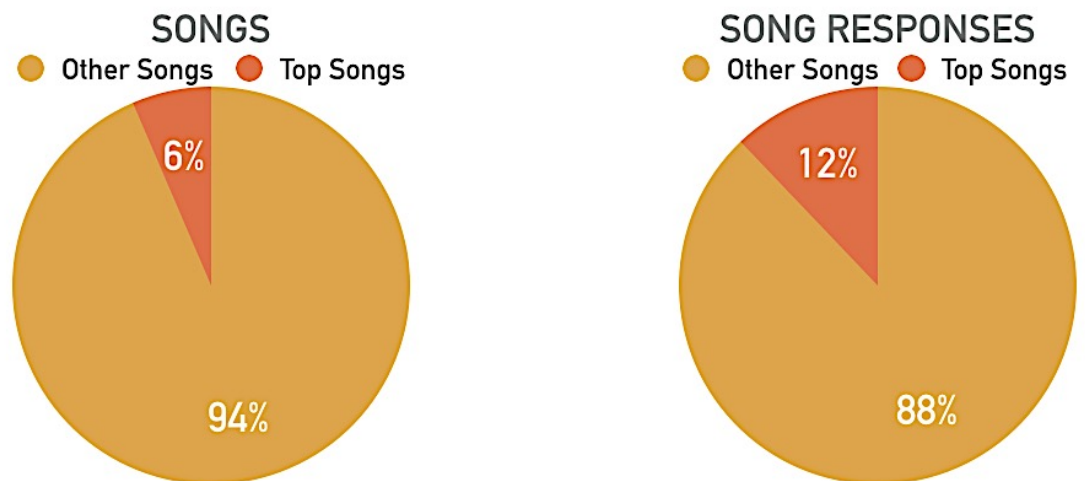
6.1.4. Songs of Hope: Presbyterian Responses

When I filtered out all responses except those from worship leaders who identified their churches as ‘Presbyterian’, the song selection diversifies even more. In response to the first question regarding a song which brought them hope, only two songs were mentioned twice. There were 31 unique songs named out of the 33 songs given. See Figure 9 below.

Figure 9

“NAME A WORSHIP SONG THAT BROUGHT YOU HOPE IN A TIME OF DESPAIR.”

- 26 PRESBYTERIAN WORSHIP LEADERS
- 23 RESPONSES
- 33 SONG RESPONSES
- 31 UNIQUE SONGS
- 2 SONGS MENTIONED TWICE

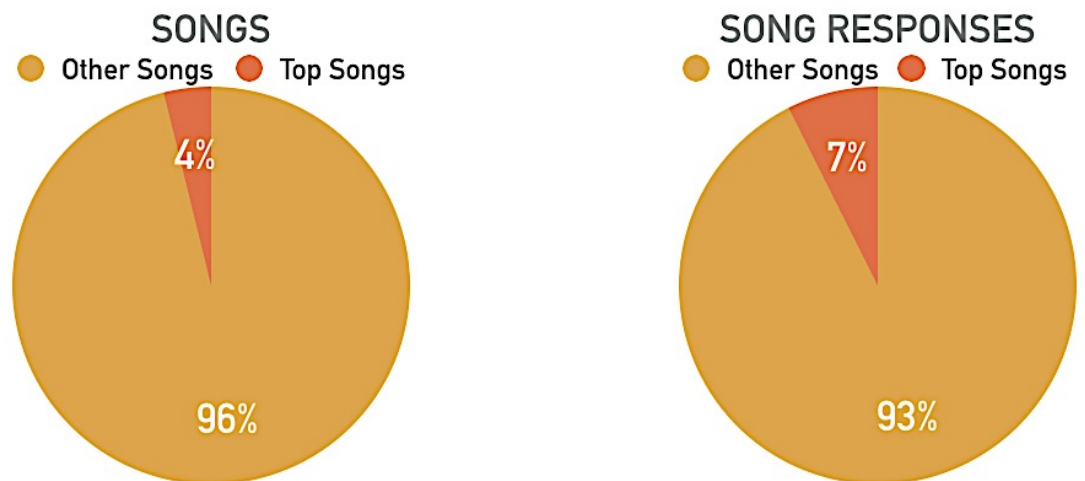


While there were fewer songs named in response to the question about a song they sing at church which brings hope, the percentage of unique songs rises slightly. 26 out of the 27 total songs names are unique. Only 1 is mentioned twice. See Figure 10 below.

Figure 10

“NAME A WORSHIP SONG YOU SING AT CHURCH THAT USUALLY BRINGS YOU HOPE.”

- 26 PRESBYTERIAN WORSHIP LEADERS
- 23 RESPONSES
- 27 SONG RESPONSES
- 26 UNIQUE SONGS
- 1 SONGS MENTIONED TWICE



From both lists, worship leaders in Presbyterian churches named, on average, more than one song each. This is highest ratio of unique songs per worship leader in all three groups—the whole group, Pentecostal-Charismatic worship leaders, and Presbyterian worship leaders. This may mean that Presbyterians are capable of finding hope from a larger array of songs than the average worship leader or the Pentecostal-Charismatic worship leader, or it may mean that Presbyterian worship leaders have a wider array of songs which have hope encoded in them from which to choose. This survey data alone cannot provide that answer.

When I combined the songs given in response to both questions, I took the songs with the most total mentions and divided them by two, the average mentions

of the top songs are as follows in Figure 11. Two songs on this list also appear on the list from the whole group of national worship leaders in Figure 5: ‘In Christ Alone’ and ‘Cornerstone’.

Figure 11

“...SONG THAT... BROUGHT YOU HOPE IN A TIME OF DESPAIR/YOU SING AT CHURCH THAT USUALLY BRINGS YOU HOPE.”

SONG TITLE	MENTIONS
IN CHRIST ALONE	1.5
BOLDLY I APPROACH	1
CORNERSTONE	1
JESUS, I MY CROSS HAVE TAKEN	1
STILL	1

6.1.5. Songs of Hope: Initial Observations

These three aggregated lists of songs that brought hope in some way formed the primary ‘text’ for my analysis of how hope is encoded in contemporary worship songs. This metadata allowed me to compare patterns in the songs named by worship leaders across denominations with the patterns in the songs named by Pentecostal-Charismatic worship leaders and with the songs named by Presbyterian worship leaders.

A few observations may be made about all three lists—Figures 5, 8, and

11—which result in nine total unique songs. First, ‘Cornerstone’ is the only song that appears in the top songs on all three lists—the general worship leader responses, worship leaders at Pentecostal-Charismatic churches, and worship leaders at Presbyterian churches. ‘In Christ Alone’ shows up on two lists—the general worship leader list, and the Presbyterian worship leader list. It is unclear what one ought to conclude about its absence from the Pentecostal-Charismatic worship leader list. It is a song which emerged from Reformed contexts and which reflects Reformed theology.⁴⁴² That the largest segment of the general worship leader group in my survey are worship leaders at Baptist churches accounts for why the song shows up on the general list—since many Baptists align theologically with Reformed theology.⁴⁴³ The one song which Presbyterians had in common with Pentecostal-Charismatics was ‘Still’. The only song unique to Pentecostal-Charismatic worship leaders was ‘Great Are You Lord’. There were two songs that only appear on the Presbyterian lists, ‘Boldly I Approach’, and ‘Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken’.

6.2. Encoded ‘Space’

Because space is a dimension of hope, it is important to examine where the action of the song is occurring, and where is the worshipper directed to aim their hope. Hope in Christian theology can either be located *here* or *there*—earth or heaven. The worshipper is situated on earth, and worship is an action which turns us upward to God. Yet a remarkable number of these top songs of hope specifically mention God’s presence here.

⁴⁴² The line in the song about the ‘wrath of God’ being ‘satisfied’ on the ‘cross where Jesus died’ has stirred no small controversy among Christians outside the Reformed tradition. It was even suggested that the line be changed in some hymnals and slide presentation software to say ‘the love of God was magnified’. But the songwriters themselves have rejected this suggestion, and Reformed theologians have doubled down on the line as being theologically necessary. All these may contribute to the reluctance of Pentecostal-Charismatic worship leaders to use the song.

⁴⁴³ See, for example, the popular blog collective, www.thegospelcoalition.org, which features prominent Baptist pastors under the umbrella of a ‘gospel’ centered approach—a phrase and framework which draws upon Reformed theology as expressed in the neo-Reformed movement.

‘In Christ Alone’ ends three of its four stanzas with a refrain that begins with the word ‘here’: ‘Here in the love of Christ I stand’; ‘Here in the death of Christ I live’; and ‘Here in the power of Christ I’ll stand’. Arguably, the ‘here’ being referred to in each instance is not a geographical location, but rather a theological one.

Nevertheless, the point of emphasis seems to be that the love, life, and power of Christ are not distant realities to which one must travel, but rather present and existential realities in which one ‘stands’.

‘Earth’ is mentioned three times in the nine top songs of hope. First, in ‘It Is Well’, a contemporary worship song which riffs off the classic hymn, the opening line reminds the worshipper that ‘Grander earth has quaked before’. This appears to be a reference to the response of creation to its Creator walking upon it and speaking to it, though it is unclear to which Gospel story this line refers. The implicit hope for the worshipper is that if the holy ground where Christ walked has responded to Jesus’s voice before, surely the earth where we walk can as well. In fact, each earthly image—seas and mountains follow—is used to represent troubles of this present world that God can change here and now.⁴⁴⁴ This is not unique to this song. Seas and storms are referenced in five of the nine songs, appearing seven times in all.

‘Great Are You Lord’—a song unique to the Pentecostal-Charismatic list—uses ‘earth’ as a reference not to the trouble in the world but to the creation that praises God. ‘And all the earth will shout Your praise, our hearts will cry these bones will sing, “Great are You Lord”’, the song exclaims. The final use of ‘earth’ in these songs appears in ‘Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken’, a song which only surfaced on the Presbyterian top songs list. Here earth is used as an adjective—

⁴⁴⁴ The first verse goes on to reference the ‘seas that are shaken and stirred’ as being able to be ‘calmed and broken’ for the ‘regard’ of the worshipper. A second verse references the ‘mountain’ in front of the worshipper as an object or obstacle which can be cast into the ‘midst of the sea’.

‘earthly’—to refer to a temporal assignment that will one day end. ‘Soon shall close my earthly mission, swiftly pass my pilgrims days; Hope soon change to glad fruition, faith to sight and prayer to praise’. ‘Earth’ in these ‘songs of hope’ refers to troubles in which God can intervene; creation, which can bring God praise; and a temporal place which the worshipper will soon leave.

‘Heaven’ is mentioned four times, but in only one of the nine songs, a song unique to the Presbyterian list, ‘Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken’. The opening stanza ends with the emphatic declaration that ‘God and heaven are still my own’. The worshipper’s hope is secure. Moreover, hope is not only a Person—God—but also a place—heaven. The second stanza enumerates the worldly people who make life difficult for the heaven-bound pilgrim, but the third stanza opens with the reminder that all these troubles only drive us to God’s blessed presence. Even though ‘Life with bitter trials may press me, Heaven will bring me sweeter rest’. The fourth stanza ends with a line which addresses the worshipper as a ‘Child of Heaven’, admonishing her not to ‘fret’. If this were not a clear enough orientation to a future place, the final stanza directs the worshipper onward and upward, pressing through the trials of the here and now.

Onward then from grace to glory,
Armed by faith and spurred by prayer;
Heaven's eternal day's before me,
God's own hand shall guide me there.

If ‘seas’ and ‘storms’ are metaphors of earthly woes, ‘throne’ is a picture of the reign of God having the final say. The ‘throne’ is an image of finality, of God’s will being done, of evil being vanquished. ‘Throne’ appears three times in two of the nine songs. ‘Cornerstone’, the only song which appears on all three lists, ends its final verse with the image of the worshipper standing before God’s throne.

When He shall come with trumpet sound

Oh, may I then in Him be found
 Dressed in His righteousness alone
 Faultless stand before the throne.

‘Boldly I Approach’ is the other song which employs the image of the throne. A song unique to the Presbyterian list, it envisages the worshipper coming to the throne not at a future time, but in the present moment. The act of worship is an act which transports the worshipper from wherever she is to the heavenly throne. What is even more interesting is both times the throne image is evoked, it is combined with a personal or familial metaphor, juxtaposing the sovereignty of God with the love of God. The song opens with this verse:

By grace alone somehow I stand
 Where even angels fear to tread
 Invited by redeeming love
 Before the throne of God above
 He pulls me close with nail-scarred hands
 Into His everlasting arms.

The chorus, the centerpiece of the song, opens with the throne image but ends once again with the metaphor of the worshipper being held or welcomed into God’s arms.

Boldly I approach Your throne
 Blameless now I'm running home
 By Your blood I come welcomed as Your own
 Into the arms of majesty.

Moving beyond specific words and phrases, many of the top nine songs on the combined list have a general sense of immediacy and proximity. Even the use of throne in the above song illustrates how even when the songs speak about God and heaven, they do so in a way that brings heaven down to earth, that makes God present here. ‘It Is Well’ declares that ‘through it all my eyes are on You’, giving not only a timeless quality to the moment but an immediacy to God. He is here, close enough for our eyes to see. ‘Good Good Father’ imagines a God who is right

here, close enough to hear his ‘tender whisper’ in the ‘dead of night’. ‘Still’ begins with the premise that God is close enough for him to ‘hide’ us under the cover of his ‘wings’. Even ‘Boldly I Approach’ places the worshipper ‘face to face with Love Himself’. Only ‘In Christ Alone’ and ‘Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken’ contain a narrative progression, which is a concept to be explored in more detail below. ‘No Longer Slaves’ evokes the imagery of Israel being led through the Red Sea to describe in an intensely personal way God’s salvation of the individual worshipper:

You split the sea so I could walk right through it,
 My fears were drowned in perfect love;
 You rescued me so I could stand and sing,
 I am a child of God.

The encoded space found in the songs that worship leaders named as songs of hope corresponds to the ‘space’ where the same worship leaders locate their hope. 3 of the 25 questions on the survey had to do with where the object of hope will arrive. Heaven is contrasted with earth. The responses are broken down by denominational cluster in the following three figures, Figure 12, Figure 13, and Figure 14. The most interesting contrast is between Figure 12 and Figure 14. Though the majority of worship leaders affirmed their hope being in heaven’s future arrival to earth, a majority also affirmed the claim that this world is not our home. It should be noted that Pentecostal-Charismatic worship leaders were more drawn to this claim than Presbyterian worship leaders were. Finally, Figure 13 demonstrates an overwhelming resonance of hope from Christ’s presence with us in our space rather than from His implied presence in heaven at the right hand of the Father or from His future glorious presence with us—even though that particular phrase is a direct line from the Nicene Creed.

Figure 11

'WHICH STATEMENT BRINGS YOU MORE HOPE?'

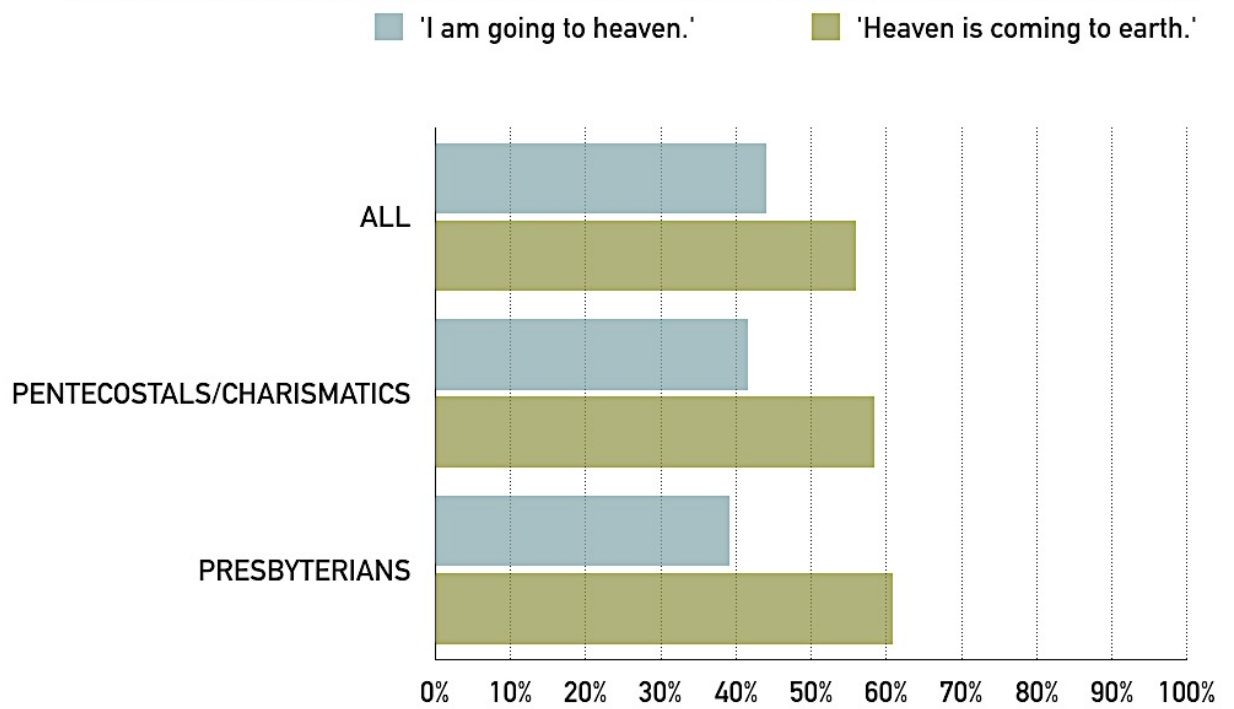


Figure 13

'WHICH STATEMENT BRINGS YOU MORE HOPE?'

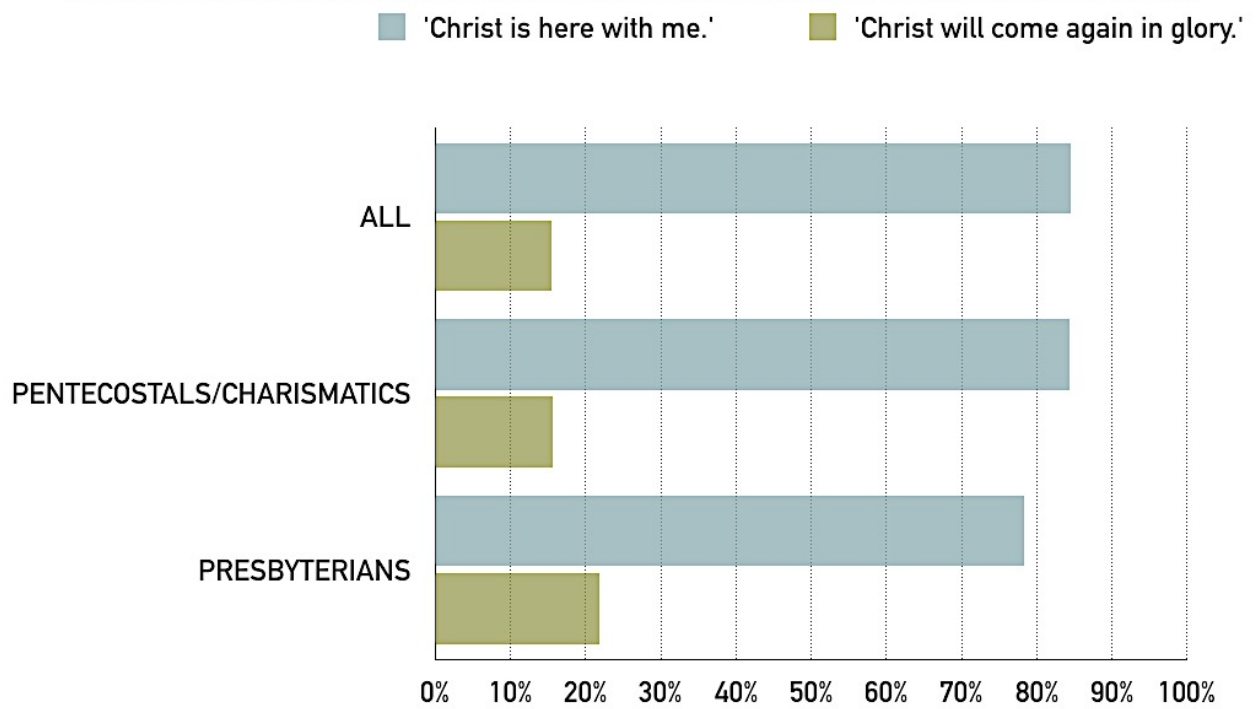
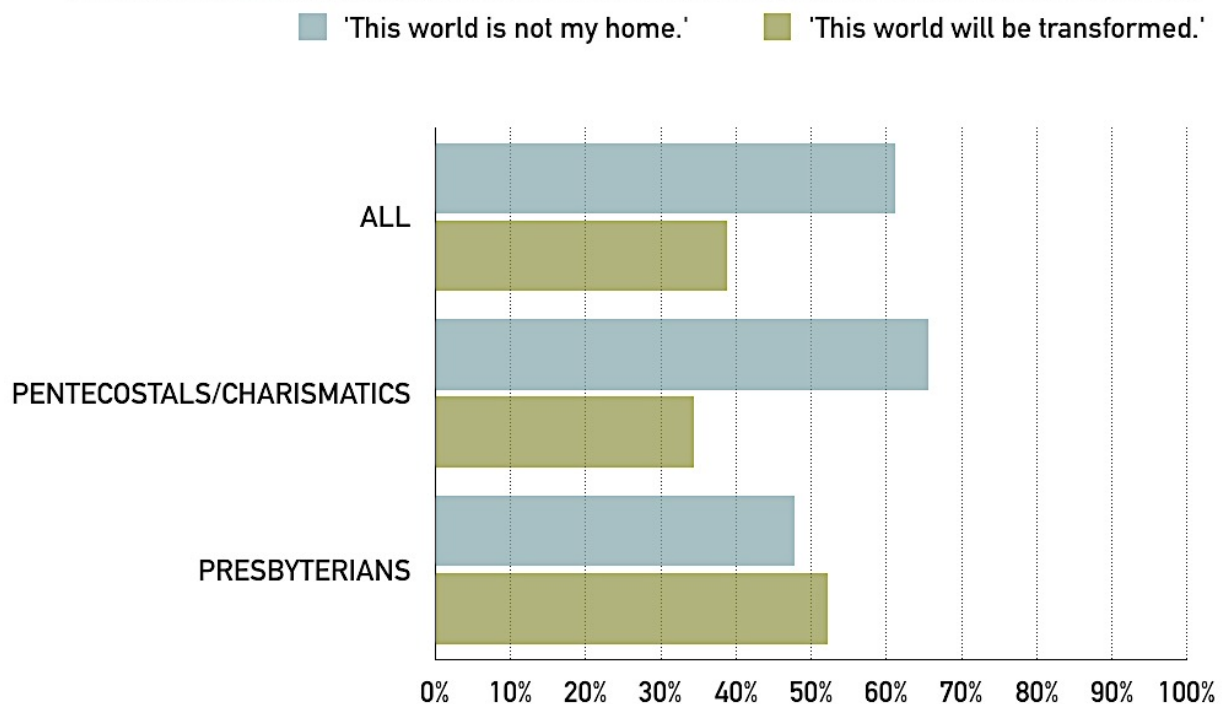


Figure 14

'WHICH STATEMENT BRINGS YOU MORE HOPE?'



The sense of immediacy of access and proximity of place which has been traced in these songs of hope is only one dimension of encoded hope. The sense of space can be corroborated by a more technical analysis of the time dimension of hope. While locating the space of hope relies on a broad look at themes and keywords, an analysis of time can be revealed by a study of the verbs in these songs.

6.3. Encoded 'Time': Verb Tenses for Divine and Human Action

Central to the question of how hope is encoded in songs is an analysis of verbs. A verb analysis allowed me to focus not so much on the type of action being sung about with reference to God and the worshipper, but rather on the timing of the action. Verb tenses locate the action of both God and the worshipper in the past, present, or future. Because hope involves the dimension of time and specifically an

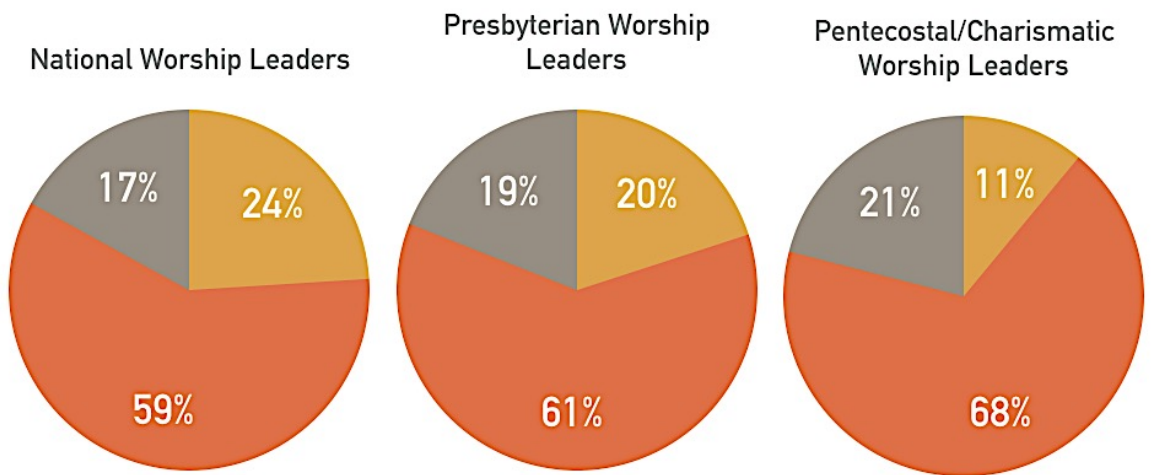
orientation toward the future, I examined how much these songs are orientated toward the future.

I divided the verbs in three groups—divine and human action, human action, and divine action—and compared them by the lists on which the songs appear—general worship leaders, Pentecostal-Charismatic worship leaders, and Presbyterian worship leaders. Below are three graphs mapping the verb tenses of these ‘songs of hope’, beginning with verbs for both (Figure 15), then verbs of human action (Figure 16), and then verbs for divine action (Figure 17). It is significant to note in Figure 15 that both the sub-groups sing about action in the past less than the general group. But most striking is the high percentage of verb tenses in the present tense from songs named by Pentecostal-Charismatic worship leaders.

Figure 15

VERBS (GOD AND US)

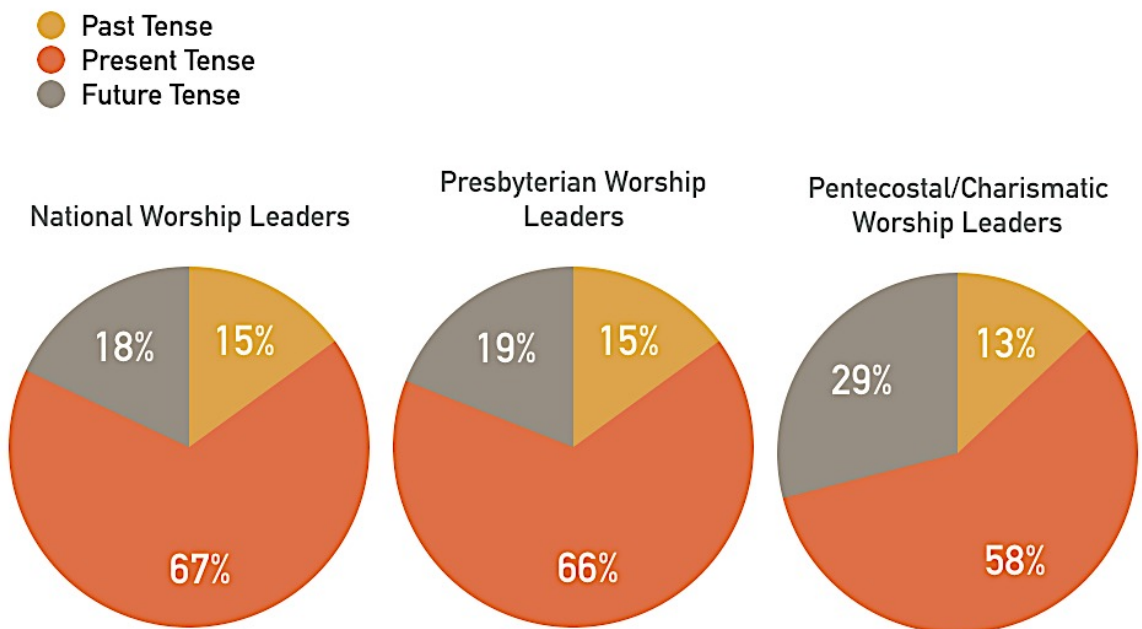
- Past Tense
- Present Tense
- Future Tense



When the verbs of human action are separated out (Figure 16), the differences between the two shift slightly. Here the difference between the focus on the past is not pronounced, while the focus on the future is higher for Pentecostal-Charismatic songs of hope. One also notes that the focus on the present is lower for Pentecostal-Charismatic songs of hope. Pentecostal-Charismatic ‘songs of hope’ seem to have little trouble anticipating what the worshipper will do in the future.

Figure 16

VERBS (US)

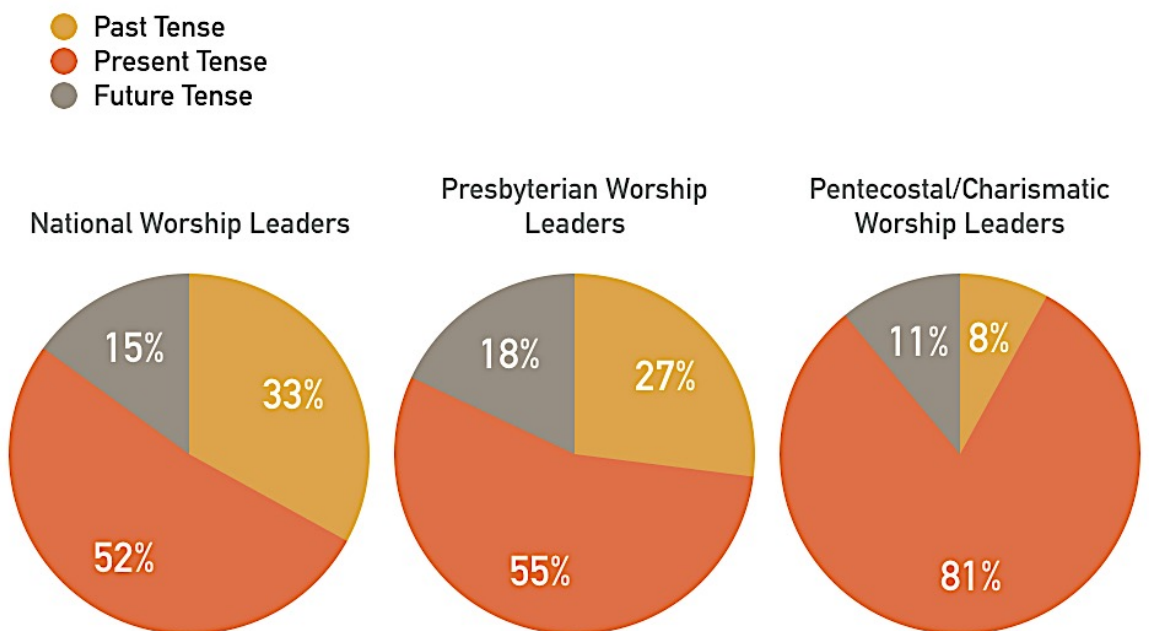


When the verbs for divine action are compared (Figure 17), the focus on the future is comparable. What is stunning—and this is the greatest discrepancy in the three graphs—is the lack of focus on the past and the strong focus on the present in Pentecostal-Charismatic songs of hope. When it comes to singing about God, Pentecostal-Charismatic worship leaders apparently derive very little hope from

what God has done or what God will do. They are fixated instead on what God is doing. Because it is puzzling how a song can be said to bring hope when there is so little reference to the future—ours or the one which God will bring, it is worth exploring further a few possible explanations for why this is the case.

Figure 17

VERBS (GOD)



6.4. Excursus: Possible Explanations for a ‘Here and Now’ Focus

How can there be hope when there is no orientation toward the future?

Below are three possible explanations. Each explanation represents a plausible hypothesis, the beginnings of which are explored in my research, but which requires further investigation in future studies. These explanations are to be understood as layers which may co-exist. All three explanations may be working at the same time, contributing to the focus of the abovementioned songs on the present tense.

6.4.1. Worship and the Character of God

A simple explanation for the focus on the present tense may be that the nature of Christian worship is to focus on who God is, rather than what God will do. This does not negate an orientation toward the future; it may simply mean that confidence for the future is grounded in the unchanging nature of who God is. An example of this can be found in a cursory examination of early Christian worship songs. A pair of ancient hymns not derived from either the Psalms or the New Testament texts are found in the writings of the Cappadocian theologians of the fourth century. The first is known as the *Phos hilaron*, meaning ‘Joyous Light’. The second, which is also better known in the West, is *Gloria in excelsis*. The first was used in evening prayer, the second in morning prayer. The *Phos hilaron* contains only three verbs in its English translation found in Andrew McGowan’s text on ancient Christian worship. Two of the verbs denote action from the church, and one from the cosmos; there are no verbs which an action from God. All three verbs are in the present tense. Each verb is italicized below:

Joyous Light of the holy glory of the immortal Father,
 Heavenly, holy, blessed Jesus Christ;
Coming to the setting of the sun, *seeing* the evening light,
 We *hymn* Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God.
 It *is* right for You at all times to *be* praised with blessed voices,
 Son of God, the Giver of life. Therefore, the cosmos *glorifies* you.

The second hymn, *Gloria in excelsis*, contains twelve verbs—five which denote human action; five which denote divine action; and two—the first and the last—which are ascriptions of glory to God. All are in the present tense. Once again, I have used McGowan’s translation, and italicized the verbs below for emphasis:

Glory *be* to God in the highest,
 and upon earth, peace, goodwill among human beings.
 We *praise* you, we *hymn* you, we *bless* you, we *glorify* you,
 we *adore* you by your great High Priest;
 You, true God, sole and unbegotten, the only inaccessible one,

Because of your great glory, Lord, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty;
 O Lord God, the Father of the Lord, the immaculate Lamb, who *takes* away the sin of the world, *receive* our prayer, You who *are enthroned* upon the cherubim.
 For you only *are* holy, you only *are* the Lord, God and Father of Jesus, the Christ, God of all created nature, our King, by whom glory, honour, and worship *are* to you.

This is not to say that all ancient Christian worship was in the present tense.

Much more detailed study would be required before such claims could be made.

McGowan even notes that the Syrian Church in the Fourth Century composed hymns that ‘told stories in narrative form, ‘with the women’s and men’s choirs taking the parts of biblical characters’. Other Syrian hymns were ‘explicitly doctrinal and pedagogical in character’. Nonetheless, it cannot be overlooked that many of the contemporary worship songs listed above from the survey are simply following a long tradition of singing about who God is, praising Him for His being ‘Father’ or ‘Cornerstone’. The perpetuity of God’s reign, God’s holiness, and more may form at least part of the reason why contemporary worship songs contain so many verbs in the present tense.

Compare the first hymn, the *Phos hilaron*, for example, with ‘Great Are You Lord’, one of the top six songs which Pentecostal-Charismatic worship leaders named as a song of hope. The first verse opens with a series of statements about what God does, culminating in the praise of who God is:

You give life,
 You are love,
 You bring light to the darkness

You give hope,
 You restore every heart that is broken
 Great are you Lord.

Praising God for who He is, as His character and nature are made manifest by His

divine actions, is a long-standing Christian practice.

6.4.2. Contemporary Songwriters and the Perfect Present

Another possible explanation for the focus on the present in contemporary worship songs of hope is that the ‘present’ is relatively pain-free for both the worship songwriter and many of the worship leaders I surveyed. The top five songs in my aggregated list (Figure 5) were written in Atlanta, Georgia (‘Good Good Father’); Redding, California (‘It Is Well’); Nashville (‘Great Are You Lord’); Sydney, Australia (‘Still’, ‘Cornerstone’); and Sophia, North Carolina (‘No Longer Slaves’). Though these are not necessarily places of affluence, they are not places of lack. Contemporary worship songs of hope can dwell on the present because life is good right now, for both songwriter and worshipper.

These songs stand in contrast with the slave Spirituals. ‘The spiritual’, James Cone argues, ‘is the spirit of the people struggling to be free; it is their religion, their source of strength in a time of trouble. And if one does not know what trouble is, then the spiritual cannot be understood’.⁴⁴⁵ Cone suggests that the Spirituals were not about a ‘“spiritual” freedom’ but an ‘eschatological freedom grounded in the events of the historical present, affirming that even now God’s future is inconsistent with the realities of slavery’.⁴⁴⁶ Though this theological language is not explicit in the spirituals, Cone insists that the ‘expectation of the future of God, grounded in the resurrection of Jesus...was the central theological focus of black religious experience’.⁴⁴⁷ The rhetoric of the songs and the sermons of Black preachers, taken together, make clear that the ground of hope was eschatological. By eschatology, Cone means not simply the future return of Christ, but the past resurrection of Christ, since it is the resurrection which shapes our hope at His return. Thus Cone

⁴⁴⁵ James Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues*, 2nd edn (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), p. 30.

⁴⁴⁶ Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues*, p. 42.

⁴⁴⁷ Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues*, p. 88.

writes, ‘The resurrection was an eschatological event which permeated both the present and future history of black slaves’.⁴⁴⁸ In fact, it was because ‘the black slave was confident that God’s eschatological liberation would be fully revealed in Jesus’s Second Coming’ that ‘he could sing songs of joy and happiness while living in bondage’.⁴⁴⁹ Cone continues by asserting that this ‘hope in a radically new future, defined solely by God the Liberator’, is manifest in the spirituals through their language about ‘*place*’ and ‘*time*’—two categories that Moltmann outlines as the key dimensions of Christian hope.⁴⁵⁰

The Spirituals are full of references to heaven, a place where ‘the oppressed would “lay down dat heavy load” ’; ‘a place where slaves would put on their robes, take up their harps, and put on their shoes and wings’; it was a ‘home indeed, where slaves would sit down by Jesus, eat at the welcome table, sing and shout, because there would be nobody there to turn them out’; it was ‘God’s eschatological promise’, where there would be ‘no more sadness, no more sorrow, and no more hunger...’.⁴⁵¹ But heaven was not simply a place of future hope; it was also a metaphor which inspired action in the present. Heaven, in the spirituals, ‘served functionally to liberate the black mind from the existing values of white society, enabling black slaves to think their own thoughts and do their own things’.⁴⁵² Cone gives some examples of what the language about heaven came to signify. ‘For Tubman and Douglass, heaven meant the risk of escape to the North and Canada; for Nat Turner, it was a vision from above that broke into the minds of believers, giving them courage and the power to take up arms against slave masters and mistresses.

⁴⁴⁸ Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues*, p. 50.

⁴⁴⁹ Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues*, p. 52.

⁴⁵⁰ Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues*, p. 88.

⁴⁵¹ Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues*, pp. 88-89.

⁴⁵² Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues*, p. 86.

And for others, heaven was a perspective on the present, a spiritual, a song about “another world...not made with hands.”⁴⁵³

The *time* of hope was set in the future even as it inspired action in the present. Black slaves used an ‘apocalyptic imagination’ to express their ‘anticipation of God’s new future’.⁴⁵⁴ Such imagery emphasized that the reality of God’s future could not be contained in our present. They ‘stressed the utter distinction between present and future’.⁴⁵⁵ This is why Black eschatology meant an affirmation of life after death.

Black eschatology in the Spirituals also had to do with judgment and justice at the return of Christ. Cone, with forceful voice, writes:

The spirituals speak not only of what Jesus has done and is doing for blacks in slavery. Jesus was understood as holding the keys of Judgment, and therefore the full consummation of God’s salvation will take place outside of the historical sphere. Jesus is the Son of God who dwells in heaven. And he is coming again; but this time “he ain’t coming to die.” He is coming to complete God’s will to set free “the poor, black, and wasted.” He will take them home to be with him.⁴⁵⁶

From Cone’s analysis, the *grounds*, *space*, *time*, and *agency* of Christian hope in the Spirituals are made clear. Setting this against my analysis of the songs which contemporary worship leaders say bring them hope, the *agency* of hope is consistent—it is God who brings about the hope-for reality—the *grounds* may be comparable, but the *space* and *time* of hope are remarkably dissimilar. If the futurity of Spirituals is clear because of a difficult present, it is plausible that contemporary songs of hope are fixated on the present because life is good here and now.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁴ Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues*, p. 90.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁶ Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues*, p. 51.

6.4.3. Postmodernism and the Loss of Narrative

The lack of narrative in the songs which people chose as songs of hope is part of a larger trend in contemporary worship songs. The worship historian Lester Ruth compared contemporary worship songs with what Stephen Marini called ‘historically significant American evangelical hymns’.⁴⁵⁷ One notable difference is in the eschatology encoded in the songs. ‘The sense of our ultimate destiny in EH [Evangelical Hymns] is delayed and mediated by key biblical types. One day our sojourn through the wilderness will be done, we will pass over the river, and enter into the Promised Land or heavenly city’.⁴⁵⁸ By contrast, ‘the sense of fulfilment in CWS [Contemporary Worship Songs] is immediate’.⁴⁵⁹

Ruth is reluctant to make absolute claims about why the difference exists, since the two bodies of songs originate from dozens of writers. Yet he makes two observations. First, the historic contexts are different in terms of the sense of the frailty or vulnerability. Modern medicine, among other things, has extended human life and mitigated the fear of death, and with it a ‘corresponding fear of the wrath of God’. ‘Longer lives, consumerist expectations, and a middle-class lifestyle for lyricist and congregation alike have created a desire for immediate fulfilment. We do not sojourn, we arrive. We now flee from meaninglessness, not an impending judgment. Recent songs tend to reflect this shift’. This is consonant with the above hypothesis of a ‘perfect present’ accounting for the fixation on life in the present tense. Secondly, Ruth observes a shift from a pilgrimage paradigm—the epitome of which is enshrined in Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*—to an ‘end times’ paradigm. Discipleship is no longer ‘a long journey toward our final destiny’, but rather a

⁴⁵⁷ Ruth, ‘Some Similarities and Differences’, p. 69.

⁴⁵⁸ Ruth, ‘Some Similarities and Differences’, p. 75.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

faithful waiting for the imminent return of Christ.⁴⁶⁰ Ruth remarks that the early contemporary worship songs arose out of the ‘Jesus People Movement’, in which an eschatology of escapism and an impending return of Christ featured prominently, and out of which a movement of worship songs came called ‘Maranatha! Music’—meaning, ‘Come, Lord Jesus!’⁴⁶¹

Yet the lack of narrative is hardly noticed because meaning no longer derives primarily from the story told by sermons and worship songs but from the worshipper’s experience. In Martin Stringer’s observations of a Baptist church, he notes that stories featured prominently in their sermons. Hymns in this context, Stringer argues, either become stories themselves or ‘triggers for the recalling of stories...One line of a hymn has the potential to conjure up a whole series of biblical stories’.⁴⁶² Stringer posits that there are three stories in a worship event: the story that we bring to worship—and that affects what we hear in worship; the ‘new stories’ that we hear in worship, either from Scripture or from leaders; and the ‘story’ of the interaction or merger of those two stories. This third story is the story of how worship ‘speaks’ to us, which is an instance, Stringer says, of an instantaneous superimposition of both our own story and the liturgical story which results in a flow of ‘meaning’ or emotion between the two.⁴⁶³

This merging of personal story and the stories supplied in worship makes up at least part of what is named as the experiential dimension of contemporary worship. Kavanagh asserted that ‘what is unknowable in worship is essentially experiential’.⁴⁶⁴ Stringer concludes that the act of worship is best understood as a ‘space without meaning’ (in a linguistic sense). Individuals who come to worship

⁴⁶⁰ Ruth, ‘Some Similarities and Differences’, p. 76.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶² Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship*, p. 104.

⁴⁶³ Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship*, p. 105.

⁴⁶⁴ Kavanagh quoted in Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship*, p. 107.

have no ‘imperative need’ to fill that space with meaning. Rather, they fill it in an ‘experiential’, ‘significance’ kind of way.

It is this experiential dimension that makes it possible to have truncated narratives in contemporary worship. The encoded ‘story’ in the songs that people say bring them hope are anaemic in both origin and ending points. The encoded story has very little to say about the beginning of hope, and the *telos*, or goal, of hope. Yet the worshipper supplies meaning by bringing their personal story to bear upon the lyrics of the song.

This loss of narrative in contemporary worship songs must be situated within wider cultural trends. The philosopher Charles Taylor maps how our ‘secular age’ came to be.⁴⁶⁵ As Taylor sees it, it is more than a ‘subtraction story’—an account of how people simply stopped believing in God. Rather, it is, as James K. A. Smith puts it, ‘a sum, created by addition, a product of intellectual multiplication’.⁴⁶⁶ Mapping out Taylor’s thesis of the story of ‘immanentization’, Smith highlights four shifts.⁴⁶⁷ The first is the loss of what Taylor calls ‘further purpose’.⁴⁶⁸ Both ‘agents and social institutions lived with a sense of a *telos* that was eternal’.⁴⁶⁹ The fourth shift seems an inevitable result of the first; it is a loss of the ‘“idea that God was planning a transformation of human beings which would take them beyond the limitations which inhere in their present condition”’.⁴⁷⁰ Without a grand *telos* or an eschatological vision, the story humans narrate and inhabit is much smaller. It may

⁴⁶⁵ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁴⁶⁶ James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), p. 26.

⁴⁶⁷ Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, p. 48.

⁴⁶⁸ Charles Taylor, quoted in Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, p. 48.

⁴⁶⁹ Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, p. 49.

⁴⁷⁰ Charles Taylor, quoted in Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, p. 50.

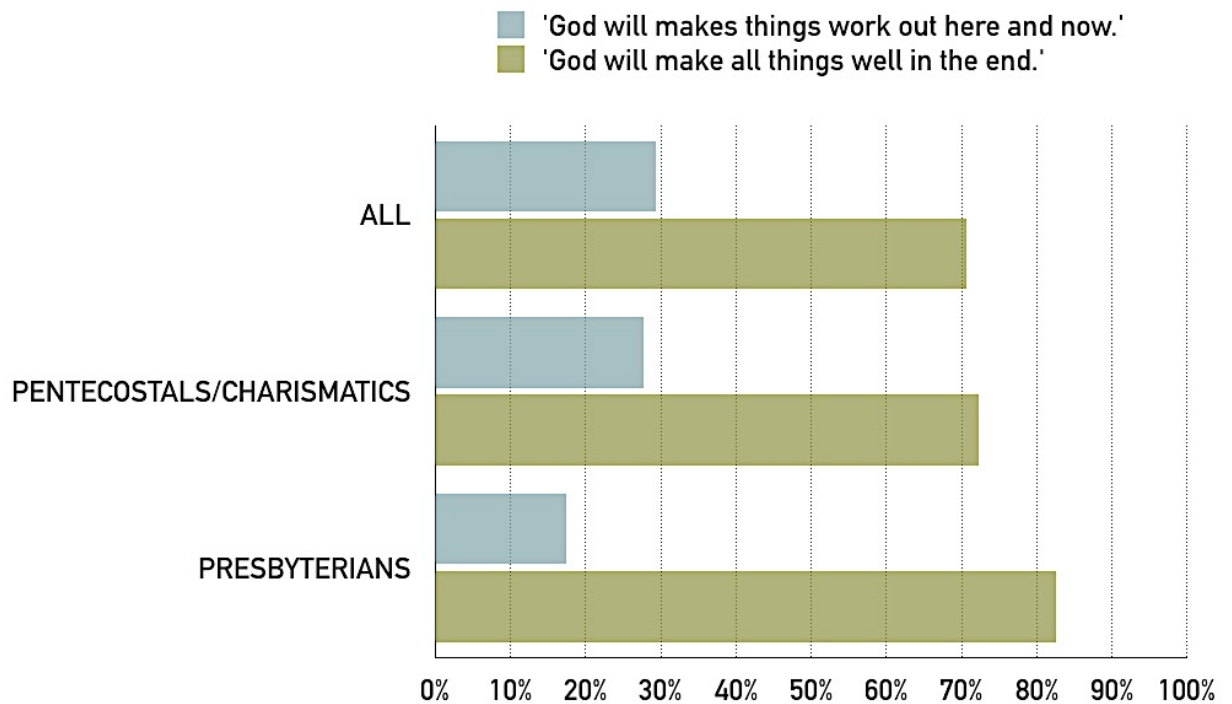
be that the truncated salvation narratives encoded in contemporary worship songs are a product of this ‘secular age’.

That worship leaders and songwriters are shaped or impacted by the loss of narrative in culture at large is evidenced by their responses to other questions on my survey. 4 of my 25 questions had to do with the time dimension of hope. I placed a pair of statements before the worship leader and asked them to choose which one brought them more hope. Both statements are arguably true from a theological perspective. My assumption is that Christians privilege certain aspects of their faith above others, and I wanted to know which statement of the sets of pairs represented a more deeply held belief. By asking which one brought more hope, I was also attempting to discover which statement would be given priority when writing or selecting songs which could bring hope. My assumption here is that a worship leader will look for songs which reflect the belief or beliefs in which the worship leader finds the most hope. Thus, the personal theology of the worship leader skews which songs he or she perceives to be songs of hope.

In the following graphs, I will display the responses of the whole group in comparison with Pentecostal-Charismatic worship leaders and Presbyterian worship leaders. In the first pair of statements, Figure 18, the majority of worship leaders—more than 70%—in each cluster find hope from the statement, ‘God will make all things well in the end’. Their hope is orientated toward the future.

Figure 18

'WHICH STATEMENT BRINGS YOU MORE HOPE?'

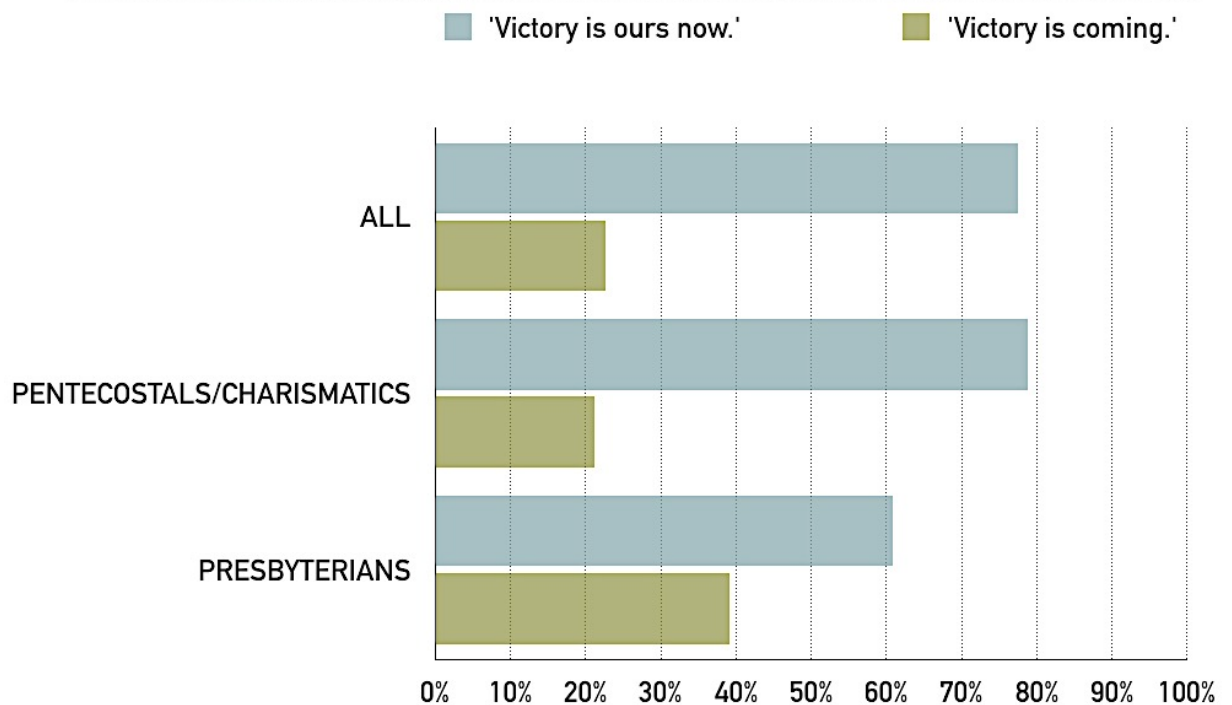


In the next three questions related to the time orientation of hope, however, worship leaders irrespective of denominational identity, chose the statement rooted in the present tense. The relatively small difference between the responses of Pentecostal-Charismatic worship leaders and that of the larger group of worship leaders is interesting given that worship leaders in Pentecostal-Charismatic churches account for only 23% of the total group (see Figure 1 above). This may possibly be due to the influence of charismatic theology beyond churches that identify as Pentecostal or Charismatic, possibly through contemporary worship songs as mentioned in Chapter 1. What is most striking in the following graph, Figure 19, is the difference in responses between Presbyterians and Pentecostal-Charismatics. Of the four questions related to time, this pair of statements—about ‘victory’—was the

greatest disparity in response. Presbyterians seem much more reluctant to find hope in the belief that victory is ours now.

Figure 19

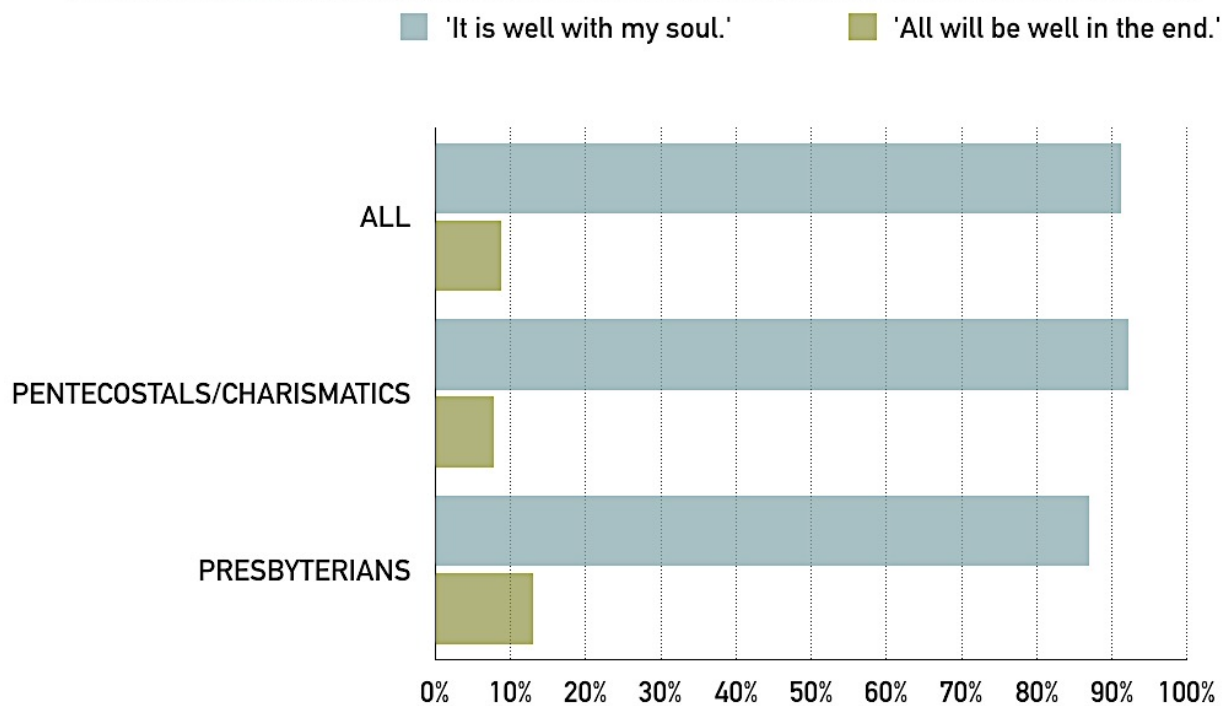
'WHICH STATEMENT BRINGS YOU MORE HOPE?'



The final two graphs of the remaining pairs of statements in my survey related to the time dimension of hope illustrate not only the hope that worship leaders derive from statements related to the present tense, but also to statements that relate to them as individuals. The first of the following two pairs of statements, Figure 20 below, sets the assertion that 'It is well with my soul' in contrast to the expectation that 'All will be well in the end'. Worship leaders of all denominational stripes overwhelmingly favoured the more personal of the two assertions. Of the four time-orientated questions, this had the highest leaning one way or another—and it leans heavily toward the present and the personal.

Figure 20

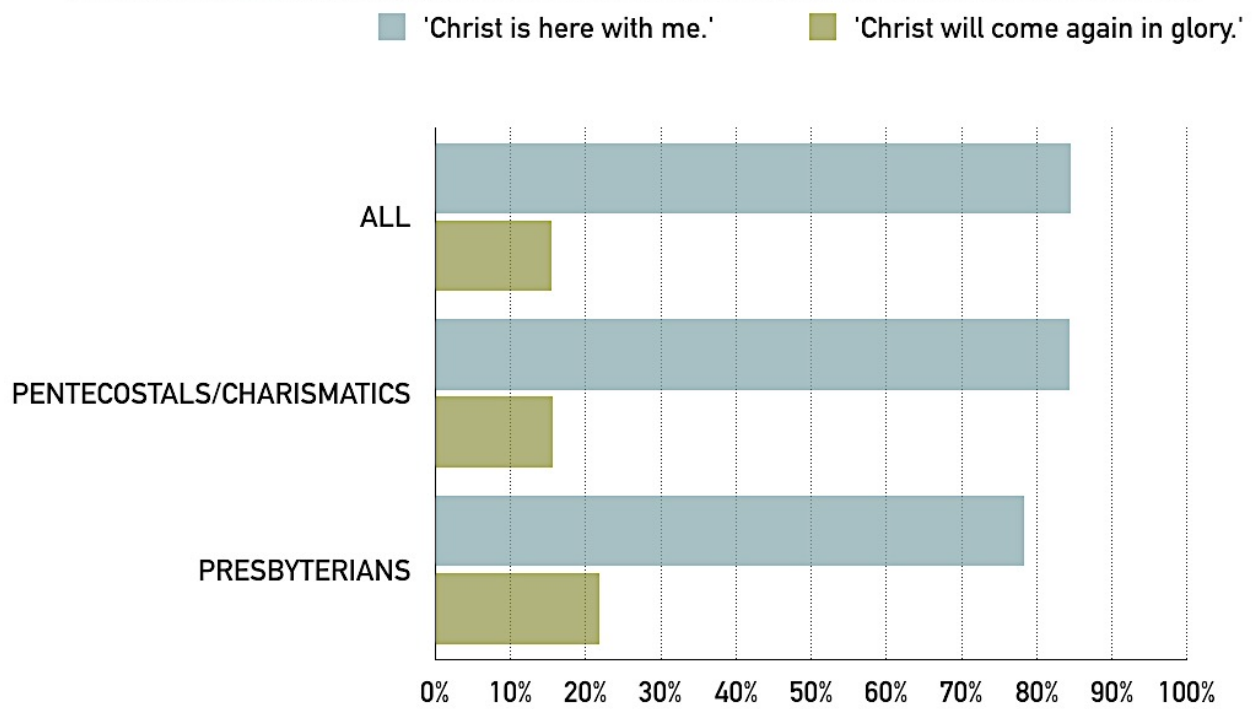
'WHICH STATEMENT BRINGS YOU MORE HOPE?'



The final pair of statements is perhaps the most stunning. Though this graph has been displayed earlier with reference to encoded space, it is worth noting here that a phrase from the Creed is set against a present tense assertion of Christ's presence with the individual. Once again, both may be defended as theologically viable and Biblically grounded. Yet one is an exact phrase in the Creed orientated toward Christian hope, the expectation of Christ's return, and the other is an existential claim. It is not the future return of Christ which will bring about the consummation of salvation and the restoration of all things that inspires hope; it is the presence of Christ with the individual. The experience of Christ by the individual in the 'here and now' has subverted the sense of futurity, and consequently contributed to a loss of narrative.

Figure 21

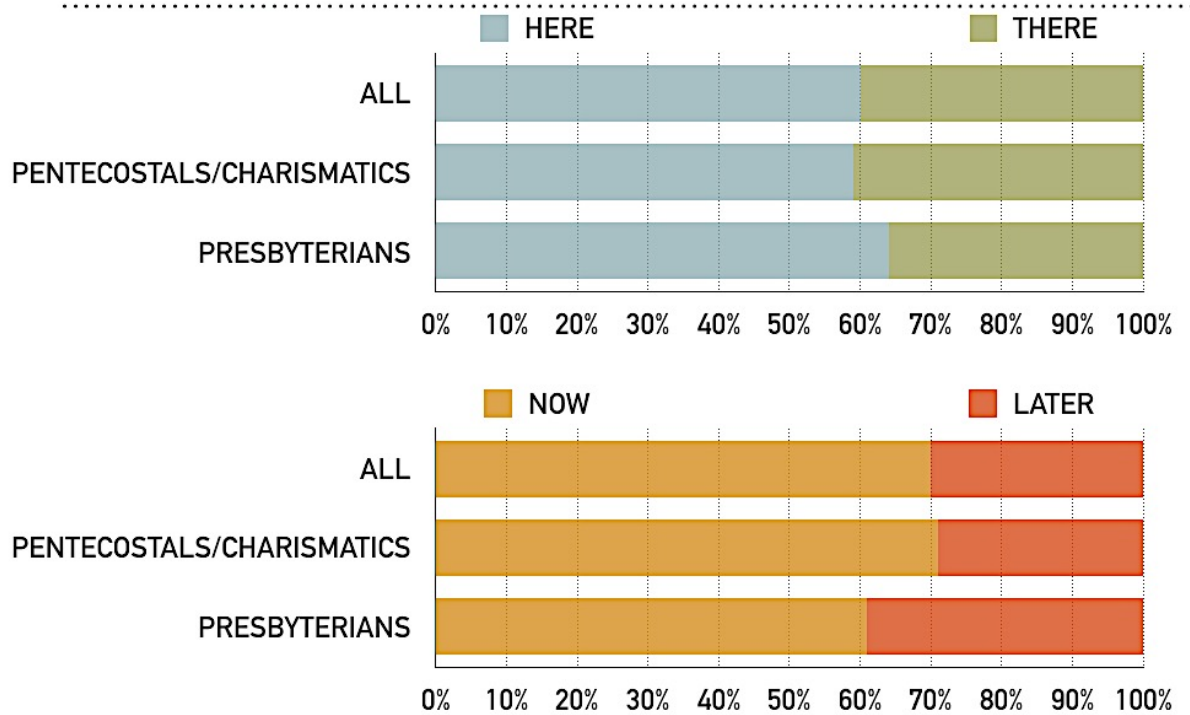
'WHICH STATEMENT BRINGS YOU MORE HOPE?'



The focus on the 'here and now'—both space and time—of the worship leaders surveyed may be seen in Figure 22. I took all seven questions relating to space and time, aggregated the percentages and divided them by the number of questions relating to space (3) and time (4), and plotted them as follows:

Figure 22

SPACE AND TIME



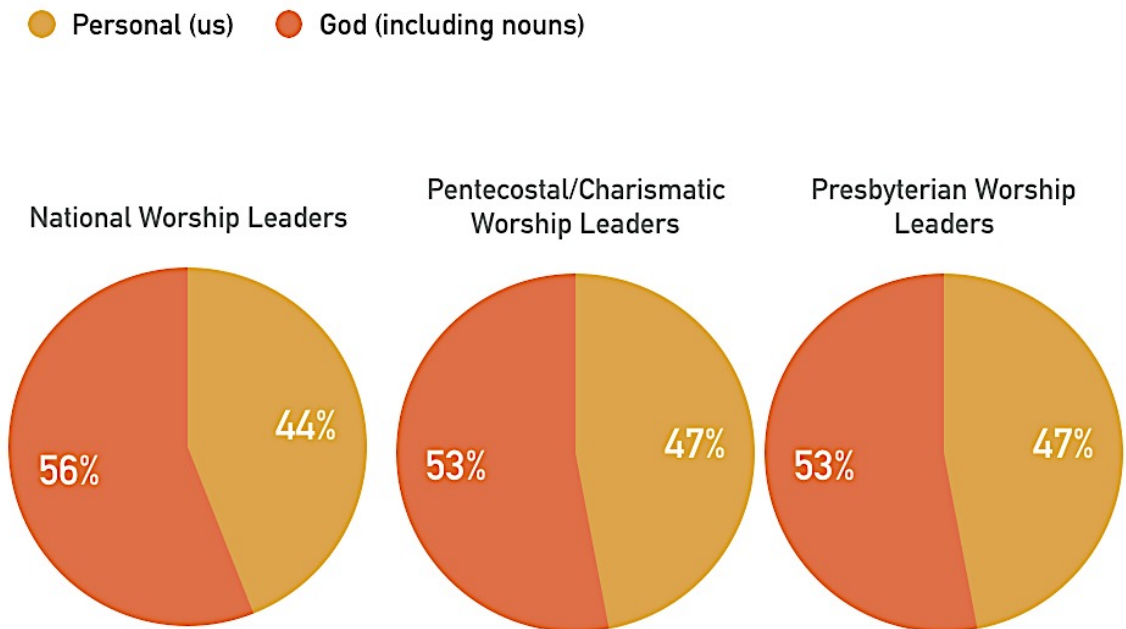
6.5. Encoded Agency

6.5.1. Nouns and Pronouns: God or Us?

Since agency is another key dimension of hope, I examined nouns and pronouns in these songs to determine who the primary actors are in the ‘songs of hope’. My primary delineation was between nouns and pronouns that refer to the worshipper and those which refer to God. As evidenced from Figure 23 below, nothing remarkable emerged. Each grouping revealed comparable percentage breakdowns of nouns and pronouns, the percentage splits were nearly even. Notably, the direct comparison between the songs named by Pentecostal-Charismatics and those named by Presbyterians revealed an identical split.

Figure 23

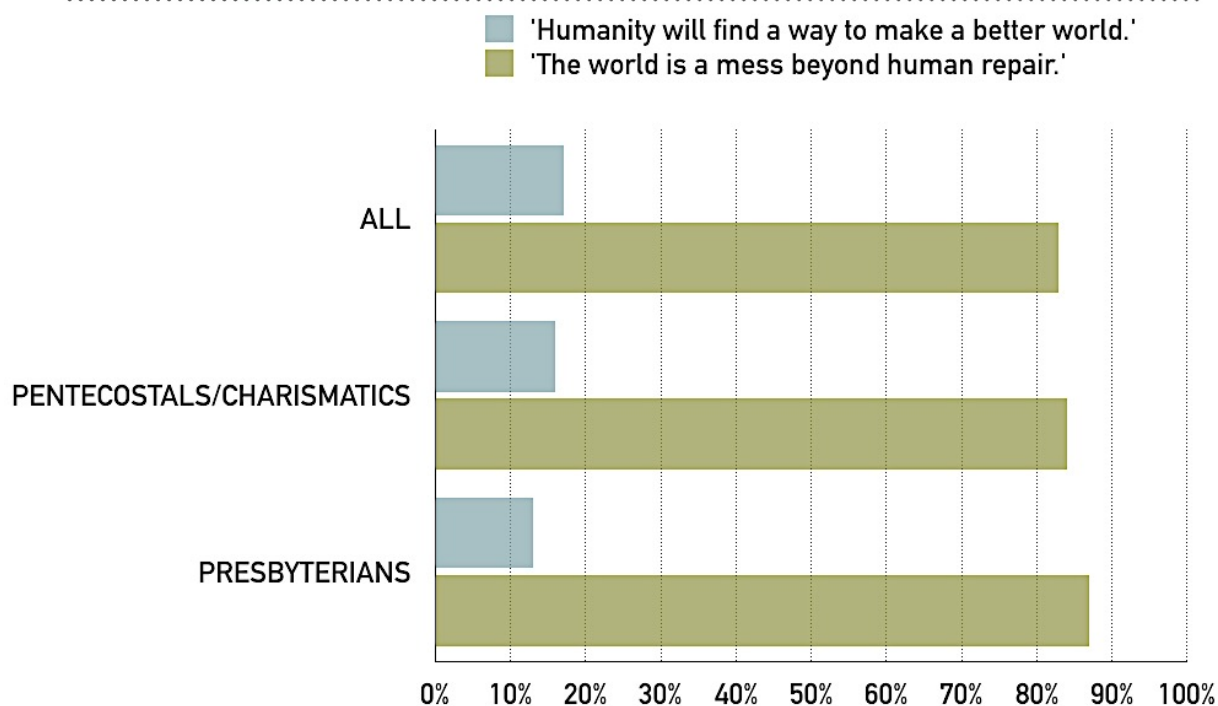
PRONOUNS AND NOUNS (GOD AND US)



While the percentages of nouns and pronouns are nearly evenly divided between those which refer to God and those which refer to the worshipper, it would not be accurate to suggest based on this that worship leaders view God and humans as having equal weight in the ‘agency’ of hope. In fact, when I asked them in the survey a question related to agency, the answers were unequivocally tipped toward divine agency, (see Figure 24 below). No group had fewer than 83% of its constituents answer the question in a way that denied human futility. Whatever humans can do, they cannot repair the mess the world is in.

Figure 24

PICK THE STATEMENT THAT BEST REFLECTS YOUR VIEW:*



This is also borne out by a closer look at the song lyrics. 'Christ alone' is the 'cornerstone'; the 'weak' are 'made strong' only in the 'Saviour's love'. 'It is well' because the 'waves and wind still know His name'. It is God who 'split the seas' so we could 'walk right through it'; it is God's 'perfect love' which drowns our fears; it is God who 'rescued' us so that we can 'stand and sing'. 'In Christ alone' our 'hope is found'; it is Jesus who 'commands my destiny', so much so that no 'power of hell' and 'no scheme of man' could ever 'pluck me from his hand'; and when we do die, it is because Christ 'calls' us 'home'. Even the song 'Still', which pictures the worshipper soaring above the storm, reminds us that we are soaring with God, the Father, who is the 'King over the flood', and thus we can 'be still and know' he is God. It is God who gives life, and brings 'light to the darkness'; it is God who gives

‘hope’ and restores ‘every heart that is broken’; moreover, it is God’s very breath that is ‘in our lungs’. God is ‘the one who fights for me’, who ‘shields my soul eternally’. The lyrical content of each of these songs of hope clearly place the agency of hope in God’s hands.

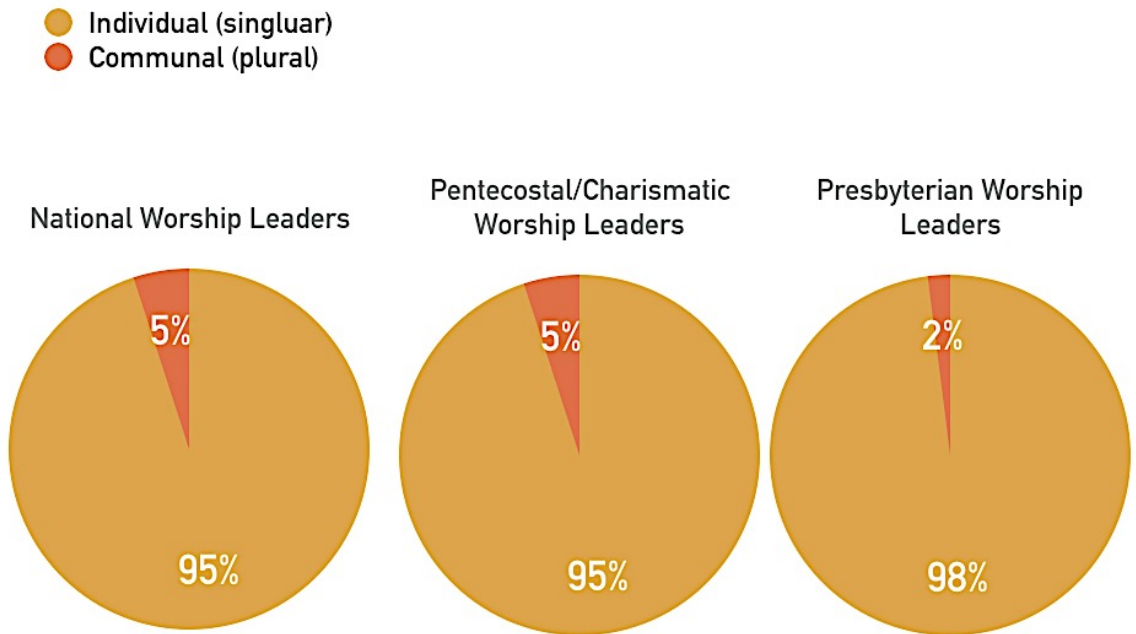
The one song that comes close to emphasising the strength of the worshipper in conquering challenges is one from the Presbyterian list, ‘Jesus I My Cross Have Taken’. In the fourth stanza, the hymn writer addresses his or her own soul: ‘Take my soul His full salvation, conquer every sin and care’. Yet in the lines that follow, the worshipper is admonished to think about the Spirit dwelling within her, the Father who loves her, and the Saviour who died to win her. Thus even the admonishment to conquer is grounded in the agency of the Triune God.

6.5.2. Pronouns: Individual or Communal?

The most interesting data came from a closer look at the pronouns which refer to the worshipper. While it does not relate specifically to agency, it does shed light on the way worship leaders—and perhaps the worshippers in the congregations they represent—experience hope. The pronouns which refer to the worshipper are overwhelmingly singular, as Figure 25 displays. 95-98% of the pronouns in these songs of hope are individual rather than communal, singular rather than plural. When hope is felt most deeply, it is experienced most personally. There is nothing in the lyrics to indicate an exclusiveness to the hope being offered or experienced. It is not private. But the heavy emphasis on the individual means, at the very least, that worship leaders can experience hope regardless of what others experience. Their sense of well-being is not directly or explicitly related to the well-being of others. So long as the worshipper feels that God is ‘coming through’ for them, there is hope. Hope may not be privatised, but it certainly has been detached from the community.

Figure 25

PRONOUNS (INDIVIDUAL VS. COMMUNAL)



6.6. Encoded Hope at Local Churches

6.6.1. Verbs for Divine and Human Action

In each of the two churches I studied as part of my fieldwork, I replicated a version of the survey taken by the national worship leaders. The questions regarding hope asked for a song that brought them hope in a time of despair, and for a song they sing at church that brings them hope. Because the contexts are significantly different—the national survey was given to worship leaders, while the fieldwork surveys were given to ‘lay people’—I am cautious about trying to make any connections between the two very different types of data. My aim is simply to set

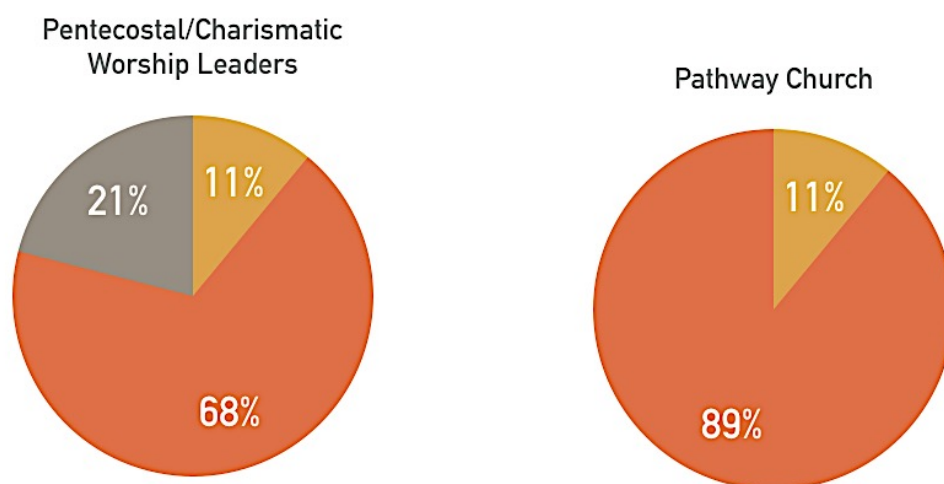
the local within the larger context of national trends, both general and denominational.

As seen in Figure 26, a general verb analysis of the top three songs at Pathway reveals very similar results to the national Pentecostal-Charismatic worship leaders. The focus on the past is identical. But there is one glaring difference: future tense verbs are completely missing in the songs named by the focus group at Pathway Church. The present tense verbs absorb the difference, skewing these songs even further toward the immediate.

Figure 26

VERBS (GOD AND US)

- Past Tense
- Present Tense
- Future Tense



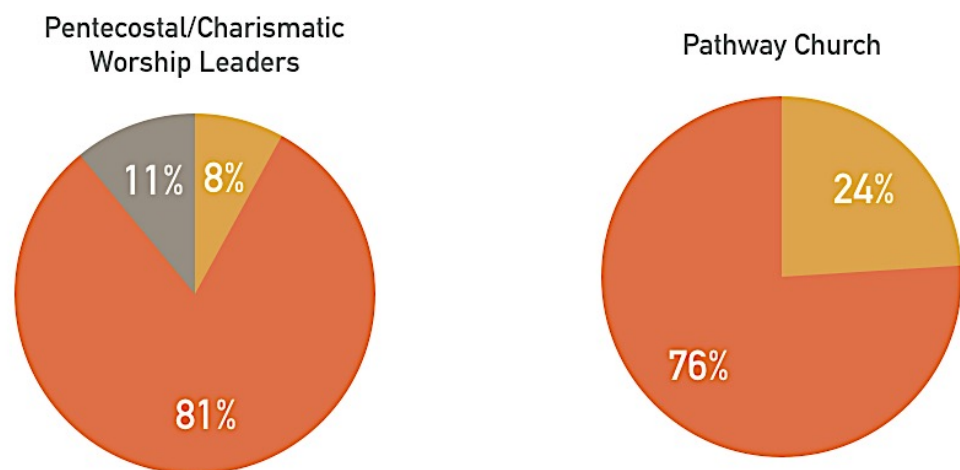
When the verbs are separated out as verbs relating to divine action (Figure 27), we see a slightly different picture. The focus group at Pathway find hope in singing about God's action in the past more so than the national group of Pentecostal-

Charismatic worship leaders, and consequently sing about God in the present slightly less. Again, for the focus group, hope is apparently not found in singing about what God will do.

Figure 27

VERBS (GOD)

- Past Tense
- Present Tense
- Future Tense

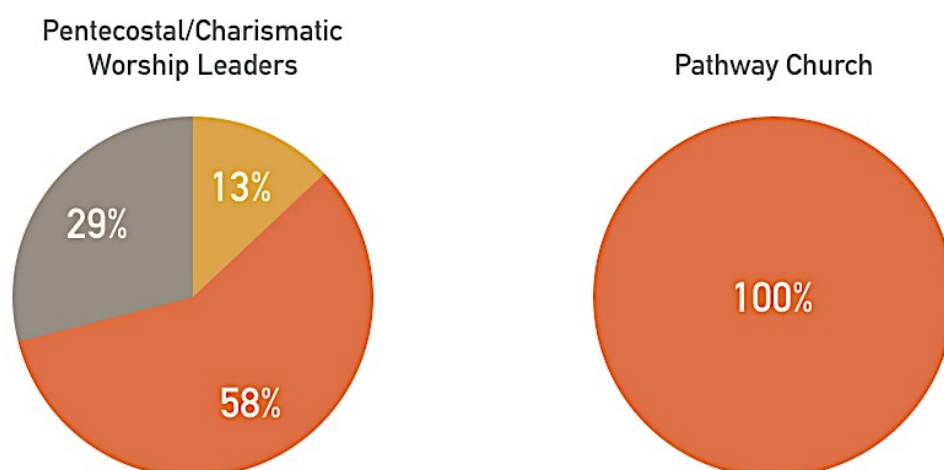


When we examine verbs for human action (Figure 28), we find the most dramatic difference. Here there are only present tense verbs. The Pathway focus group finds the most hope when singing about what they are doing and experiencing in the moment. Nothing in their own past matters; nothing in their own future is of consequence. It is all about this present moment in the presence of God.

Figure 28

VERBS (US)

- Past Tense
- Present Tense
- Future Tense

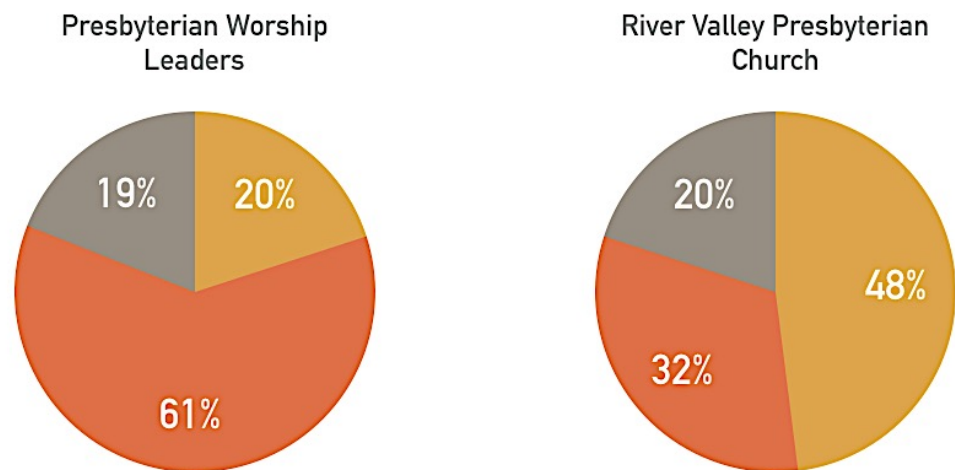


The survey respondents at River Valley Presbyterian Church was significantly larger than that of Pathway Church, but the same number of songs appeared at the top of the list: three. When the verbs for both divine and human action of River Valley's songs of hope are examined, a comparatively balanced picture emerges (Figure 29). These songs focus less on the present tense—nearly half as much—as the songs named by national Presbyterian worship leaders. While the focus on the future is comparable, it is the orientation toward the past that is significantly higher than the songs from the national list. In fact, the songs chosen by River Valley congregants are more than twice as much about the past than the national Presbyterian worship leaders.

Figure 29

VERBS (GOD AND US)

- Past Tense
- Present Tense
- Future Tense

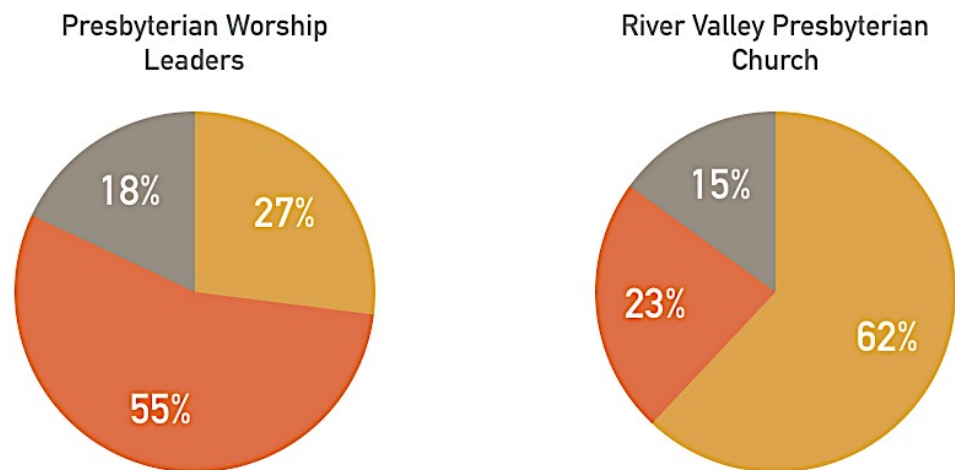


When the verbs are split out to reveal divine action, the ratio remains more or less the same (Figure 30). The focus on the future is comparable. The orientation toward the present is about half as much as the songs from nation-wide Presbyterian worship leaders. Again, the preoccupation with the past is evident by past tense verbs which more than double in percentage those of the nation-wide Presbyterian worship leaders. In fact, singing about what God has done is what River Valley congregants sing about most when they sing about God and experience hope. What God is doing or will do is, by comparison, of little use for their experience of hope.

Figure 30

VERBS (GOD)

- Past Tense
- Present Tense
- Future Tense

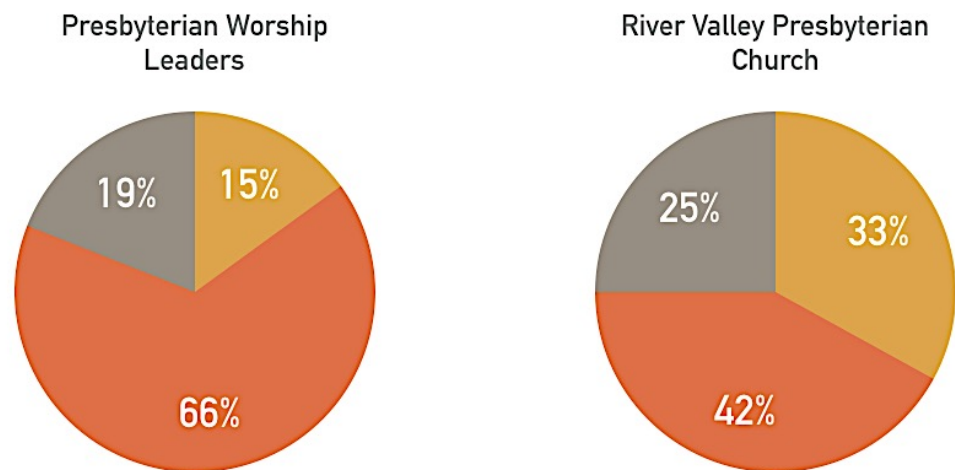


The ratios lessen slightly when examining the verbs of human action (Figure 31). Unlike the songs from the nation-wide group of Presbyterian worship leaders, the songs of hope from River Valley do not have a clear priority of verb tense when singing about the worshipper. Singing about the worshipper's action in the moment has the edge at 42%, but singing about the worshipper's action in the past is not far behind at 33%. The worshipper's future action is not much further behind that at 25%.

Figure 31

VERBS (US)

- Past Tense
- Present Tense
- Future Tense



When the verbs of the songs of hope from both of the churches in my fieldwork are placed side by side, the differences become even more obvious. In Figures 32, 33, and 34 below, the Presbyterian church in my field work finds hope in songs which sing about the past, present, and future in a more evenly distributed way than the songs which the Pentecostal-Charismatic church in my field work finds hope. Relatively speaking, both groups find hope in songs that speak of God's action in the past more than the worshipper's action in the past. But clearly the most significant difference has to do with the orientation of these songs toward the future. The worshippers at River Valley Presbyterian church find hope in songs that speak of the future, specifically of what God will do in the future, but more so in what they will do in the future. The worshippers at Pathway have no apparent need to sing

about the future in order to find hope. There are no future tense verbs in the songs that bring them hope. Furthermore, there are no past tense verbs with regard to the worshipper.

Figure 32

VERBS (GOD AND US)

- Past Tense
- Present Tense
- Future Tense

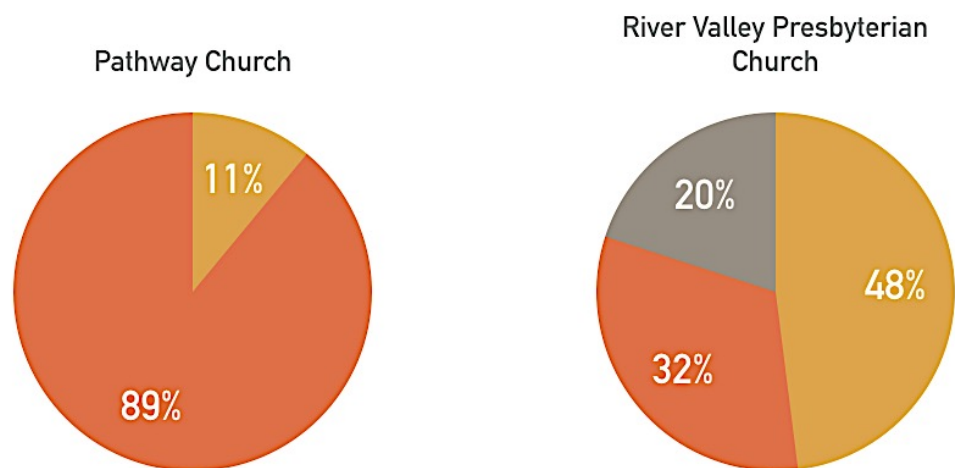


Figure 33

VERBS (GOD)

- Past Tense
- Present Tense
- Future Tense

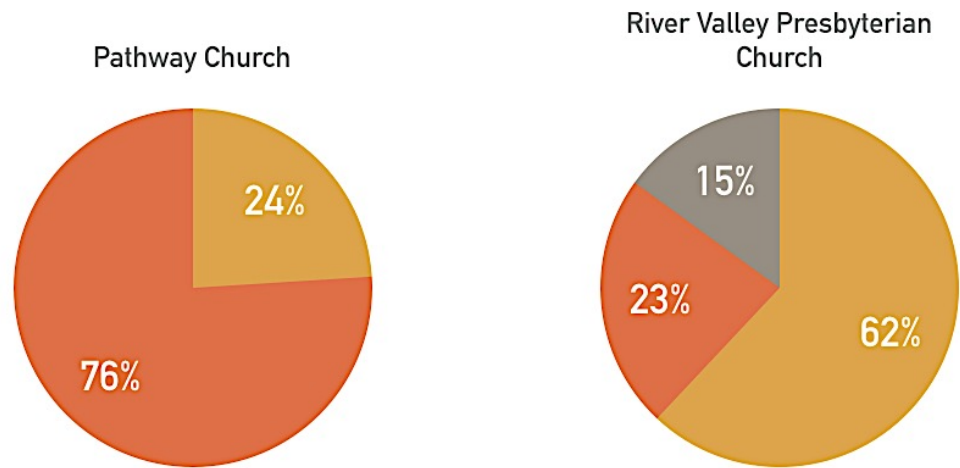
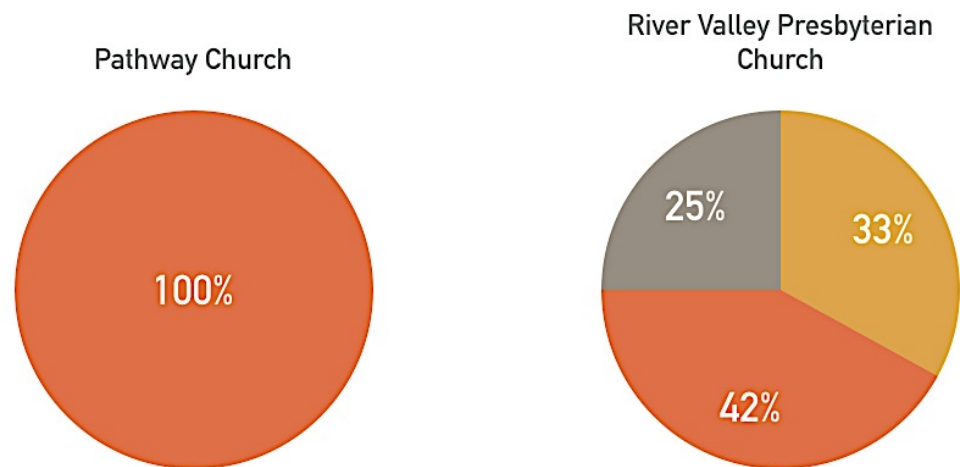


Figure 34

VERBS (US)

- Past Tense
- Present Tense
- Future Tense



6.6.2. Nouns and Pronouns

Since nouns and pronouns for the songs listed from the national survey were explored earlier, it is necessary to set the nouns and pronouns of the songs listed from each fieldwork church within the context of the songs from the national survey. I have compared them against the songs from the general group, and against songs by their closest denominational affiliation. Nothing remarkable appears from the comparison of nouns and pronouns which refer to God versus those which refer to the worshipper. In fact, whether the comparison is between Presbyterians and Pentecostal-Charismatics, or River Valley and Pathway, the percentages are nearly identical. The only comparison of note is when individual versus communal pronouns are set side by side. Here it appears that River Valley's songs of hope

favour communal pronouns significantly more than the songs from national Presbyterian worship leaders. By contrast, the songs of hope from Pathway seem to favour communal pronouns only slightly more than the songs from national Pentecostal-Charismatic worship leaders.

Figure 35

PRONOUNS AND NOUNS (GOD AND US)

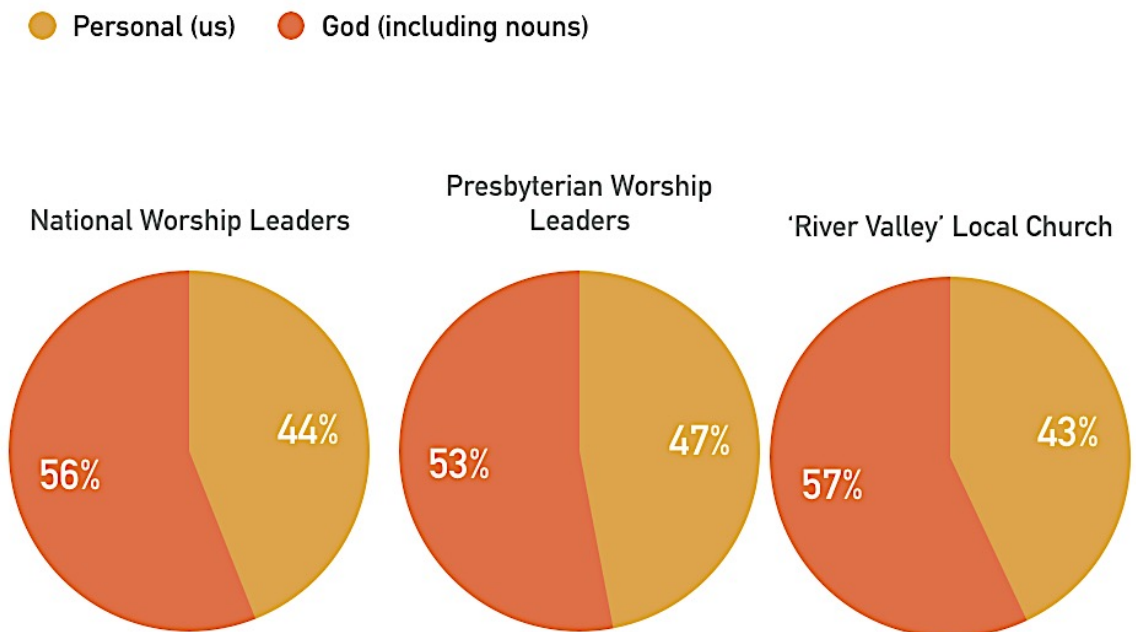


Figure 36

PRONOUNS AND NOUNS (GOD AND US)

● Personal (us) ● God (including nouns)

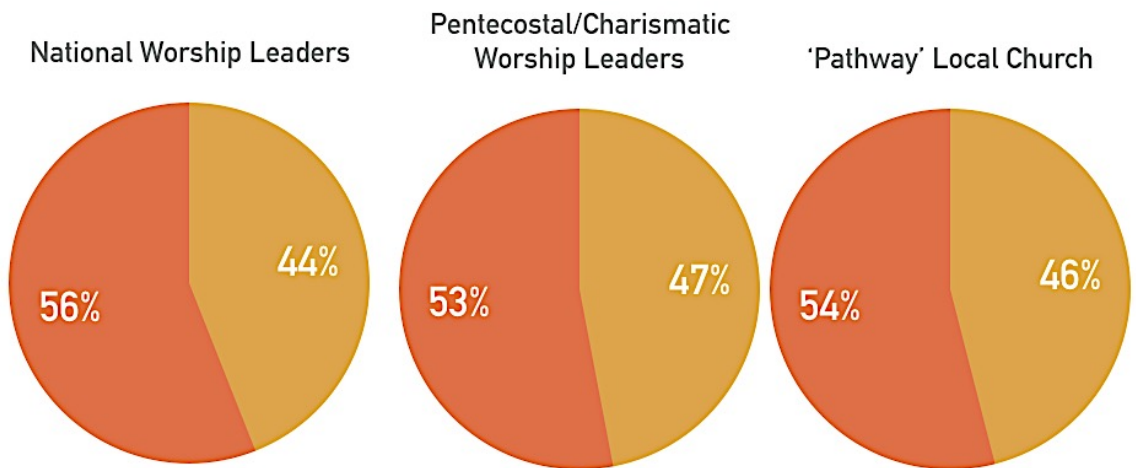


Figure 37

PRONOUNS (INDIVIDUAL VS. COMMUNAL)

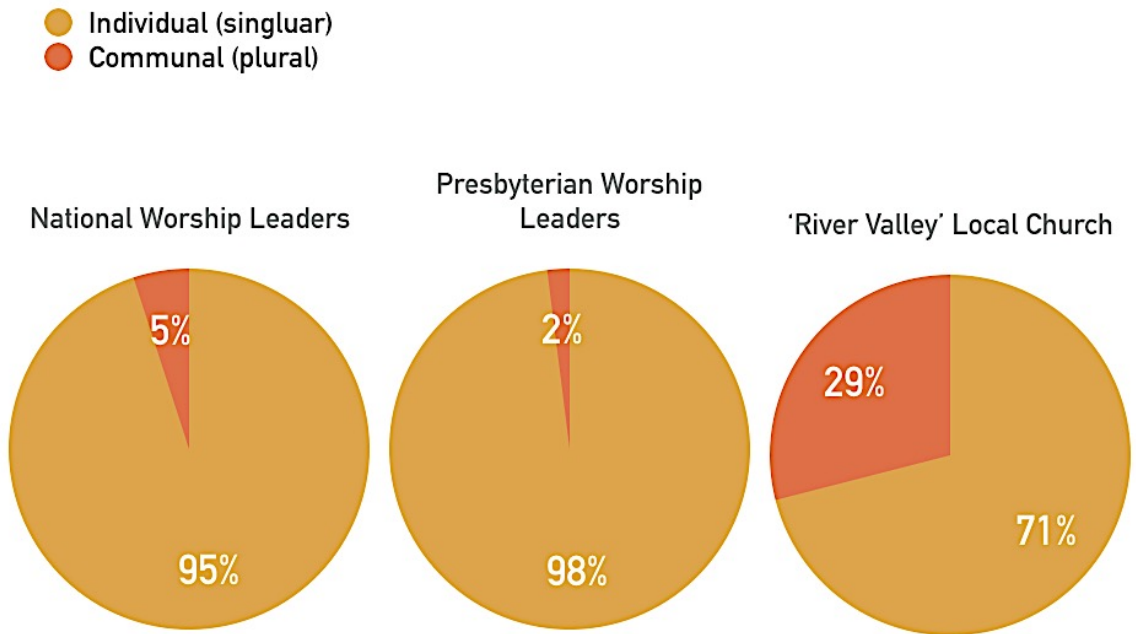
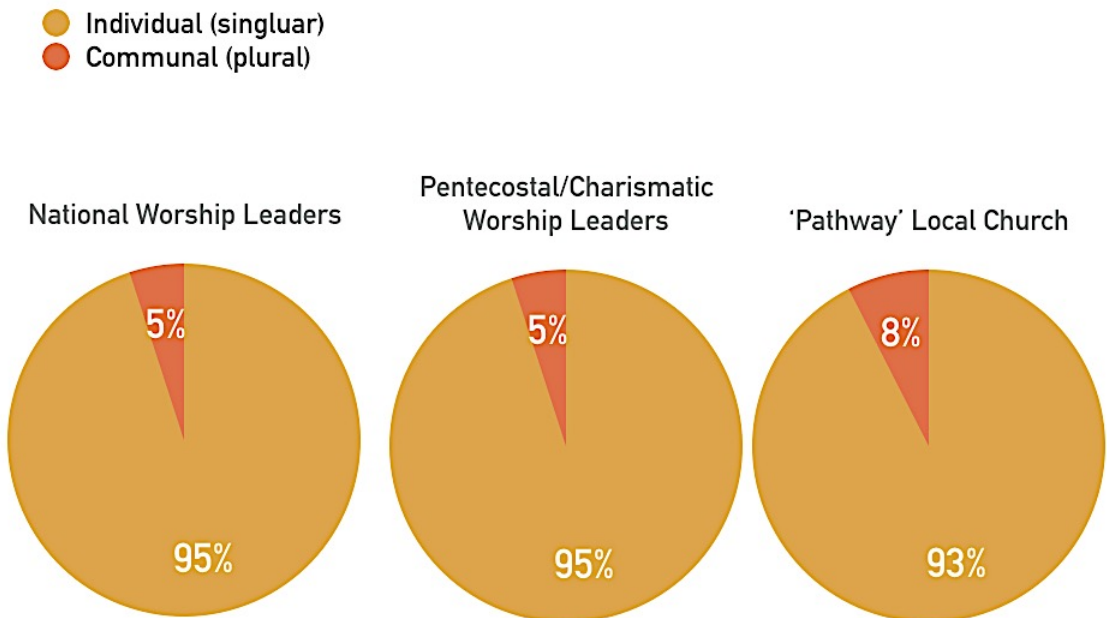


Figure 38

PRONOUNS (INDIVIDUAL VS. COMMUNAL)



6.7. Conclusion and Connections

The result of this analysis of encoded hope in songs which worship leaders say bring them and their churches hope is that the operant theology of hope among worship leaders in North America is one which focuses on immediacy and intimacy and lacks a future orientation and a narrative sense. This focus on the 'here and now' may be due to the tendency of Christian worship to sing about God in the present tense, to the comfortable conditions of contemporary worship songwriters and worship leaders in North America, or to the wider loss of narrative in a post-modern era. These 'songs of hope' also sing about what the worshipper is doing as much as they do about what God has done, is doing, or will do, though they are clear that the agency of hope is God's. Finally, these songs are written from the

perspective of the individual rather than the community. These trends are replicated within the churches in my fieldwork, although with differences of degrees.

While an analysis of these song lyrics and themes may lead to a hypothesis that the quality of hope in contemporary worship is weak, the songs are different from the experience of the worship service. This is a significant distinction highlighted in Chapter 2 from ritual studies, where I noted that the ritual is separate from the performance of it. It also underscores the need for discourse analysis, as Stringer argued, in order to explore how personal stories supply meaning to the encoded hope of a song. It is to the experience of hope in contemporary worship services and the discourse about that experience that we turn now.

Chapter 7

Hope Experienced

In the previous chapter, I drew upon the theology of hope as outlined in Chapter 4 to critique the hope encoded in contemporary worship songs. I demonstrated that the vision of hope found in contemporary worship songs—specifically songs which worship leaders and congregants say bring them hope—do not have an eschatological dimension to them. Using Moltmann’s eschatological categories of ‘space’ and ‘time’, I suggested that these songs are concerned with earth as the place of trouble, the place from which praise arises, and the place where God is present. By analysing verbs and by paying attention to particular metaphors, I determined that these songs are inordinately focussed on the present tense, and have little sense of narrative. In short, they express a vision of hope which is *here* and *now*.

This chapter will explore the experience of hope drawing upon the models for hope in Chapter 3. To explore hope from a phenomenological angle that pays attention to both the cognitive and affective aspects, I designed my fieldwork research with two churches to focus on the worshippers and their experience of God during the service. I have divided the chapter by the two churches I visited in my fieldwork and clustered specific themes together under each section. Broadly speaking, Pathway’s experience of hope tends toward the ‘affective model’, while River Valley’s aligns more with the ‘cognitive model’. Having said that, I am conscious that, following Ralph Hood, a religious experience is a ‘subjective appreciation that is neither merely affect or cognition, but a more totalization of

what it is that has happened or occurred'.⁴⁷¹ Furthermore, with Abernathy and Witvliet, I affirm that the 'sacred involves both emotions and cognitions', thus making it 'complicated to separate the emotional and cognitive dimensions of spiritual experience from the emotional reactions to it'.⁴⁷²

Following Stringer's outline of discourses in congregational studies, I have put the words and narrated experiences from the focus groups in conversation with literature from the social sciences on ritual, emotion, and collective behaviour as part of an analysis of unofficial and collective discourses. In the final sections, which combine insights from both churches, I mark the discovery of a resilient hope which results from transferring 'agency' and 'pathway' (Snyder, 2017) to God. Finally, in an effort to connect the experience of hope with the 'virtue-ethics' model of hope described in Chapter 3, I explore the resilient hope I discovered in both focus groups in light of the processes of 'prospection', 'affective adaptation', and virtue formation.

My goal with the focus groups at each church was to try to find indirect ways into the subject of hope in worship so as to avoid eliciting responses that were conditioned by their knowledge of my research interest. I spent multiple hours with both focus groups talking about what drew them to start attending the church, what they think is happening in corporate worship, and how they experience hope in the midst of congregational worship. I also asked them how they defined hope, if they had experienced disappointment with God after experiencing hope in worship, and if they had found a way to prevent hope from fading.

⁴⁷¹ Ralph Hood, *Handbook of Religious Experience* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1995), p. 3.

⁴⁷² Alexis D. Abernathy and Charlotte vanOyen Witvliet, 'A Study of Transformation in Worship: Psychological, Cultural, and Psychophysiological Perspectives', in *Worship That Changes Lives: Multidisciplinary and Congregational Perspectives on Spiritual Transformation*, ed. by Alexis D. Abernathy (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), p. 200.

7.1. Pathway Church: Encounters and Experiences in the Presence of God

7.1.1. Personal Encounters

Worship at Pathway Church is seen primarily as an experience with God. As a church which describes itself, as noted in Chapter 5, as ‘pentecostal’ and ‘charismatic’, it is no surprise that their dominant paradigm for congregational worship is the one I have called ‘Encounter’ in Chapter 2. When I asked the group what they would guess the worship team’s goal for the congregation is in the worship time, Mark, a man in his mid-forties, answered without hesitation: ‘experiencing God’. After listening to a handful of other weigh in, Julie affirmed that she would ‘echo’ what had been said, and then offered the perspective she would have of congregational worship if she were the one leading:

I would want to just usher in the presence of God, and allow people to experience it, and to have an actual connection with God, to actually experience Him, connect with Him. ... They said hope to be experienced, but just that love to be experienced, for God’s presence to be so overwhelming that everyone feels it, and has that connection, that communication, that meeting, that encounter with God.

She used the word ‘experience’ four times, a related word ‘connection’ twice, and other personal words like ‘feel’, ‘communication’, and ‘encounter’ a total of three times. 9 out of 64 words in her opening remarks about the goal of congregational worship were words drawn from the language of relationship, of personhood and encounter.

The language of encounter in charismatic worship is an outworking of the refusal to objectify God, to treat God as a cosmic “It”. It flows from a paradigm of two persons interacting with one another dynamically and dialogically. This is significant because one of the charges against Pathway was that it was a ‘soft prosperity gospel’ megachurch, and the prosperity gospel reduces God to a means to human ends. The language of personal encounter demonstrates a dynamic

relationship between God and the worshipper—each capable of being moved by the other—making God no mere ‘object’.

Julie and Mark are not alone in using the language of experience to describe what occurs during worship. When talking about what drew her to Pathway, Carol said it is the people. But she specifically mentions that when she does not feel like coming, it is the ‘freedom that is in this church’ that draws her. The staff and the people at Pathway have obviously ‘experienced that freedom’. Bill describes times when he is ‘not feeling the presence of the Lord’ as he is worshipping ‘individually’. Note that the fact that he mentions this as an anomaly, as a departure from an expected outcome. Here he is going off the unofficial script at Pathway that people come in and sense God’s presence in worship in a personal and individual way. He rescues the narrative, however, by sharing his remedy to such an occurrence:

Sometimes when I’m not feeling the presence of the Lord as I’m worshipping individually, sometimes what I do is I just open up my eyes and I start looking at all the saints, everybody else with their hands up, and that actually does something to me; just ... watching everybody else experiencing God even when I’m not maybe experiencing God that way I want to experience Him at the moment. Something about opening up my eyes and seeing everybody else experiencing God does something for me, and it changes me from the inside out.

Bill uses the word ‘feeling’ or ‘experience’ and ‘experiencing’ 5 times in 91 words. It accounts for 5 of the 12 verbs in this description. When the congregants at Pathway speak about what is occurring in congregational worship, they speak about an experience that they can feel.

This is often contrasted with how things were at their previous church. Christopher, a man in his early fifties, talked about coming from a Baptist church to Pathway, and how the ‘whole Holy Spirit thing’ was new to him and to his family. Likewise, Carol bemoans the fact that even though people at her old Baptist church

believed in the Holy Spirit, or at the very least, had ‘heard of the Holy Spirit’, not a lot of them ‘knew you could experience the Holy Spirit’.

This emphasis on experiencing the Holy Spirit is not unique to Pathway. In fact, as shown in an earlier chapter, the Spirit has been central in Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions for decades, with ‘encounter’ as a primary paradigm. After extensive analysis of songbooks in the UK from the 1960s to the 1990s, Pete Ward at Durham concludes that in charismatic spirituality, contemporary worship songs are not only ‘narratives of encounter’⁴⁷³, but also ‘the means to a personal encounter with God’.⁴⁷⁴ In singing, the worshipper expresses praise, adoration, devotion, and love to God. In turn, God, through the Holy Spirit, communicates his presence to the worshipper. ‘Intimacy is ... both expressive and experiential’.⁴⁷⁵

This focus on encounter reflects a change, even in the relatively short history of contemporary worship. Ward notes that in the *Youth Praise* songs of the 1960s, the focus used to be an event in the past— either conversion or ‘baptism’ or the in-filling of the Holy Spirit. But the ‘charismatic experience moved evangelical Christians into a more immediate and experiential understanding of worship’, in which the focus of the activity of God is in the present.⁴⁷⁶ Not only is an encounter to be experienced in the present, it is expected to be normative, as referenced above in Bill’s comments about the implied abnormality of being in worship and not feeling God’s presence. Whereas experiences with God were either ‘initiator’ or ‘occasional’, they are expected to be normative for the worshipper.⁴⁷⁷ Worshipers

⁴⁷³ Ward, *Selling Worship* pp. 202-203.

⁴⁷⁴ Ward, *Selling Worship*, p. 198.

⁴⁷⁵ Ward, *Selling Worship*, p. 199.

⁴⁷⁶ Ward, *Selling Worship*, p. 200.

⁴⁷⁷ Ward, *Selling Worship*, p. 203.

now describe, disdainfully, going to church and ‘just singing’ as opposed to ‘really worshipping’.⁴⁷⁸

This emphasis on a relational encounter is a distinctive of charismatic worship. Yet, it is spreading the wider Evangelical Christian circle. One evidence of this is the soaring popularity of the song ‘Holy Spirit’. Written by two young, Charismatic worship leaders, the song specifically asks that the Holy Spirit would ‘let’ the worshipper ‘become more aware’ of His presence’, and that the Spirit would ‘let’ them ‘experience the glory of [God’s] goodness’. It is certainly not the first song to ask for such things. Yet no song that made such a request had ever achieved the kind of popularity that this song has. It is the first song in the CCLI U.S. Top 25 to use the word ‘experience’.⁴⁷⁹

7.1.2. Feeling God: Experience and Emotion

How does a worshipper at Pathway know if they have experienced God in worship? If experiencing God is central to the purpose of congregational worship, then each worshipper must be gauging this each time they come to church. I have already noted that this experience with God is something that they feel. But what is that emotion like? How does the presence of God feel?

Arlie Hochschild, a sociologist at UC Berkeley, has written about the ‘managed heart’. Emotion, as Hochschild understands it, is a ‘bodily orientation to an imaginary act’, and therefore has a ‘signal function’, warning us or alerting us to where we stand in relation to inner or outer events. Because emotion has a signal function, it is a way of locating our viewpoint, or position. It is also a way that we

⁴⁷⁸ Adnams, Gordon, ‘“Really Worshipping” not “Just Singing”’, in *Christian Congregational Music: Performance, Identity and Experience*, ed. by Monique Ingalls, Carolyn Landau, and Tom Wagner (Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), p. 186.

⁴⁷⁹ Lester Ruth (@jl_ruth) New CCLI top-25 song "Holy Spirit" uses word "experience" for the first time among top songs since 1989 27 February 2015. Available at <https://twitter.com/jl_ruth/status/571385209981022209> [accessed 22 July 2017].

try to locate someone else's position or viewpoint. Yet its signal function is culturally-shaped. Hochschild argues that emotion is 'more permeable to cultural influence than organismic theorists have thought', but 'more substantial than some interactional theorists have thought'.⁴⁸⁰

The signal function of emotion is complicated because of what Hochschild calls 'surface acting' and 'deep acting'.⁴⁸¹ Surface acting involves disguising what we feel, and pretending to feel what we do not. In surface acting, we may deceive others, but we do not deceive ourselves. Deep acting, on the other hand, requires deceiving ourselves. In deep acting, a person changes herself by 'taking over the levers of feeling production'.⁴⁸² In short, surface acting changes the display; deep acting changes the emotion.

The need to act, whether in a surface or deep way, arises out of the culturally-shaped norms. Hochschild calls these norms and expectations 'feeling rules'. We discover the feeling rules of a group when confronted by direct statements such as, 'You should be ashamed...', or, 'You have no right to feel...'. They are even revealed by disguised questions such as, 'Don't you love...?' or, 'Aren't you thrilled about...?'.⁴⁸³

In daily life, we run up against these feeling rules any time we sense a gap between the perceived 'ideal feeling' and the 'actual feeling' we are experiencing. There may also be 'mis-fitting feelings', such as sadness at a wedding, or the lack of sadness or even the wrong amount of sadness at a funeral. In relationships that are more tightly knit, the parties involved are required to do more emotion work; yet that work is increasingly more unconscious in close relationships.

⁴⁸⁰ Hochschild, Arlie Russell, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, 2nd edn (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2003), 28.

⁴⁸¹ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, p. 33.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*

⁴⁸³ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, p. 58.

The congregants in my focus group at Pathway were not always aware of the ‘feeling rules’ at Pathway. In fact, the one who had been there longer were less able to stand apart from the pastors and worship leaders and name the unspoken ‘rules’ of emotion in worship. The three people in the focus group who are relatively new to Pathway—Betty, Bill, and Josh—felt the most freedom to admit a departure from the norm, a violation of an unsaid feeling rule. It is important to note, however, as Hochschild does, that even the conscious choice to violate a feeling rule is not a changing of the rule; for it needs the rule to be present and clear in order to make a statement by breaking it.

Betty seemed conscious of this as she responded to a question I asked about a time when any member of our focus group had walked into church in a negative emotional state, and left in a more positive one. ‘Can I talk about a time when maybe it didn’t happen?’ she ventured. Taking the group’s silence as sufficient permission, she continued. ‘When I first came here, I thought the music was too loud...’ She quickly qualifies her perception, which is a clear deviation from the feeling rules, with a conformity to a different group norm at Pathway—the mysterious ‘knowing’ that something is the will of God: ‘But I knew I was supposed to be here. So, it was a bit tortuous but I came every Sunday even though I still thought it was too loud— ‘cause I’m not a noise person; I don’t do concerts...’ After peppering in another positive affirmation about Pathway—specifically about how she enjoyed the messages from the beginning—she returns to her struggle with the music, admitting, ‘It really took about three months for me to be really kind of be able to tolerate it...And even now three years later, I’m not a big worshipper and it doesn’t have that profound effect on me, and I’m still usually waiting for it to end—and it’s funny because I can tell when they go a little long’.

The group is not sure how to respond to this. She is the only one who expresses any negative experience stemming from the worship itself. Others admit being angry about something else when they came into the service; but Betty is breaking the rules significantly by saying that she is not moved in a particular way by the worship time. Perhaps as the relative new-comer, the one who had not yet bonded as deeply with the church, she was not as willing to acquiesce to the unspoken feeling rules.

7.1.3. God Vibrations: Emotion, Energy, and Collective Behaviour

When I asked the group to describe what made corporate worship—gathering together in church to worship—significant compared to listening to the same songs at home or in the car, the word ‘energy’ was mentioned several times. ‘One of the things we noticed,’ Christopher said, ‘the very first time we came to Gateway was all of the energy. You just sense God’s presence in a very real way. I get completely enveloped’. Julie, his wife, added more detail, and enthusiasm:

The excitement is contagious; it’s absolutely contagious. When everyone around you is screaming and shouting for God, and praising Him—you’ve hit an emotional standpoint [sic]. You’ve got people all around crying. That energy—you can’t *not* feel the presence of the Holy Spirit; you can’t *not* feel the presence of God; you get goose bumps. You can get those feelings by yourself, but there’s an energy that comes in that corporate worship settings.

As a pastor-theologian, I was uneasy with Julie’s prioritizing of feelings. Yet there is validity to Julie’s appraisal. There is an energy that comes in corporate worship settings.

Randall Collins, drawing on both Emile Durkheim and Irving Goffman, describes what happens when ‘human bodies are together in the same place’.⁴⁸⁴ There is a ‘physical attunement: currents of feeling, a sense of wariness or interest, a palpable

⁴⁸⁴ Collins, Randall, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 34.

change in the atmosphere'.⁴⁸⁵ 'The bodies', Collins says, 'are paying attention to each other, whether at first there is any great conscious awareness of it or not'.⁴⁸⁶ Durkheim argued that once bodies are together, 'collective effervescence'—the 'process of intensification of shared experiences'—may occur.⁴⁸⁷ 'Collective effervescence' is such a 'strong, shared emotional experience' that it 'connects participants to the collective and its identity and goals'.⁴⁸⁸ In fact, Collins argues that collective effervescence will result in 'group solidarity, emotional energy, symbols of social relationship, and standards of morality'.

Moreover, Collins argues that humans are seekers of 'emotional energy (EE)', in particular, which he defines as a 'socially derived...feeling of confidence, courage to take action, [and] boldness in taking initiative'.⁴⁸⁹ Gaining more Emotional Energy, according to Collins, is the goal of social interaction. Thus, the creation of more and new options for 'social action and affiliation' is fuelled by this innate desire to gain and spread Emotional Energy.⁴⁹⁰ The people, groups, or activities that 'effectively produce Emotional Energy are more attractive and successful'.⁴⁹¹

How do groups produce Emotional Energy through their rituals? Collins draws on interaction ritual theory to outline four criteria that if followed results in collective effervescence and high amounts of Emotional Energy: high number of participants assembled, high barriers for excluding outsiders, mutual focus of

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁷ Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, p. 35.

⁴⁸⁸ James K. Wellman Jr., Katie E. Corcoran, and Kate Stockly-Meyerdirk, "'God Is Like a Drug...": Explaining Interaction Ritual Chains in American Mega-churches', *Eastern Sociological Society*, 29.3, (2014), 650-672, p. 652.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*

attention, and shared emotional mood.⁴⁹² In some settings, there are what Collins calls ‘energy stars’—people who can actually create a mutual focus of attention, and therefore create a shared emotional mood.⁴⁹³ Energy stars are closely related to rituals that successfully produce high levels of Emotional Energy.

The worship space at the EP campus at Pathway was a large rectangular room with over a thousand seats. The large screens in the front of the room gave up close views of the worship team—the ‘energy stars’—and occasional panoramic shots of the congregation. Wollschleger discovered that congregations with worship services that produced more collective effervescence had higher rates of church attendance because people will keep returning to rituals that give them higher levels of Emotional Energy.⁴⁹⁴ The large sanctuaries of megachurches with cameras that help people see one another feed into a form of interaction—albeit a tacit one—making people feel like they are ‘where the action is’.⁴⁹⁵ The effect of cameras and screens on an already large room may be that they intensify the sense of a large assembly, thus far exceeding the first criteria of producing Emotional Energy.

The second component for producing Emotional Energy is high barriers. Wellman et al. argue that megachurches have intentionally low barriers. They are quick to note, however, that there are several kinds of barriers. The Episcopal Church has ‘low barriers’ in their theology, but high barriers in their liturgy. Megachurches are the reverse. They leverage cultural capital from the culture at large by creating an atmosphere in the lobby that resembles a Starbucks, and by playing music in the stylistic genre range of what may be heard on the radio. Thus megachurches require very little ‘cultural membership capital’ of people— when

⁴⁹² Collins, *Interaction Ritual Theory*, p. 48.

⁴⁹³ Wellman, et. al., ‘“God is Like”’, p. 653.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.* Quoting Wollschleger, 2012, p. 899.

⁴⁹⁵ Wellman, et. al., ‘“God is Like”’, p. 657.

guests come, they find the scene and sounds and feel to be familiar. This is generally true of churches than adopt contemporary worship, as demonstrated in Chapter 1, but it is especially true at megachurches. Because this ease of adaptability can be perceived as a low barrier and thus a contradiction to Collins's theory, Wellman et al. seem backed into a corner. They argue that since collective effervescence is amplified when more individuals are participating, having lower barriers is better than having clear boundaries if those boundaries work to lower the number of participants. Lower barriers mean higher attendance, and higher attendance is the chief ingredient for producing Emotional Energy.

Wellman et al. need not make this case, however. The high barriers of theology found in megachurches are not hidden or peripheral to the life and worship of the church. Mega-church preaching tends to place a high value on the authority of Scripture, and to fall in line with conservative positions. Moreover, the people who attend megachurches are more likely to hold theologically conservative or traditional views. Though these are not demonstrations of causation, the following comparisons from a Baylor Religion Study led by Rodney Stark in 2007 show higher commitment and traditional theology in megachurches than in smaller congregations.⁴⁹⁶ These serve as high barriers to outsiders.

Pathway confirms the Baylor study by its conformity to traditional doctrines regarding eternity and the afterlife. During my research, I noticed a particularly strong and public affirmation of the belief in hell. In a sermon on the rapture, an

⁴⁹⁶ Stark's study, in which megachurches = >1000 and small congregations = < 100, shower higher percentages of people at megachurches tithing, attending a Bible study, attending services more often, and believing in orthodox but controversial Christian doctrines such as the existence of heaven and hell. Rodney Stark and Christopher Bader, Joseph Baker, Kevin Dougherty, Scott Draper, Robyn Driskell, Paul Froese, Carl R. Gwin, Sung Joon Jang, Byron Johnson, Megan Johnson, Jordan LaBouff, Larry Lyon, Carson Mencken, Charles M. North, Wafa Hakim Orman, Ashley Palmer-Boyes, Jerry Z. Park, and Wade Rowatt, *What Americans Really Believe* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), pp.46-47.

influential pastor second only to the senior pastor at Pathway, Johnny Edmonds, demonstrated the moral decay of America by rattling off a statistic from the hip: ‘Half of churches do not believe in a literal hell and a literal devil’. The congregation, already incredulous, were ready for his oratorical knockout punch: ‘If the Bible is lying to us about hell, you think it’s telling us the truth about heaven? ... If one thing in this book is wrong, how can we trust anything in it?’ He offered an unsubstantiated claim that Jesus talked more about hell than he did about heaven, and concluded this segment of the sermon with a forceful, rhetorical question: ‘Is Jesus a liar?’

Bill, from my focus group, responded to a question regarding the nature of Christian hope by talking about the finality of judgment and ‘the fact that we are never going to cease to exist, in one way, one form or another’. ‘Hell is hot,’ he states, ‘and heaven is real’. The prominence of such strong views on judgment, hell, and the afterlife surely cannot be considered ‘low barriers’, as Wellman, et. al imagine. It is my contention that megachurches—particularly in the Pentecostal-Charismatic streams—fit more closely within Collins’s paradigm of Emotional Energy than Wellman et al. imagine.

Wellman et al. lump the third and fourth ingredients of successful ritual chain interactions together since the two things— a mutual focus of attention and a shared mood— ‘interact dynamically to create cumulative effects’.⁴⁹⁷ In general, the songs result in a kind of emotional participation that is so astounding that Wellman et al. have coined a term for it: ‘a *connectic* experience: a multi-sensory melange of sensory input’.⁴⁹⁸ But it is not just the music that produces this effect; it is also the preaching. In fact, Wellman et al. view worship as setting the appropriate

⁴⁹⁷ Wellman, et. al., ‘ “God is Like” ’, p. 660.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

mood for the pastor to provide ‘mutual entrainment’ in their shared values or convictions.⁴⁹⁹ Thus they conclude that ‘the combination of the qualitative and quantitative data clearly demonstrates that megachurches succeed in creating successful interaction rituals. The processual ingredients of the large-scale worship services, enhanced by the pastor as an emotional energy star, and supplemented with small-group participation create an effective interaction ritual chain, promoting collective effervescence and EE, membership feelings, membership symbols, feelings of morality, and a heightened sense of spirituality.’⁵⁰⁰

The reality, seen clearly at Pathway, is that worship leaders and preachers are ‘key performers’ in a fairly predictable script. Timothy Nelson, who spent twelve months doing ethnographic research on an African Methodist Episcopal church in the American South, suggests fixed characteristics of the kind of ‘collective behaviour’ that happens in ‘emotional services’. For Nelson, there are four key differences between the required behavioural norms in ‘emotional services’ versus those in non-emotional services (formal, liturgical services):

1. Ambiguity of Role: No one knows who should be the one to ‘say Amen’, or stand, or shout. But they know somebody should.
2. Expectation of Climax: The arc of the emotional engagement is supposed to build in intensity as the service progresses.
3. Resistance to Visibility: Because it is unclear who should play what role, and because someone has to take the first step to increase the degree of intensity in response, that individual will stand out. This visibility has the potential to create a barrier to individuals.

⁴⁹⁹ Wellman, et. al., ‘“God is Like”’, p. 661.

⁵⁰⁰ Wellman, et. al., ‘“God is Like”’, p. 667.

4. Responsibility of Key Performers: The key performers— such as the preacher and the worship leader— take on the responsibility to help the congregation surmount these barriers.⁵⁰¹

Collective behaviour in ‘emotional services’, by Nelson’s analysis, works like a ‘feedback loop’. Performers use the particular resources of music (drums and rhythm feature prominently) and language to evoke a response from the congregation. The response ‘increases in *intensity* and *quality* of the performer’s actions, which in turn evoke a greater congregational response’.⁵⁰² This circular reaction is a hallmark of ‘collective behaviour’, and involves an ‘oscillating movement toward higher levels of intensity and participation’.⁵⁰³

Collective behaviour, Nelson argues, also requires the transfer of control. The emotional service is thus a ‘joint creation’ produced by the performer and the congregation. The key dynamic which makes this possible— and indeed, makes all collective behaviours possible— is the individual’s willingness to ‘transfer control’ to the group.

Without consciously referring to Emotional Energy, several members of the focus group at Pathway described being drawn to the church because of the energy they felt there. Jonah, who has been a Christian for two years, was no stranger to church life growing up. He recalls the worship led by a choir in the Baptist church he attended as a child, comparing it to the energy he now feels in worship at Pathway:

I remember [a] long time ago my mom used to force me to go to church. It was a Baptist church; you had people in the choir singing; everyone stood up singing. But looking back on it now, it was all so clinical; it was all so cold, like it was something you were just

⁵⁰¹ Timothy J. Nelson, ‘Sacrifice of Praise: Emotion and Collective Participation in an African-American Worship Service’, *Sociology of Religion*, 57.4, (1996), 379-396, p. 398-391.

⁵⁰² Nelson, ‘Sacrifice of Praise’, p. 392.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*

supposed to do. Here, I remember the first time I came—everybody started singing, and I could see people with their hands up. That used to bother me, but, well, that was when I wasn't a Christian. Now that I am, I get it. I didn't know anything about the Holy Spirit either.

Jonah brought his point home by comparing being at church with being at a 'baseball game or hockey game'. Sure, you can watch it at home and you can get into it, but when you're actually there... 'it can just take you over; you feel the vibration, you feel the energy in the air, the people, it brings your worship level to just a whole 'nother level...'

7.2. River Valley Church

7.2.1. The Message in the Music

Worship at River Valley is programmed to coordinate with the season of the Church Year, and with the textual or topical series through which the pastor is preaching. In this way, River Valley, a Presbyterian church, fits the general pattern of churches within the Reformed tradition and approaches congregational worship through what I called the 'Formation' paradigm in Chapter 2. My focus group, comprised of people in their 60s and 70s of European descent, all seemed particularly attentive to the lyrics of the songs they sang.

When I asked the group what they thought the worship team's goal was for the congregation each week, the conversation went immediately to lyrics and the meaning of the songs. Milton, who described himself as having been a Christian all his life but a 'practicing Christian' only the past decade or so, talked about the way Allan Moody, the worship leader at River Valley, introduces new songs and repeats it over the next few weeks. Milton finds that to be a helpful practice since it takes until the third or fourth time to 'really get to the meaning'. Worship songs, Milton adds, really 'touch' him, and he listens closely to the words.

The lyrics are also important to the group because of the way they relate to the sermon. Milton, again, noted this: ‘Moody makes an effort to tie the songs and the music into the message. And there have been times when I’ve really wondered if he has written those lyrics himself...I’ve wondered, you know, it was so perfect; it was just so perfectly aligned with Bob’s message, or whoever was preaching...that day’.

The theme of the music relating to the message surfaced in comments from two others in the group. There is a clear value of the cognitive dimensions of worship. The people in the focus group want to be able to comprehend the meaning and the message of the music. Furthermore, they want the meaning and the message of the music to be consistent with the message which is preached. Thus, the prioritization of the cognitive dimension of worship is seen in the congregation’s desire for both comprehension and consistency.

7.2.2. Be Still and Know: Silence and Simplicity

The setting of the service is designed to be understated. The large sanctuary is sectioned off to only allow seating on one wing. Cards with the service order—their own created liturgy—rest on a music stand near the pews for people to take. Candles are lit and placed on one side of the wing of seats, and the lights are dimmed for the effect of warmth. The service leader and preacher stands not on a stage or platform but on the floor. The instrumentation of the band is usually a grand piano, acoustic guitar, cello or upright bass, and a stripped-down drum kit with a djembe or other hand percussion taking the place of a full rack of toms—and even then, the drummer plays with brushes or rods not sticks. Everything about the atmosphere is designed to make the worshipper exhale and slow down. In fact, Greg, who seems the least versed in Christian culture or language, described coming into service carrying burdens or things he had been ‘bombarded with’, even as a

retired man. He physically exhaled to demonstrate the feeling of relief, and talked about his own physical posture beginning to change: ‘Yeah... you can kinda feel your shoulders relax...’

When I asked my focus group what drew them to the church, Milton, who has been attending River Valley for the past 4 years, said that with regard to the worship service itself, what drew him was the way ‘it kind of strips away all the pomp and circumstance of some services, and gets right to the heart of it’. Though he acknowledged that it is ‘not for everyone’, he enjoys the ‘contemplative’ and ‘quiet’ quality of the service because of the way it allows time ‘to really focus on worship rather than all the external things’.

Darren, who moved to Colorado from Arkansas, where he and his wife had attended a PCUSA church, described being at an EPC church now as a ‘significant change’. When I asked Darren how long he had been a Christian, he responded with Southern charm and the drawl to match: ‘I guess I’ve been a Christian since I was born!’ The group laughed. Yet the significance for Darren in being part of an EPC church instead of a PCUSA church is in what the ‘E’ stands for: ‘Evangelical’. Though he did not say it this way, it became evident when he described the biggest difference—and one he now enjoys—is that River Valley is ‘much more Bible-based’. This prioritization of the Bible as an authoritative text is, as we have noted in Chapters 2 and 5, a characteristic of Evangelicalism. But that is not all that drew Darren to the church. He and his wife also appreciate the quietness, the space for reflection, and weekly communion—something that is not done weekly at the Sunday morning services at River Valley. ‘I like it because I love the candlelight. It’s more contemplative...And the time to be quiet and reflect is very

meaningful...And, I like taking communion every single time. And I love going up, and taking, breaking the bread— it's very powerful'.

Greg struggled to find a way to describe what he thought Moody sought to achieve through the music each week.⁵⁰⁴ It was clear, however, that he did not care for music which feels coercive or designed to produce a particularly energetic emotional response. This is interesting especially for the way it sets the group at River Valley in contrast to the group at Pathway, where emotional energy is a big part of why people like to attend.

I think we've been in churches where the worship leader or the song leader brings...the music along to more crescendo, and [sic]... you know, wants you to start doing the jubilation, and— I'm not there...I like the way Evan's music is, to me, is pertinent to what's coming on... We're not trying to get... people all jumping and shouting and [trails off]. This is just a nice progression of music, and it's pertinent to...the message, and it's...just enjoyable. It goes with the meditation of the evening.

7.2.3. Getting Real: Informality, Authenticity, and Community

Another theme that emerged in my conversations with the focus group were the related themes of informality, authenticity, and community. In Christian terms, the word 'fellowship' is sometimes used to describe the sense of openness and closeness to one another that can be fostered in a group of believers. Various members of the group shared how the Saturday evening service's informality—relative to the Sunday morning services at River Valley—facilitates authenticity, vulnerability, and community.

Greg believes that even the senior pastor, Bob Slate, is 'probably a little more open in this service because of the smallness'. The service runs about 75-100 people in attendance. Greg references its size to make his point. 'It's just your own little

⁵⁰⁴ When I asked Greg how long he had been a Christian, he responded, 'To my knowledge, I've been a believer all my life— being raised in a Christian home and such'.

community that on Sunday morning you don't have'. Milton chimes in, 'It's like a large small group!' The group heartily agrees. I ask a clarifying question about Bob's preaching, inquiring if it had a different tone to it on Saturday evenings. 'He's more real', and 'Very transparent' are a few of the comments made, in addition to jokes about his wearing jeans and comments about the congregation's physical proximity to the pastor as he preaches from the floor with a music stand—as opposed to on the stage behind a pulpit on Sunday mornings.

The informality embodied by the pastor and encoded in and engendered by the service structure fosters a sense of vulnerability and closeness as a faith community. This sense of 'community' within the congregation is in itself one of the factors which drew people to the church. Vicki, who also described herself as someone who has been a Christian all her life—'I was raised in a Christian home, and I've really loved the Lord since I was very, very little'—talks about the mix of ages within the congregation as a specific aspect of the community which drew her to the church.

Partly for me, that difference [between the Saturday evening service and the Sunday morning services] is having a more mixed age group— I love that. I love having older people. And, I am an "older people" now. [Laughter follows.]. No,— and children too. I love that diversity of age, for one thing. I love the— there's much more interaction in this service. And you don't feel dumb about it. You know, you don't feel so embarrassed to speak. And [...] they try to really engage people, like in prayer especially. I would say I've noticed that more than anything else. A vast difference'.

The element in the service which facilitates authenticity and vulnerability within the community most effectively and consistently, however, was not the preaching or the music, but the time of prayer. Almost every week in the service, there is a 'prayers of the people' section where people from the congregation voice a brief prayer request and the rest of the people listen in agreement. At first, some members

of the congregation were sceptical about this practice. Greg shared his perspective: ‘Just thinking back to when we first started—some of the prayer time we had when we first started was very [sic], some of the regulars— I’ll put it that way— including me, were holding back, you know...’ Then Greg folded his arms and re-enacted the posture and words that were reflective of his response at the time: ‘Let’s see where this is going’. Laughter follows Greg’s dramatization.

Nevertheless, people eventually became more comfortable with it. Vicki adds that now ‘you feel safe speaking up’. Diana, Milton’s wife, points out that the part of the safety comes from knowing that one is not alone in the issues they face. She says, in fact, that it is ‘surprising how many of us have the same issues [...] You know, you don’t want the ...whole congregation to really know—but in this little group, it feels safe. You’re not alone’. Milton describes how the pastor will, at times, ask for people to pray for someone dealing with a particular issue, and though one might guess that there would not be many who would respond, Milton says that about ‘80 or 90% of the people have a name of somebody that are dealing with that issue that he asked for prayer about’.

Vicki, not wanting to be critical of Sunday morning services and its structured approach—because ‘there are people who need that kind of structure and that kind of service’—nevertheless appreciates the freedom to have unscripted prayers from the congregation during the service. When asked to describe Sunday mornings, Milton responds, ‘Structured. Pomp and circumstance’, referring to the robes, choir, and organ.

Milton described coming to church knowing about a ‘devastating situation’ in which a friend found himself. The sermon and the time for ‘prayers of the people’ in that evening’s service provided an openness and an opportunity for Milton to pray

for his friend. This would not have been possible, in Milton's estimation, during the Sunday morning services. 'And nothing against the services tomorrow, but because it's so structured, and, you know, you're not usually going to get that opportunity.... just to have quiet time, and this forces you to have quietness'.

7.3. Hope Fulfilled: Promise and Prospecion

I asked the focus groups at each church to talk about times when God had done something they had hoped he would do. I told them it could be big or small. Both groups had stories, but at Pathway, the stories were hard to stop. One lady shared a story about hoping that her youngest child would come to a decision of faith. At a recent church youth camp, it seemed that he had made a step in that direction. Another man shared a similar story about being frustrated with his son, only to realize that God wanted him to help lead his son to faith. Neither of these initial stories were quite the stories of promise and fulfilment I had been looking for, but I waited.

Julie, always willing to share, began by saying that she was trying to 'just think of one', implying that God had come through for her so many times. She told a couple of short stories about two of her children needing medical interventions early in their life, and the Lord guiding them to the right procedures for them. '[W]e just prayed, and God said, "Do this", and we did it, and he's been fine ever since'. Her second story was especially arresting.

Our third was a NICU baby, and she had to pass this test to be able to go home, and, her levels kept dropping during her test, and we just prayed, and said, 'Nope...her last test, she'll be a 75 and she'd going home today.' And her last test, she was a 75, and she went home.

Gilbert and Wilson write about ‘prospection’, the ability to ‘experience the future’ in the present.⁵⁰⁵ The act of prospection relies upon *simulation*, which Gilbert and Wilson define as a ‘mental representation of a future event’. This is to be distinguished from *memory*—a ‘mental representation of a past event’—and *perception*—a mental representation of a present event.⁵⁰⁶ Two things are necessary for the simulation to be useful for prospecting emotions. First, the mental representation of the event in the future—the prospection—must match the mental representation of the event when it is eventually experienced in the present—perception. In other words, the event must occur as the person imagined it would. Secondly, the contextual factors of the prospection must match the contextual factors of the perception. If both these conditions are met, then the ‘hedonic experience’—the emotions and feelings of pleasure or pain—of the imagined event will match the hedonic experience of the actual event. In Gilbert’s and Wilson’s words, ‘Simulations allow people to “preview” events and to “prefeel” the pleasures and pains those events will produce’.⁵⁰⁷

Julie predicted that by the end of the day she was going to experience something like relief and gratitude that the ordeal was over because her daughter was going home. Julie was confident that last test would not require them to stay an extra night. Julie was right not only about how she would feel; she was right about the circumstance that she had predicted. Notice that for Julie, her mental representation of the outcome of the test matched the actual outcome of the test later that day, and therefore her anticipated feeling of relief was in fact her experienced

⁵⁰⁵ Daniel T. Gilbert and Timothy D. Wilson, ‘Prospection: Experiencing the Future’, *Science*, 317.5843, (2007), 1351-1354, p. 1351.

⁵⁰⁶ Gilbert and Wilson, ‘Prospection’, p. 1352.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

feeling by the day's end. What she had hoped for had occurred, more or less as she had imagined it.

One of the fascinating aspects of what Gilbert and Wilson describe as the contextual factors for the simulation has to do with how the sense of anticipated pleasure or pain can be impacted by the 'events that are occurring in the present, the thoughts we are having in the present, our present bodily states', and more.⁵⁰⁸ For example, we 'feel better when we imagine going to the theatre than to the dentist, but we feel better imagining either event on a sunny day than on a rainy day, or when we are well rather than ill'. This is precisely where the atmosphere of congregational worship can influence prospection. If the mood of the worship service is positive, the simulations one creates in his or her mind of a future event are likely to produce more strongly positive hedonic effects than if one were to simulate the event in an ordinary moment of the day. In a particularly powerful story, one member of the Pathway focus group recounted an emotional breakthrough that occurred not only in a time of congregational worship, but also through a vision which occurred in that worship service of being at the beach with Jesus.

There was an actual worship experience. I was at a Habitation [all prayer and worship] service, and just in a pit of despair, agony, pain, suffering, and I was like, 'God I need you; I need you more than ever. I need you to show up. I need to feel Your presence in a way that I've never felt Your presence before. I am at a rock bottom', and I honestly have no idea what song we were singing, but I got the first vision that God's ever given me, and He came, and all I [sic] for like the next 20 minutes, I just remember having a personal encounter with Him. We were walking down a beach together— 'cause that's like my happy place; if I could choose any place to be, it would be on the beach—and we were just walking down the beach, and He was like, "I got you, and I'm carrying you, and you don't need to worry; I'm right here". I just remember falling to my knees, and crying, but leaving so filled with hope. Because at my bottom, God showed up in a visual, tangible way.

⁵⁰⁸ Gilbert and Wilson, 'Prospection', p. 1352.

In this situation, no future event was imagined; it was a change of negative emotions that was needed, the breaking of despair. In a favourable context—congregational worship, which this focus group member had earlier said she loves—she experienced a vision, which is a kind of simulated perception—simulated because it occurs in the mind, but perception because it occurs in the present—of another even more favourable context, her ‘happy place’, the beach. The context gets even stronger in positive associations; God begins to talk to her, saying words which she herself has longed to hear. This experience narrates a progression from a favourable general context to an imagined context with strong positive associations to an extremely powerful context of an encounter with God. The change in her emotional state from despair to hope is an unsurprising outcome.

At River Valley, there were no stories of specifically thinking about or imagining situations that they were facing during times of congregational worship. In fact, one member of the group, Milton, said that he preferred to just be silent during the service. Nevertheless, there were a few personal stories of ‘God coming through’, though they were not connected to the times of congregational worship. Diana recounted a particularly moving story about feeling lonely at the holidays because of her estranged relationship with her son and because of her husband Milton’s lack of relationship with his children. They had gotten married late in life—a second marriage for each of them—and were struggling to make their peace with the emptiness of their new home. In effort to move beyond their own loneliness, they began hosting a small group through the church. One day, a young family came over to join the group. Eventually, a relationship began to build. The older couple—Milton and Diana—decided to go out on a limb and offer to be like grandparents to the kids and extended family to the young couple. The couple was

moved by this because Denver was a new city for them and not near either of their families. Diana was emotional as she recounted how they all came over to spend Mother's Day with them, and how the kids call them 'Pippy and Poppy' as their grandparents of sorts.

Perhaps what is most noteworthy about this story as it relates to my research is that the thing which was hoped for—a family to fill their home on special days—was supplied through relationships and the community within their church. The stories at Pathway of God acting in a way that fulfilled their hope tended toward the ecstatic or what they may call the supernatural. This fits the world view of Pentecostal-Charismatics. God is at work in the 'heavenly realm' bringing about changes on earth. But at River Valley, God seems to be at work on earth through other human beings; it is incarnational. Where members of the Pathway focus group described visions and divine encounters—again, consistent with the paradigm I have called in chapter 2 'Encounter'—members of the River Valley focus group described human encounters through which God met them. My intent here is not to praise one over the other; it is simply to note this difference not only in the mode of meeting with God—mystical versus relational—but to note which aspect of the congregational worship service fulfilled this hope—music versus fellowship.

7.4. Hope Deferred: Prospecction and Adaptation

In the same focus group meetings at each church where we discussed a time when God 'came through', I also asked each group to talk about a time when God did not do the specific thing they were hoping he would. At Pathway, several people seized the opportunity to share openly about struggles that they had faced. This vulnerability about personal suffering contradicts Bowler's sketch of prosperity gospel churches as lacking a vocabulary for hardship. The people in my Pathway

focus group were not living in denial or running to triumphalism; they were honest about disappointment, but resilient in their hope in God.

Mark, a Christian for over fifteen years, opened up about a recent struggle to get pregnant. Mark and his wife were in a second marriage with no children from the two of them.

Several months ago...we had been praying for my wife. She had a tubal ligation done, so we had got that reversed back in April [this interview was done in August of the same year]. We were just praying for a baby... Her mom talked her into getting the tubal ligation done, and then we had that reversed 'cause she really wanted to have a baby ... We found out in June she was pregnant, then ... probably three or four weeks ago, we went in for a sonogram, and they saw the sack, the placenta, everything was there, except there was no heartbeat ... no baby... You know, it was really hard. It was hard on me; it was really hard on my wife.

This was the first time that afternoon that someone in the Pathway focus group had been willing to express negative emotions about an experience. Yet the group seemed empathetic; Mark was not out of line for expressing this, even though it seemed to be outside the normal 'feeling rules' for the group.

... we talked to Brian ... and we said, ... 'Will you pray for us?' We prayed, and we just really believed God that when we went back to the doctor the next week there was going to be a baby there, there was going to be a heartbeat. We went back, and there wasn't. There wasn't a heartbeat.

The group was quiet and attentive, feeling Mark's pain, sensing the emotion in his voice as he narrated the story. Perhaps in an effort to prevent the group meeting from descending into despair, or perhaps because of his own discomfort with being overly sad, Mark began to pick up the tone of the story.

But the first time we went in there, my wife was devastated. And I was devastated, and I was like, you know...it's just a really hard thing to go through. But, when we went back in the second time, we really hoped to, you know, thought, that, you know, there will be a baby here. But there wasn't, but we had a peace. I mean, it was just like, I mean I can't tell you how much of a peace we had when we went back there. The week that we were getting ready to go back to

the doctor, Pastor Ted Ralph [a pastor who had been on staff at Pathway and was now a senior pastor at another church] spoke on his message, ‘When God says no’, and it was just a really, really timely message, you know, for both of us.

As noted earlier, Pathway Church is at the very least on the spectrum of what Kate Bowler calls ‘soft prosperity gospel’. They would not teach that there is a way to guarantee health and wealth; but they tend to emphasize divine blessing in material terms. Though I cannot say if Pastor Bob Norriff would preach on God saying ‘no’, it was noteworthy that it was a guest speaker at Pathway who gave language to the disappointment Mark and his wife were experiencing. As a result, Mark is able to, like the Psalmists, move from lament to trust.

You know, because sometimes we don’t know...and I just told my wife, you know, I said, ‘We’re just going to trust God. We don’t know what’s going on here. But we’re just going to trust God’. And the other thing is, that somehow, it just brought us closer together, you know...it just brought both of us so much closer together. So, we didn’t get what we were praying for, but God really gave us a peace about it, and it really did something, I don’t know, really rekindled something in our marriage.

Luke, a single guy built like a football player, shared a story about a recent relationship ending, prefacing with the suggestion that sometimes ‘it’s easier to remember the ones [God] didn’t answer than the ones He did’. Luke recounted a story about being engaged, and then coming clean to his fiancé about a struggle in his life— out of obedience to the Lord— but then having his fiancé break up with him and walk away. During the breakup, he read the Bible, prayed, and felt like the relationship was going to come back. ‘And it never came about—ever. And I just kept telling myself over and over, “I believe in God, I know you’re in it...”’

’ Finally, he came to the point of having to let her go. He seemed pretty self-aware of the hurt he had caused her, which led her to completely cut off the relationship in a way that was hurtful to him. It took him nine months to a year to eventually get

over it. ‘But in getting that “no”, I wouldn’t change it, right? At all. For everything that I learned in that year...But I don’t know why it’s easier to remember the “no” than the “yes”. Maybe it’s a bigger lesson in the “no” than in the “yes”’. Julie chimed in that we remember the pain most because that is what ‘the enemy’ wants us focus on instead of remembering ‘our faith’ and staying ‘focused on the victory’. But Luke did not want to minimize the pain or to over-emphasize the devil’s work, pointing instead again to the lessons he learned during his time of hardship and to the sovereignty of God. ‘Whatever he [God] wants, he gets’.

One might say that at River Valley, the confidence level in God’s ability to come through was even higher. When I asked the River Valley focus group to name a time when God did not come through, Diana promptly responded that it had not happened yet. She was quick to clarify that she does not believe in a ‘vending machine God’ who exists to do her bidding.

Milton chimed in to frame the question in terms of how one understands prayer. This was an astute theological move. In his book on *Prayer*, well-known Presbyterian pastor Tim Keller says that, ‘God will either give us what we ask or give us what we would have asked if we knew everything he knows’.⁵⁰⁹ Milton did not reference Keller, but he described in essence Keller’s view. If prayer is understood as a way of participating in God’s will arriving on earth ‘as it is in heaven’, then surrender is as much a part of prayer as asking.

I will return to this trust in God which leads to a resilient hope in both the Presbyterian focus group at River Valley and the Pentecostal-Charismatic focus group at Pathway at the end of the next section. For now, I note that resilience is a quality of the hope found in both contexts; both demonstrated a hope that can

⁵⁰⁹ Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (New York: Dutton, Penguin Group, 2014), p. 228.

withstand disappointment. At times, this resilience is seen even in reframing disappointment to not be a disappointment directed at God at all.

7.5. From Feeling to Virtue: Persistence and Resilience

7.5.1. Moving from Moods to Traits

This resilience is significant because it is a link between the feeling of hope and the virtue of hope, as outlined in Chapter 3. Recall that Christian philosopher Bob Roberts argued that ‘real, spiritual hope’ is not something that is felt ‘only in church, with the help of a vaulted ceiling, the unctuous preaching of Easter, and the resounding chords of “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today”’.⁵¹⁰ The feeling or experience of hope must develop into a ‘character trait’ which is ‘characterized by “endurance”’, which Roberts defines as ‘the ability to feel the emotion even in situations that don’t seem very propitious for it.’⁵¹¹

However, Roberts believes that the ‘ornamental aspects’ of a worship service—from architecture to colours to music—can create the appropriate moods as a step toward awakening the right emotions.⁵¹² ‘These features of the service are not just aesthetically fitting, but encourage moods in us that foster Christian emotions. So these aesthetic or ornamental features of the service serve partially as aids to our having the Christian emotions in the midst of the worship service’.⁵¹³ Nevertheless, Roberts is also aware that there are dangers to this strategy. Mood setting can be so powerful that the moods themselves may be mistaken for Christian emotions. The passing emotional states precipitated by these aesthetic aspects of the service may be mistaken for genuine expressions of Christian emotions. The above may result in the Christian being ‘partially immunized against real Christianity by being made

⁵¹⁰ Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions*, p. 19.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁵¹² Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions*, pg. 156

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*

complacent about their spirituality'.⁵¹⁴ Thus Roberts is sceptical about what worship services can achieve toward the end of developing hope as a virtue. The 'engineering' of a service along with its architecture and decoration and delivery of sermon, and more may 'skew the emphasis away from the character building' and toward 'experiences'.⁵¹⁵

Yet once a Christian learns to distinguish 'Christian emotions' from moods or passing emotional states, he can be taught to not merely experience hope in the worship service but to become a hopeful person. 'The hope he experiences in the service should become a deeply etched hopefulness, a character trait that he carries into the most diverse and uncondusive situations of his life, situations where the environments, unlike the church, does not at all predispose him to hope...'.⁵¹⁶ In fact, the toughness of the world is a tutor for turning the experience of hope into the character of hopefulness.

7.5.2. When the Feelings Fade

One of the ways the experience of hope in worship is tested is when the feelings begin to fade. Gilbert and Wilson call this 'affective adaptation'.⁵¹⁷ It is the result of people beginning to ' "explain away" these events, transforming them from extraordinary events that grab attention into ordinary events which do not'.⁵¹⁸ The Pathway focus group related several stories of this occurring. Carol from the Pathway Church focus group saw the devil as the one behind such normalizing:

I think God ministers to you so much through worship that sometimes you don't even need a message. Sometimes you just need to be in the worship music, and He'll do that and it's so, and so

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid*

⁵¹⁵ Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions*, p. 163.

⁵¹⁶ Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions*, pp. 156-157.

⁵¹⁷ Timothy D. Wilson and Daniel T. Gilbert, 'Explaining Away: A Model of Affective Adaptation', *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3.5, (2008), 370-386, in Association for Psychological Science, Sage Publications, Inc. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40212259>> [accessed 15 August 2016].

⁵¹⁸ Wilson and Gilbert, 'Explaining Away: A Model of Affective Adaptation', p. 370.

you're so like on this, kind of like, worship high, I guess you could say. And then, like, in a few days, when you get away from that, sometimes ... Satan will start putting these thoughts in your head, like, 'You're never going to get through that trouble', you know, 'You're never going to get over that'.

Gilbert and Wilson outline 'explanation' as only the first half of a weakening affective experience; adaptation is the second half of it. Once the events are reappraised with a different narrative—'I was just making that up', or 'I must have been emotional from being so tired'—then a person adapts the experience or event by 'attending' to it less, and thereby experiencing weaker affective reactions. But the Pathway focus group has shown that the reverse is also true. By 'attending' to the experience—by recalling it, remembering it, reimagining it in prayer—the worshipper is able to re-experience the affective reactions. Carol concluded her story above by simply saying, 'But then I always have to go back to what I experienced, how big I experienced God in that place of worship, and that's all it takes is an instant'. Luke does not think reliving the experience is even necessary since it is easy to simply re-create the atmosphere of congregational worship. 'You can almost, like, recreate 'em [the experience of hope in worship] by even just another time of worship...It may be a song, but there's just something about when you just surrender your heart, and it's just you'. Julie agrees. '[W]hat I have noticed is that if I have turned back on my music and start to worship, it [the experience and the accompanying feelings] will immediately come back'. Thus, the hope experienced acquires resilience through re-living or re-creating the experience.

7.5.3. Adjusting and Trusting

In Chapter 3, I outlined Snyder's cognitive theory of hope as the result of both agency and pathway, 'willpower' and 'way power'. From my question above to each focus group about a time when God did not bring about something they had

hoped for, I discovered that many of them had experienced situations where they had lost a sense of control or agency and were disappointed about things taking a turn that was different from the pathway they had imagined. ‘Mine never go through like I think they’re gonna go through; it never lines up how I pretty much think it’s going to line-up’, Josh from the Pathway group shrugged.

The most stunning example of this experience came from the Pathway group. In Mark’s account of the custody battle he and his wife endured, they had a promise from God that the process would not require a battle, and yet it did.

God spoke to us a promise, and we were like, ‘OK, we’re gonna walk into court and this is going to happen’. And we went to court every two months, you know, so, and the judge basically wouldn’t do anything. But we were like, we got a promise from God. ‘God, what is going on here?’ You know, like, ‘You told us that this is gonna happen’, and then we go to court and go to court, like thousands and thousands of dollars, and nothing would happen.

By the end of his story, however, Mark had appraised the situation not as an instance where God had not come through, but where God had kept His word, but in a different way.

It happened exactly what God—God literally spoke to us and said, ‘You’re not even going to have to fight a battle’. And we were trying to fight a battle the entire time, and I think God really was working on us. We kept going back in. And then we walk into court in February of this year, and he wasn’t there, and the judge was like, ‘Well, what do you guys want?’ You know, and ... our lawyer wrote up a custody order, and we got exactly — I mean exactly— what God promised us.

I did not get a chance to find out what Mark meant by that—whether it was that the custody outcome was what they had hoped to get, or whether the process itself was ultimately not a battle. It did not seem appropriate for me to press.

What makes the hope experienced in charismatic worship have this quality of resilience? How is it adaptable to different outcomes and processes? One reason may be that the worshippers in the Pentecostal-Charismatic church stress divine

agency rather than human agency. Their own powerlessness is irrelevant because God is all-powerful. Moreover, they believe that God will bring his power to bear on their behalf. Bowler may consider this an instance of ‘soft prosperity gospel’—that God is working toward our ends; but this belief is fertile ground for hope. Secondly, the worshippers in my focus group appear to trust divine pathways more than the ones they devise or imagine. As Josh shared, ‘There’s always a different way around it, but the end result is usually the same’. Finally, it is not just that God may have a different path for bringing about their desired end; it is that they believe that God may have other good goals in mind, such as inner transformation. Mark’s conclusion to their arduous and no doubt expensive custody battle was, ‘We want the end result, but we don’t want the transformation that God does in us along the way’. Thus the hope experienced is resilient because it is rooted in divine agency, divine pathway, and perhaps even divine goodness.

But Pentecostal-Charismatics are not the only Christians with a resilient hope which they experience in worship. The Presbyterians also described situations that did not go according to plan. Diana described being troubled by her difficult relationship with her estranged son. She had prayed many times about it, asking the Lord to restore it. One night, she was awakened in the early hours of the morning by what she felt had to have been the Lord. She sensed God telling her to release the relationship to him and to trust him with her son’s life. ‘I just wanted to know that he was OK’, she said. ‘And I felt the Lord said that he was OK’. I asked her if she ever waivered from that, or if days or weeks later she would doubt the assurance that had filled her that night. She said no. In fact, that vision became a source of inspiration not only for her but also for many others. She wrote down the vision and

printed out copies of it to take with her to the prisons where she ministers to inmates.

This written account of her divine vision is what Gilbert might call an ‘explanation’, the third step of ‘affective adaptation’. But whereas Gilbert describes explanation as the process of transforming ‘extraordinary events that grab attention into ordinary events which do not’, my focus group at River Valley shows that ‘explanation’ can work in the opposite direction.⁵¹⁹ An explanation of ordinary events into extraordinary events reinforces the affect or the emotional experience of the event. Diana believed that God spoke to her that night; she reinforced the event with a written narrative which was repeated in multiple settings. Each repetition allowed her to re-experience the emotions—a kind of ‘attending’ to the original event, in Gilbert’s terms. It is also worth noting that while for Pathway ‘attending’ to the event involved music and thus the more affective aspects of the original experience, the focus group at River Valley used a cognitive approach to ‘attending’ to the original experience of hope. Whether affective or cognitive, this revisiting of the experience contributed to the resiliency of the hope that came from it.

7.6. Summary and Conclusion

From participant observation, interviews, and a focus group with Pathway Church and River Valley Presbyterian Church, I made four observations. First, by exploring the experience of hope in two very different congregational worship contexts, I discovered that worshippers are able to draw hope through a variety of means. At Pathway, emotion is crucial. The worshipper’s experience of God is positively affected by the energy in the room, the music, and their own emotional response. At River Valley, the informality of the service, the silence, and space for

⁵¹⁹ Wilson and Gilbert, ‘Explaining Away: A Model of Affective Adaptation’, p. 370.

contemplation allow a more cognitive engagement with God through the message and through the offering of prayers.

Secondly, in both churches hope in God was adaptive to their circumstances. When things went as hoped, they gave God the credit; when they did not, they trusted Him anyway. People in both churches recounted times when God came through for them, and both groups were relatively buoyant even when things did not go as they had hoped. No one in either group hinted at losing faith in God or in questioning God's ways.

Thirdly, neither group provided anything like an eschatological vision of hope. They spoke about heaven when they die, or circumstances in their immediate future. Thus, the experience of hope, while memorable and significant, is not like 'creedal Christian Hope'. If it had a future orientation, it did not deal with the material creation; if it related to the materiality of life issues—sickness, relational discord, financial trouble, or the like—it had no long-range future dimension to it. Hope was either about things improving now, or about getting to heaven soon. This may be described as a therapeutic hope—a hope which helped people feel better about life and its challenges.

This is not to be dismissed as insignificant, however, because of the fourth observation. This hope, even if it is not eschatological in its orientation toward the future, is still theological in its grounding in relation to God. For the Pentecostal-Charismatic group, agency and pathway were turned over to God because of the belief in God's supernatural power; for the Presbyterian group, agency and pathway are ascribed to God because of the belief in God's sovereignty. Yet for both groups, resilient hope is the result of being grounded in divine agency and pathway.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

To conclude, I will first provide a summary of four key observations from my fieldwork, drawing out the most significant themes and trends. Then, I will construct a three-fold theological reflection to attempt to address a few questions and puzzles which emerged from my research. I will then offer three recommendations for church leaders for ministry practice. Finally, I will note places for further study and exploration.

8.1. Observations

First, by my study of songs which people—worship leaders and congregants alike—said brought them hope, I discovered an extraordinary focus on the present tense and the proximate space. Through there was some differentiation between the general Evangelical base and the Presbyterian and Pentecostal-Charismatic responses, the overall trend was to sing about things that are occurring here and now. I suggested several possible reasons in Chapter 6 that this might be the case, from the relatively comfortable conditions of the songwriters and the worshippers to the post-modern deconstruction of meta-narrative. Threads from each of these surfaced in the official, unofficial, and collective discourses with parishioners and leaders through interviews and focus groups. There was not a compelling reason to privilege one of these explanations over the others, nor is there a reason to believe that the list of explanations is conclusive.

Secondly, these songs of hope are expressed from the perspective of the individual rather than the congregation. In other words, where there are pronouns referring to the worshipper, they are overwhelmingly in the singular case. Once again, the Evangelical propensity for personal faith shows through in these songs.

The individualization of faith and the privatization of a relationship with God are often blamed as the reason for the heavy dose of singular personal pronouns. Yet there has not been sufficient work in comparing the use of singular pronouns in the Psalms with the usage in contemporary worship songs. Even a comparison between the early Christian hymns found in the New Testament—the *Benedictus*, *Magnificat*, and *Nunc Dimitis*—all are written from the perspective of an individual—Zachariah, Mary, and Simeon, respectively. One might, in another piece of work, make the case that the individual ‘I’ when sung in a congregation becomes a collective ‘we’ before God. Nevertheless, it does raise theological and ecclesiological questions since it seems the worshippers in my focus groups can experience hope without any reference to what their community of faith is experiencing.

Thirdly, the experience of hope seems to be strongly correlated with congregational worship. In fact, the times when worshippers did not experience any sort of uplift as a result of gathering at church were rare and noteworthy. My questions approached the subject from various angles by asking about things like what drew them to church, what keeps them coming, and times when they have come to church feeling down but left feeling better. Everyone in my focus groups at both churches provided some basis for viewing the worship service as an experience which had an overall positive effect on them. In this sense, whether or not hope was experienced was of less interest to me as to the kind of hope which was experienced. I will say more on this below.

Fourthly, the hope possessed by many in both focus groups may be described as a resilient hope. Despite setbacks, despite things not working out as they had hoped, the people in my focus groups seemed to maintain their hope in God. Their

hope was not overly attached to a particular outcome so that when that outcome did not occur they fell into despair. They were able to keep singing, keep praying, keep showing up at worship services because their hope was anchored in God rather than in themselves. This leads us now to a critical concluding piece of reflection.

8.2. Reflection: Hope and the Holy Spirit

I want to shape this summary reflection around three questions: How could the experience of hope be consistent when the encoded hope was so theologically weak? Why does the experience of God's presence produce hope? In what ways is the Spirit present and active in congregational worship?

One of the more puzzling results of my research was the apparent dissonance between the encoded hope and the experienced hope. The encoded hope of contemporary worship songs lacks narrative or much of a future orientation. Yet the experience of hope is reliable and resilient. This was surprising. How are we to reconcile the two? I propose it is in looking afresh at what it means to experience the presence of God.

First, remember that the centre of Moltmann's eschatology is the presence of God. Though Moltmann is thinking of the eschatological presence—the final filling of the renewed creation with God's *Shekinah*—this focus on presence is a key to understanding the way hope is expressed and experienced in contemporary worship. Secondly, recall that the focus on the presence of God in contemporary worship is a key contribution of the Pentecostal roots of the contemporary worship movement, as demonstrated in Chapter 2. Moreover, a sociological analysis of worship in a global context suggests that 'the Charismatic meeting, complete with "worship time", powerful, emotive and biblical preaching, and the manifestation of the Spirit in

some dramatic form' is 'the most common form of Christian worship in the contemporary world.'⁵²⁰

I am proposing here that it is a theology of the Spirit as God's eschatological presence in the gathered church that forms the link between 'the presence of God' in contemporary worship and in Moltmann's eschatology. New Testament scholar and son of an Assemblies of God pastor Gordon Fee summarized his extensive study of the Spirit in Pauline theology by describing the Holy Spirit as 'the experienced, empowering return of God's own personal presence in and among us, who enables us to live as a radically eschatological people in the present world while we await the consummation'.⁵²¹ Fee sets his understanding of the Spirit in Paul's theology within the framework of an 'already/not yet' eschatology. In fact, Fee argues that for Paul, 'neither his own experience of the Spirit nor his perception of that experience makes sense apart from the perspective of the fulfilled promise and salvation as already but not yet.'⁵²² It is the outpouring of the Spirit which signalled the beginning of the new age and the 'guarantee of its final consummation'.⁵²³ Fee focuses on Paul's imagery for the Spirit as the 'down payment, firstfruits, and seal', each emphasizing either 'the present evidence of future realities or as the assurance of the final glory, or both of these simultaneously'.⁵²⁴

That phrase, 'the present evidence of future realities', is precisely what I discovered in the experience of hope. If the ultimate future reality is, as Moltmann argues, that the presence of God will the earth so fully and gloriously so as to make it new; if, as Gordon Fee argues, the Holy Spirit is the experience of that future in

⁵²⁰Martin D. Stringer, *A Sociological History of Christian Worship* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 233-234.

⁵²¹ Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*, loc. 181.

⁵²² Fee, p. 53.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*

the present; and if, as Pentecostals and Charismatics have believed, congregational worship—the gathered church—is the location of the presence of God through the Holy Spirit; then it follows that congregational worship would be a prime setting for the experience of hope. Moreover, it means that for this experience of hope to occur, the songs need not be specifically about that hope; they simply need to be songs of worship which make the worshipper aware of God's presence.⁵²⁵ The very fact that so many songs which were said to bring people hope are about God's activity in the present may itself be an indication that the experience of God's presence in the present moment of worship is in and of itself an experience of hope. After all, if the ultimate reason for hope is not bodily resurrection or a renewed creation but the presence of God, then any foretaste of the future presence in the present is an experience of eschatological hope.

Why does the experience of the Spirit as God's presence produce hope? I propose that it is not simply because it is the experience of the future, eschatological personal presence of God in the present, but also because it is the experience of God's powerful presence. Here I want to place Snyder's theory of hope in conversation with Wright's exposition of Pauline eschatology. First recall from Chapter 3 that Snyder understands hope, from a cognitive perspective, to be the result of both agency and pathway, the confluence of willpower and waypower. Next, remember that for Wright, Pauline eschatology is grounded in the faithfulness of God. This faithfulness is revealed in Christ's fulfilling and completing Israel's vocation and thus opening the way of salvation to the Gentiles; and it is also seen in God's faithfulness to Christ in vindicating his sacrificial death by raising him from the dead. On the basis of God's faithfulness as revealed in the life, death, and

⁵²⁵ This is not the place for a much lengthier and more vigorous debate as to whether God is specially present when the congregation is at worship, or whether believers are simply more aware of God's presence during times of corporate worship.

resurrection of Jesus the Messiah, Christians have a sure and certain hope of their own future bodily resurrection, and for the cosmos to be redeemed. In Snyder's terms, all the agency of hope is God's.

I propose that in worship, Christians re-enact the transfer of agency in their lives upward to God. In proclaiming that all the honour, glory, and power is God's, they are reminding themselves that salvation belongs to the Lord. Just as Moses at the Red Sea called on Israel to stand and see the salvation of the Lord, and just as the heavenly scenes of worship in the book of Revelation ascribe power and redemption to God, so in congregational worship, the church reminds itself that the agency is the Lord's. This cognitive transfer of agency to God releases them from bearing the burden of solving their own problems.

Agency became more important than pathway because once one transfers agency to God, one need not worry about how God will bring about change. Time and time again in my interviews and focus group conversations, it became evident that for these worshippers, if they knew who was in charge, they did not need to know how things would resolve. If God is faithful, and if Christian hope rests on the faithfulness of God, and if worship is the transfer of agency upward to God, then hope begins to abound as Christians remember God's power in worship. Moreover, there are times in corporate worship when the Christians I interviewed saw signs of the Holy Spirit at work, reinforcing their trust in God's power.

But the faithfulness and power of God result in a kind of returning of agency back to the believer. There was a sense—particularly in the Pentecostal-Charismatic context—that the divine power was available to them. This is a demonstration of Fee's other described dimension of the Spirit not only as God's personal presence,

but as God's empowering presence. This view is also rooted in New Testament texts such as Philippians 4:13, 1 Corinthians 15:10, and Ephesians 3:16.

One final question remains for my reflection: In what way is the Spirit present? At Pathway, this is seen in the way the Holy Spirit communicated hope to people through the phenomenon of their experiences and the physiology of their emotions. At River Valley, this seemed to primarily take place through cognitive means via the sermon, and through relationships with one another. I referred to this as being 'incarnational'—where God's hope was becoming flesh to them through one another.

Here I would like to propose that God communicates hope to Christians in an incarnational way; the Spirit works in and through our humanity. While the incarnation is rightly used to refer to the second person of the Trinity, the mode of the Spirit's operation occurs through the created realities such as the cognitive, the emotional, the physical, and the relational. This draws on the ancient reference to the Spirit as the 'Creator Spirit', or as the Creed confesses, the 'Lord, the Giver of Life'.⁵²⁶ If the Spirit works through our physicality, then there is no need to place so-called 'therapeutic hope' in opposition to 'eschatological hope'. This is true for two reasons. First, hope, though oriented toward the future, is experienced in the present. Secondly, each of the models of hope discussed in Chapter 3 are only separated as concepts for the sake of academic analysis. The actual experience of hope, based on my interviews and focus group conversations, is not either cognitive or affective, an emotion or a virtue; hope is all these at once. I am arguing here that a robust theology of the Spirit as the Creator Spirit allows us to see each dimension of hope as a mode of operation for the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who allows for the

⁵²⁶ See the 8th century hymn, *Veni Creator Spiritus* and the third article of the Nicene Creed.

transfer of agency and pathway to God and empowers our own sense of agency; it is the Spirit who lifts our emotions by altering our perception; it is the Spirit who forms virtue—the ‘fruit of the Spirit’—in the Christian; and it is the Spirit whose presence is at work in us in the phenomenology of hope.

Thus the Spirit is God’s eschatological presence, God’s powerful and empowering presence, and as God’s incarnational presence in the Church. Such a theology of the Spirit helps to give an account for the experience of hope in congregational worship. As Paul prayed in Romans 15:13, ‘May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.’

8.3. Ministry Recommendations

Based on the observations and the reflection above, there are several possible places for action. I will provide three recommendations for church leaders which emerge from my own perspective within my ministerial context. I am limiting these to leaders because pastors, worship leaders, and songwriters have the ability to change the encoded ‘canonical messages’ by writing songs and sermons and to affect the ‘indexical messages’ by choosing which songs to sing in a service and with what frequency.⁵²⁷

The first recommendation is not related to the musical portion of the service but occupies the largest segment of cognitive messaging: the sermon. While this research has only referenced sermons as a way of placing the operant theology of songs and worshippers in the context of the espoused theology of their churches, in a much smaller earlier study I did on funeral sermons, I found virtually no reference to bodily resurrection and a restored creation. The sermons were about heaven as a

⁵²⁷ Recall Rappaport’s terms in Chapter 1.

respite from the troubles of this world. This is significant because if there were to be a place for preaching about eschatological hope, one would expect it to be at a funeral. The argument might be, as some preachers in my interviews in that study indicated, that in moments of grief, people need comfort not theology. Yet this only affirms the pattern I have discovered here of preferring the therapeutic over the traditionally theological.

When eschatological hope surfaces in regular sermons given at weekend services, it is usually, as was the case at Pathway, the result of a special series. In other words, eschatology is only marginally relevant to the Christian life. Furthermore, when the direction of arrival is reversed—when the focus is not on the believer’s entrance to heaven but heaven’s arrival on earth—it is not usually talked about in an eschatological sense, but rather as a way of understanding the miraculous.⁵²⁸ What looms in the background, however, is the threat of final judgment with the accompanying hope of heaven and fear of hell. Apocalypticism, with its vivid imagery of the end of the world and its resulting urgency for a ‘decision’ to be made about Jesus, has long nourished Evangelical fervour. In fact, some have argued that the impending end of the world, often depicted as a sinking ship, and the corollary view of salvation through Jesus Christ, shown as a lifeboat out of the wreckage, are at the very heart of modern American Evangelicalism.⁵²⁹ Thus it is not the case the Evangelical preaching is devoid of an eschatological vision; it is that it draws from an impoverished vision and therefore offers an anaemic hope. For preachers like the pastor at River Valley who know and are able to articulate ‘creedal Christian hope’, they need to take the risk to preach on it more,

⁵²⁸ See Bill Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 2003).

⁵²⁹ See Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism*.

and to allow that to form the meta-frame or invisible narrative structure behind all their gospel proclamation.

Secondly, songwriters have to take the risk of breaking with form. With CCLI's tracking of the use of songs and their creation of charts which rank them, there now exists an unofficial template for writing popular worship songs. Because ritual involves an adherence to form (Rappaport), it is difficult to try to write songs that depart from the convention. In fact, my brief look at the imagery of the songs which people said brought hope showed considerable overlap in metaphors and themes. Other research has also demonstrated the tendency to get stuck on a narrow band of themes, sometimes within particular movements.⁵³⁰

Nevertheless, as writers begin to use historical theology as a doorway into new themes rather than simply a fence to guard against heresy, contemporary worship songs can expand its range of thematic content. Yet there is a complexity to this solution because even if writers are writing songs with 'creedal Christian hope' encoded in them, there is no guarantee that these songs will find their way to churches or on recording projects. The Christian Music Industrial Complex, as it were, of publishing companies, record labels, artist managers, tour promoters, radio programmers and more make it difficult for new artists and songs to break in. This might be even more difficult if the song is a break from the current form. Perhaps the most successful CCM song related to Christian hope is the 'I Can Only Imagine', a song about an otherworldly heaven. If this song represents the norm for

⁵³⁰ Lester Ruther's collaboration with Vineyard worship leaders Andy Park and Cindy Rethmeier are an example of this on the theme of intimacy (Andy Park, Lester Ruth, and Cindy Rethmeier, *Worshipping with the Anaheim Vineyard: The Emergence of Contemporary Worship*), as is Kate Bowler and Wen Reagan's work on the victory themes at Hillsong (Kate Bowler and Wen Reagan, 'Bigger, Better, Louder: The Prosperity Gospel's Impact on Contemporary Christian Worship', *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, 24.2, (2014), 186-230, in <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rac.2014.24.2.186>> [accessed 6 October 2016]). But more work could be done on various movements like Sovereign Grace, Passion, and more.

the ritual, a new song with considerable thematic variance from it would have an uphill climb to the top of the charts.

The final proposal is more modest, returning the focus to the local church. Pastors and worship leaders can design an intentional gospel-storied shape to the services. This places less stress on the songs and the sermon, the two weightiest portions of an Evangelical worship service. If the service contained other elements that provided a narrative shape, it can mitigate for the lack of narrative within individual songs. After all, no matter how hard a worship leader or songwriter may work, it is not likely that every song in a service will represent the past, present, and future or salvation history. But if there are elements within a service, such as references to the liturgical season, confessions of a creed, or prayers from a historic prayer book, an over-arching narrative shape may be imparted. This was, in fact, the intent of the Saturday evening ‘Word and Table’ service at River Valley. Both the pastor and the worship pastor were able to articulate a clear vision for this, with formation as the goal of their design. Based on the responses from my focus group there, however, one may be tempted to conclude that such intentional designing of the worship service has no effect on the operant theology of congregants. However, I would suggest that such conclusions are not possible from the limited scale and scope of my study. It remains plausible that with better preaching, richer songs, and a gospel-storied shape to the service, that over the long haul, the operant theology of hope within individual worshippers can come to resemble ‘creedal Christian hope’.

8.4. Further Study

There is much more work to be done in the study of congregational worship, and particularly in the field of practical theology. Because congregational worship is a weekly occurrence for most Christians, and because contemporary worship music

is the style which is sweeping the globe with no signs of slowing, much more focused theological reflection is needed. Even within the study of the particular angles I used—hope in contemporary worship—there are many avenues for further exploration. Further work is needed to demonstrate whether the themes and trends I discovered appear again in other contexts. Do other congregations demonstrate a resilient hope? Do other worship services provide the impetus for the experience of hope? Additionally, broader work remains regarding contemporary worship songs. I have analysed only a small selection of songs, songs which people said brought them hope. But to gain a clearer picture of whether these songs represent wider trends within the greater corpus of contemporary worship songs or not, a larger database of songs would need to be studied, at the very least for their verb and pronoun content in way that is similar to my analysis. Nevertheless, my hope is that this research will have contributed to the literature by not adding simply a descriptive or prescriptive perspective. Rather, by engaging in theological ethnography and by narrowing the analysis on the theology of hope as it is both encoded in contemporary worship songs and experienced in contemporary worship services in two particular congregations, this can be an encouragement for further study in the field.

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