

CHURCH MUSIC AND COLOSSIANS 3:16

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In his recent exegetical commentary on Colossians, James Dunn has rightly recognized that Colossians 3:16 "is in fact one of only a handful of passages that give us some insight into the content and character of earliest Christian worship and enable us to say anything at all about it."¹ Ralph Martin goes a step further, declaring that here exists "The best evidence we have that the early church, even in New Testament times, was a singing church."² It is therefore surprising to discover that this crucial verse has not received any in-depth attention in theological journals throughout the years. The present article seeks to rectify this situation and to encourage other Christian leaders to focus their attention—and especially their exegetical and theological skills—on what the apostle Paul had to say about music and worship in the church.³

The problem, however, as William Smith puts it, is that Colossians 3:16, "together with Eph. 5:19, present questions of syntax to which the interpreter is exceedingly hard put to find a certain answer."⁴ He is exactly right. All one needs to do is compare a few of the best English translations of Colossians 3:16 and it will become clear that there is considerable lack of agreement as to what this verse is actually saying.

¹James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 236.

²Ralph P. Martin, *The Worship of God: Some Theological, Pastoral, and Practical Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 51.

³Along with Colossians 3:16, there is the parallel passage of Ephesians 5:18-21 and two important references in 1 Corinthians 14 (verses 15 and 26).

⁴William Sheppard Smith, *Musical Aspects of the New Testament* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij W. Ten Have N. V., 1962) 168.

The NRSV, for example, translates the verse in a way in which each of the three clauses appears to have imperatival force in an independent sense (i.e., they read like three separate commands):

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

The NIV translation is similar, although now the latter two clauses are related to the opening command (suggesting attendant circumstance):

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

The NASB, by comparison, translates the verse quite differently, with the "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" now being connected with "teaching and admonishing":

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Such divergent translations (however subtle the differences may be) raise a basic question that is vital to the understanding of what Paul was trying to say concerning music in worship: How do the various elements of this verse relate to each other? Dunn, in his commentary, considers this very question:

Is it a coordinated series, the instruction explaining how the indwelling takes place, the singing as the means of (cf. Eph. 5:19) or the response to the instruction? Or is it an uncoordinated series, the elements appearing in different combinations in different gatherings?⁵

After raising these important questions, however, Dunn surprisingly fails to provide any

⁵Dunn, Colossians 236.

meaningful analysis of the overall structure of the text! He simply remarks that, "Unfortunately, we cannot tell, though the first clause is certainly the principal clause. Nevertheless, for those with liturgical interests, the details are of more than usual interest."⁶ They are indeed of interest, which is why an article such as this one is long overdue.

The Background and Setting of Colossians

This letter of Paul, written while he was in prison (4:3, 10, 18), is addressed "to the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae" (1:2). Colossae,⁷ a city of Phrygia in the Roman province of Asia Minor, was situated approximately 100 miles east of Ephesus and 11 miles up the Lycus valley from Laodicea.⁸ The population consisted primarily of indigenous Phrygian and Greek settlers (although there were some Jews),⁹ and, consequently,

The Christians at Colossae lived in an environment of religious pluralism. They coexisted with people who worshipped Anatolian, Persian, Greek, Roman, and Egyptian deities and with Jews who were devoted to the worship of one god and the observance of Torah. The manner of devotion and religious expression was quite varied among the different groups.¹⁰

Paul himself did not establish the church in Colossae (nor does he seem to have yet visited there at the time of writing, cf. 2:1; Phlm 22); Rather, this was the work of Epaphras, a Colossian

⁶Ibid. 236.

⁷Mentioned nowhere else in the New Testament.

⁸Churches existed in both of these important cities, and, no doubt due to proximity, the Colossians appear to have enjoyed a special relationship with the believers in Laodicea (cf. 2:1; 4:16).

⁹Peter T. O'Brien, "Colossians, Letter to the," Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993) 147.

¹⁰Clinton E. Arnold, The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface Between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996) 310.

and a "fellow servant" of Paul (Col 1:7-8; 4:12-13; Phlm 23).¹¹ Other Colossians that may be identified with relative certainty include Onesimus (Col 4:9; the runaway slave of Philemon who was later converted by Paul; cf. the apostle's letter to Philemon¹²), Philemon, Apphia (probably Philemon's wife), and Archippus (his son?; Phlm 1-2).

Almost nothing is known of the size of the Christian community in Colossae. There was at least one house church (meeting in the home of Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus; Phlm 2), and perhaps two (if Nympha's house church is located at or near Colossae [Laodicea appears more likely]; Col 4:15). However, regardless of the number of local congregations, it is enough to conclude that such gatherings in a house for corporate worship would have been limited to what the house could hold—probably somewhere between 30 to 50 people.¹³

What is more certain about the followers of Christ in Colossae is that, while there was much about them that gave Paul reason to be thankful (1:3ff), they were beginning to show signs of syncretism, and this deeply concerned Paul and prompted his letter. As Clinton Arnold explains,

The fledgling Christian community at Colossae was perceived by Paul (perhaps through the report of Epaphras) as facing the threat of dangerous false teaching resembling aspects both of pagan religion as well as Judaism (see esp. Col 2:6-23). Making an eloquent case for the sole-sufficiency of Christ in his letter, Paul admonishes these believers not to give credence to the claims of the false teachers but to hold firmly to the Lord Jesus Christ alone.¹⁴

Such is the context to which Colossians 3:16 first spoke.

¹¹Epaphras was likely both converted and commissioned as a church planter during the two and a half year ministry of Paul in Ephesus (cf. Acts 19:10).

¹²Which appears to have been sent at the same time as his letter to the Colossians (cp. Col 4:9 and Phlm 10-19).

¹³See Robert Banks, Paul's Idea of Community Revised Edition (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994) 35-36.

¹⁴Clinton E. Arnold, "Colossae," ABD I, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 1089.

An Exegesis of Colossians 3:16

Colossians 3:16 (along with v. 17) concludes a marvelous passage of positive general exhortations that began in verse 12. Paul wrote these words to the believers in Colossae to encourage them to live out their new life in Christ (cf. 1:10; 2:6-7; 3:1-3), both in attitude and behavior, in order that they might corporately reflect the grace and truth of the Lord Jesus in the midst of a pagan society. These disciples were in fact "God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved" (3:12), and thus the life of the Christian community is very much the focus of these challenging verses.¹⁵

The concluding imperative of this section, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (v. 16), is followed by three participles (forming two clauses) that reveal a well-balanced sentence structure in the Greek that can be arranged as follows¹⁶:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly
in all wisdom
teaching and admonishing one another
[with] psalms hymns [and] spiritual songs
in the grace [Gk., en te chariti]
singing . . . to God
in your hearts

The Imperative of the Verse

¹⁵While Curtis Vaughan believes that "verses 16, 17 focus attention on matters that have to do more directly with the personal life" ("Colossians," EBC 11 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978] 216), Gordon Fee is surely correct in stating that "These are not words for the individual believer, but for believers as the people of God in relationship with one another" (God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994] 649). Cf. Dunn, Colossians 237; and Joachim Gnilka, Der Kolosserbrief HTKNT 10/1 (Freiburg: Herder, 1980) 200.

¹⁶Commenting on this verse over a century ago, Meyer rightly suggests that "The symmetry of the . . . participial clauses, each of which begins with en (en pase sophia . . . en t. chariti), ought not to be abandoned without some special reason." H. A. W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Philippians and Colossians (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1875) 448. Cf. Fee, God's Empowering Presence 653 n. 68; and Richard R. Melick, Jr., Philippians, Colossians, Philemon NAC 32 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991) 303 n. 44.

In the Greek, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" is a present imperative, denoting the on-going nature of the obedience required. The Colossian believers would have understood Paul to be saying, "Let the word of Christ continually dwell in you richly."¹⁷ By "the word of Christ" (o logos tou Christou),¹⁸ Paul meant either "the word spoken by Christ" (a subjective genitive), or "the teaching concerning Christ" (an objective genitive), or perhaps both.¹⁹ The overall thrust of the letter seems to favor the latter understanding here, "the message that centers on Christ"²⁰ (cf. 1:5, 15-20, 25; 4:3; Gal 1:7; 1 Cor 9:12; 2 Cor 2:12).

This Christ-centered message is to richly "dwell" (enoikeito) within the Colossians (or, better, in their midst²¹), meaning that it "is not merely to be present as a resident but it is to be operative as a powerful force."²² The adverb "richly" (plousios; cf. 1 Tim 6:17; Titus 3:6; 2 Pet 1:11) helps to clarify this understanding, with Fee concluding that "the 'riches' of the gospel are to

¹⁷"The present aspect is used in this context to urge continuing and ongoing activity" (Dave Mathewson, "Verbal Aspect in Imperative Constructions in Pauline Ethical Injunctions," Filologia Neotestamentaria 9 [May 1996] 34).

¹⁸"Instead of the unusual expression 'the word of Christ,' which occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, several witnesses substitute the more customary 'the word of God' or 'the word of the Lord'" (Bruce M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament [United Bible Societies, 1975] 625).

¹⁹Dunn writes, "it can denote both the word (gospel) of which (the) Christ is the content, and the word which (the) Christ spoke (Jesus tradition); there is no reason why the genitive form should be pressed to an either-or decision (either objective or subjective)" (Colossians 236).

²⁰Peter T. O'Brien, Colossians, Philemon WBC 44 (Waco, TX: Word, 1982) 206; Cf. Fee, God's Empowering Presence 650; Murray J. Harris, Colossians and Philemon: An Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 166; Eduard Lohse, Colossians and Philemon Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 150; and Michael Wolter, Der Brief an die Kolosser OTKNT 12 (Gutersloh: Gutersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1993) 189.

²¹Concerning the prepositional phrase en humin, Fee writes, "even though it modifies the verb 'indwell' and would ordinarily mean 'within you' [cf. Rom 8:11; 2 Tim 1:14], [it] must here mean 'in your midst' (God's Empowering Presence 649). Pokorny, also seeing the community as a whole in view, translates it "among you," (Petr Pokorny, Colossians: A Commentary [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991] 173 n. 80), as does Bruce (Colossians 157) and, with less certainty, Dunn (Colossians 237). Cp. T. K. Abbott, The Epistle to the Ephesians and to the Colossians ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1897) 290.

²²Harris, Colossians 167.

be present among them with great `richness.'"²³ This would indeed be the case "if they paid heed to what they heard, bowed to its authority, assimilated its lessons, and translated them into daily living."²⁴ Such joyful obedience is precisely the focus of the remainder of the verse.

The Participial Clauses that Follow the Imperative.

As noted above, the command is followed by two participial clauses, both apparently introduced by a prepositional phrase, and both in the present tense (usually denoting contemporaneous action). But what is the significance of these participles in relation to the main verb? Are they dependant on the imperative or independent of it? If dependant, are they to be viewed as adverbial (or circumstantial) participles or do they merely reflect attendant circumstance?²⁵ And if adverbial participles, with which category should they be identified?²⁶ These are not easy questions to answer (as Bible translators have already revealed) but they cannot be ignored if one hopes to understand what this verse reveals about the role of music in worship.²⁷

Determining the Force of the Participles. To begin with, Daniel Wallace soberly reminds us that

²³Fee, God's Empowering Presence 650. Or, as O'Brien puts it, "the gospel is to have its gracious and glorious way in their lives" (Colossians 207).

²⁴Bruce, Colossians 158.

²⁵See the helpful discussion of these two subcategories of dependant verbal participles in Daniel B. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 622-645.

²⁶Most recent grammars list up to eight categories of dependant verbal participles (see, for example, Stanley E. Porter, Idioms of the Greek New Testament, Second Edition [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994] 187-192; Richard A. Young, Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach [Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994] 153-157; and Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics 623-637).

²⁷It is surprising to discover that most commentators say little or nothing about these important syntactical questions. None explore the full range of possible answers before stating a preferred position.

"One's exegetical skills get tested more with participles than with any other part of speech"²⁸ (this alone should cause us to proceed with caution!). The reason for this, as all Greek grammars further remind us, is that "the logical relation of the circumstantial participle to the rest of the sentence is not expressed by the participle itself (apart from the future participle), but is to be deduced from the context,"²⁹ and "frequently several choices seem equally plausible."³⁰ What choices fall within the range of possibility for Colossians 3:16?

1. Imperatival participles? A significantly large number of interpreters believe that the participles occur here with imperatival force (a view reflected in the NRSV translation),³¹ although this is by no means an indication of consensus among scholars—nor do any of those who hold to this view make a particularly strong case for it. Wallace, for example, believes that such a view "should be seriously questioned" here,³² and we must therefore carefully evaluate this position

²⁸Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics 613.

²⁹F. Blass and A. Debrunner, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, trans. and rev. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961) 215. Wallace adds, "The context has more influence on participles than on any other area of Greek grammar. In other words, for most participles, one cannot simply look at the structure to determine what kind of participle it is" (Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics 613).

³⁰James L. Boyer, "The Classification of Participles: A Statistical Study," Grace Theological Journal 5.2 (1984) 169. A. T. Robertson appropriately adds, "only the context can tell, and men do not always interpret the context correctly" (A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research [Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934] 1125).

³¹Commentators include Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, Colossians AB, trans. Astrid B. Beck (New York: Doubleday, 1994) 427; Hans Hubner, An Philemon An die Kolosser An die Epheser Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 12 (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1997) 108; Lohse, Colossians 150 n. 141; and Lightfoot, Colossians 222. Grammarians include James Hope Moulton, "Prolegomena," vol. I of A Grammar of New Testament Greek, Third Edition (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1908) 181; Blass and Debrunner, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament 245; and, with much less certainty, Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament 1133; Nigel Turner, "Syntax," vol. III of James Hope Moulton, A Grammar of New Testament Greek (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963) 343; Stanley E. Porter, Verbal Aspects in the Greek of the New Testament with Reference to Tense and Mood (New York: Peter Lang, 1989) 377-78; and Buist M. Fanning, Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) 387.

³²Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics 652.

before drawing any conclusions.

First of all, it must be kept in mind that "the participle in itself is never imperative" and to view it with such force "is the work of the interpreter to a large extent rather than of the grammarian."³³ This goes a long way towards explaining the problematic nature of an imperatival category of verbal participles. Indeed, as Stanley Porter explains,

There has been a long-standing debate over whether the participle in NT Greek has a commanding sense (imperatival participle) when it is used independently (i.e. when it is not directly dependant upon a finite verb or any other structure, but is clearly linked in some way).³⁴

Some scholars believe that no such category exists,³⁵ while others (in fact a good many grammarians) contend that, while they do exist, imperatival participles are quite rare in the New Testament.³⁶

Interestingly, most of the verses that are considered to be clear examples of imperatival participles are found in Romans 12 (vv. 9-19) and 1 Peter (2:12, 18; 3:1, 7, 9, 16; 4:8, 10).³⁷

Concerning the references in 1 Peter, it is significant to note that in every case the participles are

³³Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament 1133.

³⁴Porter, Idioms of the Greek New Testament 185. See his detailed discussion in idem., Verbal Aspects in the Greek of the New Testament 370-377.

³⁵See, for example, Boyer, "The Classification of Participles" 173.

³⁶"Here we have a peculiarity of Koine Greek, found in the New Testament and the papyri. Only a few examples of it, however, occur in the New Testament" (H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament [New York: Macmillan, 1955] 229). Cf. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics 650; James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Winbery, Syntax of New Testament Greek (Boston: University Press, 1979) 152; and Young, Intermediate New Testament Greek 160. Note also the comment of Gordon Fee: "The so-called imperatival participle is not nearly as certain as some avow" (God's Empowering Presence 719). Turner, by contrast, believes that "it is common in the Koine" ("Syntax" 343).

³⁷So notes Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics 651. Cf. Young, Intermediate New Testament Greek 160.

in fact "used independently of a main verb and occur in a context where the imperative would normally appear"³⁸ (this is not the case with Colossians 3:16, as an imperative actually does appear as the main verb). Similarly, concerning the references in Romans 12, it is important to observe that the seventeen participles that occur in that passage (most of which do seem to express imperatival force) do not appear to be directly dependant upon a finite verb (the three seemingly random present imperatives that appear midway through the passage do not function at all like the command in Col 3:16).

It may be, as some have effectively argued, that the use of imperatival participles in Romans 12 and 1 Peter is due to Semitic influence.³⁹ If this is in fact the case, then we would not necessarily expect Paul to use imperatival participles in writing this particular passage (Col 3:12-17) to the converts in Colossae—most of whom were probably Gentiles.⁴⁰

All of this is not to suggest that the participles in Colossians 3:16 are entirely devoid of any imperatival force. According to D. A. Carson, "When a participle functions as a circumstantial participle dependant on an imperative, it normally gains some imperatival force."⁴¹ The question is whether we should view this as its primary force. The

³⁸Cleon Rogers, "The Great Commission," BSac 130 (July-September 1973) 259.

³⁹A case famously and extensively made by David Daube, "Participle and Imperative in 1 Peter" in Edward Gordon Selwyn, The First Epistle of Saint Peter, Second Edition (London: Macmillan, 1947) 467-488, and defended more recently (presenting a new source, The Manual of Discipline [1QS]) by Philip Kanjuparambil, "Imperatival Participles in Rom 12:9-21," JBL 102.2 (June 1983) 285-288. Cf. C. F. D. Moule, An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek, Second Edition (London: Cambridge University Press, 1959) 180: "A strong case can be made for tracing at least some [imperatival participles] to Semitic influence."

⁴⁰O'Brien, "Colossians, Letter to the" 148.

⁴¹D. A. Carson, "Matthew," EBC 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 595. Cf. Fanning, Verbal Aspect

overall thrust of the discussion up to this point suggests that it is best not to conclude that the primary force of a participle is imperatival (i.e., viewing the participle as independent) when it is clearly attached to a verb (as is the case here).⁴² A. T. Robertson (followed closely by Wallace⁴³) offers this very advice: "In general it may be said that no participle should be explained in this way [as imperatival] that can properly be connected with a finite verb."⁴⁴ As a basic rule this is altogether agreeable, with one important exception: Cleon Rogers has shown that when a verb in the imperative is preceded by a participle (especially an aorist participle), the chief force of that participle may be rightly viewed as imperatival.⁴⁵ However, given that this does not reflect the structure of Colossians 3:16, we are left with the reasonable conclusion that the participles there are something other than imperatival. Carson confirms this understanding when he states that

computer studies of the Greek New Testament have shown that although a participle dependant on an imperative normally gains imperatival force when it precedes the imperative, its chief force is not normally imperatival when it follows the imperative."⁴⁶

Ultimately (and in light of all that has been said above), neither the grammar nor the context provide the interpreter with any particularly compelling reason to see the participles of Colossians 3:16 as primarily imperatival. Other options may prove to be far more plausible, and to

in New Testament Greek 386.

⁴²"Certainly no participle should be explained as an independent participle if there is any other way to explain it" (Brooks and Winbery, Syntax of New Testament Greek 152).

⁴³Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics 650.

⁴⁴Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament 1133-1134.

⁴⁵He supplies numerous examples, both from the LXX and the Gospel of Matthew (Rogers, "The Great Commission" 259-261).

⁴⁶Carson, "Matthew" 597.

these options the discussion will now turn.

2. Attendant circumstance participles? A few commentators imply that the participial clauses merely express circumstances attendant on the main verb (giving the sense of "as you teach and admonish . . ."; a view reflected in the NIV translation).⁴⁷ While this is contextually possible, Wallace gives us reason to doubt that such a designation is best here: the participles do not fit the normal pattern for attendant circumstance.⁴⁸ Further, he notes that "If a participle makes good sense when treated as an adverbial participle, we should not seek to treat it as attendant circumstance."⁴⁹ This is indeed the case with Colossians 3:16, as we shall see.

3. Result participles? Among the categories of adverbial participles that seem to fit here is that of result (expressing the evidence or outcome of the indwelling word).⁵⁰ However, while taking such a view makes a certain amount of contextual sense⁵¹ (and at least one commentator seems to hold to it⁵²), it does not appear to be the best choice.

⁴⁷This appears to be the position of John Eadie, Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians (Minneapolis: James and Klock Publishing Co., 1977; reprint of 1856 edition) 251; and, at least in his translation, O'Brien, Colossians 195.

⁴⁸He identifies five features that occur in at least 90% of the instances of attendant circumstance participles: 1) The tense of the participle is usually aorist; 2) the tense of the main verb is usually aorist; 3) The mood of the main verb is usually imperative or indicative; 4) The participle will precede the main verb—both in word order and time of event; and 5) Such participles occur frequently in narrative literature, infrequently elsewhere (Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics 641-642).

⁴⁹Ibid., 640.

⁵⁰"Although most grammars do not include this as a separate category, such is not due to linguistic principle (contra Young, Intermediate Greek, who calls it 'rather rare' and a 'debated category' [157]). The result participle is usually mixed in with the attendant circumstance participles, following Burton's lead (Moods and Tenses, 173-74). But that is looking at the matter purely from an English viewpoint. The two should be distinguished because of structural and semantic differences" (Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics 637 n. 63).

⁵¹A community in which the word of Christ was dwelling richly would surely be well-equipped to teach and admonish one another.

⁵²O'Brien, Colossians 207. While his translation (195) suggests attendant circumstance participles (which, in his mind, may include the idea of result; see footnote 52 above), his comments on the verse suggest that the participles carry resultive force.

4. Instrumental participles? More likely, the participles here carry either modal or instrumental force—"modal" expressing the manner in which the action of the main verb is accomplished, and "instrumental" expressing the means.⁵³ While the two are similar, Wallace explains that

pragmatically, the participle of manner refers to the emotion (or sometimes attitude) that accompanies the main verb. In this sense, it "adds color" to the story. It could appropriately be called the participle of style. This contrasts with the participle of means which defines the action of the main verb. The key question which must be asked is, Does this participle explain or define the action of the main verb (means), or does it merely add extra color to the action of the main verb (manner)?⁵⁴

This being the case (and given that the participle of manner is relatively rare⁵⁵), it seems reasonable to view the participial clauses of Colossians 3:16 as having instrumental force.⁵⁶ In other words, the way in which the Colossians were to let the word of Christ dwell richly in their

⁵³See James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Winbery, Syntax of New Testament Greek (Boston: University Press of America, 1979) 149-50. Porter does not distinguish between manner and means (both are included in the instrumental category) (Idioms of the Greek New Testament 192). Cf. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament 1128; and Wallace, who explains that "there is much confusion between [the participle of manner] and the participle of means. The reason is that both answer the question, 'How?' However, beyond this initial question, there is usually little similarity." Further, he writes, "Most grammars and commentaries make either little distinction between these two or define manner in a way that is much closer to our definition of means. . . . However, there are usually clear semantic differences. What is at stake is for the most part a terminological issue, not a substantive one. When commentators speak of the 'modal participle' (a term that fits both means and manner), it is best to regard most such identifications as participles of means" (Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics 627). Finally, it may be helpful to note that some older grammars and commentaries use the term "conjunctive" when referring to a participle that carries modal or instrumental force.

⁵⁴Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics 627.

⁵⁵Ibid., 627.

⁵⁶It should be noted that, in their recent commentary, Barth and Blanke reject the possibility of the participles here being translated with instrumental force. However, their argument is based on their understanding of Col 1:6, where they view the "word" being discussed as a sovereignly acting person. This leads them to conclude that "After the elucidation about sovereignty over the world, it would be difficult to agree on a statement according to which the dwelling of this word is brought about through human action" (Colossians 426, 427).

midst was by "teaching and admonishing one another" and by "singing in [their] hearts to God." Such a view makes both contextual and logical sense, and finds support not only among scholars⁵⁷ but in the exegesis that follows as well.

Clause One: Teaching and Admonishing One Another. Looking now at each participial clause on its own, it is generally agreed among commentators that the prepositional phrase "in all wisdom" (en pase sophia) marks the beginning of the first clause as opposed to further qualifying the preceding imperative.⁵⁸ This makes sense both in light of Colossians 1:28, where Paul similarly speaks of "admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom" (emphasis added), and in consideration of the phrase itself, which seems to indicate "the manner in which the teaching and admonition are to occur"⁵⁹ (cf. 1:9; 2:3, 23; 4:5).

The participles themselves, "teaching" (didaskontes) and "admonishing" (nouthetountes; cf. Acts 20:31; 1 Cor 4:14; 1 Thess 5:12; 2 Thess 3:15; Titus 1:11), seem to "describe respectively the positive and negative side of instruction."⁶⁰ They appeared together in Colossians 1:28, where they were used to describe the ministry of Paul and other leaders. Here, however, they are qualified by "one another" (heautous), giving clear evidence that "Paul did not consider

⁵⁷Those who hold to this position include Fee, God's Empowering Presence 651 (see n. 61); Harris, Colossians 168; Pokorny Colossians 174; Meyer, Colossians 448; and David Peterson, who writes, "The lengthy clause in Col. 3:16 beginning with the words en pase sophia didaskontes kai nouthetountes heautous gives a definition of the way in which they are to let the word of Christ dwell richly in their midst" (Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993] 222 n. 7). Interestingly, O'Brien believes that a modal (by which he appears to mean "instrumental") definition is given to the preceding clause. Thus, he says, "As the word of Christ richly indwells the Colossians, so by means of its operation they will `teach and admonish one another . . .'" and, again, "the teaching and admonishing in all wisdom arise from the indwelling of the word" (Colossians 207). This, then, appears to give the participial clauses a resultive force, which is contextually possible but not necessarily preferable (as we have already noted).

⁵⁸See Dunn, Colossians 211 n. 14; and Gnllka, Der Kolosserbrief 200.

⁵⁹O'Brien, Colossians 208. Cf. Harris, Colossians 167; Fee, God's Empowering Presence 652; Barth and Blanke, Colossians 427; and Bruce, Colossians 158.

⁶⁰Lightfoot, Colossians 222.

`ministry' to be the special province of either apostles or office holders."⁶¹ The Colossian believers were to do far more than appreciate and benefit from the service of their leaders; they were to be committed to ministering to each other as well (cf. Rom 15:14; 1 Thess 5:11).

It is at this point that the phrase "psalms, hymns [and] spiritual songs" appears in the verse. Grammatically, these datives most naturally qualify the preceding participles ("teaching and admonishing"), while conceptually they appear more suitable with the following participle ("singing"). However, conceptual problems aside, the former is almost certainly the correct understanding.⁶² To assign these datives to "singing" would create an overload of qualifying statements and destroy the symmetry of the two participial clauses. On the other hand, to assign them to "teaching and admonishing" is consistent both with the unambiguous parallel of Ephesians 5:19 ("speaking [lalountes] to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" [NASB]) and with the fact that "recent study of NT hymnody has shown that within early Christian hymns both didactic and hortatory elements are featured."⁶³ C. F. D. Moule confirms this understanding: "On the face of it, it is not obvious how one instructs and admonishes with psalms, etc.; but there is no denying that Eph. v.19 leaves no choice but to speak to one another in psalms' etc.; and presumably the use of music and utterances of praise may be didactic (cf. I Cor. xiv.26ff)."⁶⁴ This is not to say that teaching and admonishing can (or should) only take place by means of "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" (Paul's letters themselves suggest otherwise). However, the apostle is clearly emphasizing that Christian songs are of great importance in this regard.⁶⁵

⁶¹Fee, God's Empowering Presence 649.

⁶²Supporters of this position include Fee, God's Empowering Presence 652-53; O'Brien, Colossians 208-209; Gnllka, Der Kolosserbrief 200; Pokorny, Colossians 174; Lightfoot, Colossians 222; Wayne A. Meeks, The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983) 146; and Martin Hengel, "Hymns and Christology," Between Jesus and Paul (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 7. Note also the struggle of Dunn, Colossians 211 n. 14 and 237.

⁶³O'Brien, Colossians 209.

⁶⁴C. F. D. Moule, The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon CGTC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957) 125.

⁶⁵Writing at the end of the fourth century, John Chrysostom comments on this understanding of

Excursus: Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs. The question now arises as to whether or not it is possible to differentiate the "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" of which Paul speaks. Was he referring to three different kinds of songs to be utilized in Christian worship, or are the terms essentially synonymous? Historically, there have been some interesting developments. For example, A. A. R. Bastiaensen, in an illuminating and unique study, concludes that

in the Greek Christian world [from the third century onward] a technical terminology had come into being with regard to the songs of the Old Testament: psalmos denoting a "psalm" from the Book of Psalms, humnos the song of the children in the furnace from Daniel [cf. the apocryphal additions, inserted between 3:23 and 3:24], ode the songs ascribed to Moses and to other biblical figures. But this specialization did not prevent other meanings from the Jewish-Christian tradition remaining in use.⁶⁶

John Calvin, at the time of the Reformation, followed the apparently common understanding of his day, namely that "a psalm is sung to the accompaniment of some musical instrument; a hymn is properly a song of praise, whether it be sung simply with the voice or otherwise; an ode contains not merely praises, but exhortations and other matters."⁶⁷ Today, however, the vast majority of commentators would agree with Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, who state that "an exact specific differentiation and a generic ordering of the terms psalmos, humnos, ode are not possible based on their usage in the NT (as well as in the LXX)."⁶⁸ This is indeed what is found.

1. Psalms. The term psalmos occurs only seven times in the New Testament (Luke 20:42;

Colossians 3:16: "Observe also the considerateness of Paul. Since reading is laborious and very tiring, he did not lead you to histories but to psalms, so that you could by singing both delight your spirit and lighten the burden" (In Colossenses, Hom. ix, 2; quoted in James McKinnon, Music in Early Christian Literature [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987] 87). Cf. Hengel, "Hymns and Christology" 80.

⁶⁶A. A. R. Bastiaensen, "Psalmi, hymni and cantica in early Jewish-Christian tradition," Studia Patristica 21 (Leuven: Peeters Press, 1989) 23.

⁶⁷John Calvin, The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philemon, Colossians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprinted 1965) 353.

⁶⁸Barth and Blanke, Colossians 427. Hubner is the most recent commentator to disagree with this position (Kolossier 108).

24:44; Acts 1:20; 13:33; 1 Cor 14:26; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). In Luke's writings, it is clearly referring to the Old Testament Psalms in each case, while this is not so certain in Paul's letters. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 14:26, where Paul remarks, "When you come together, everyone has a hymn [psalmon]," the context suggests that it is highly unlikely that Old Testament Psalms are in view.⁶⁹ Rather, "This probably refers to songs composed by members of the congregation, which they then present in the worship service."⁷⁰ It would appear, then, that Paul was comfortable with using the word "psalm" in a less than technical sense.

In the Septuagint (LXX), psalmos is found in over sixty of the psalm titles, but ode ("song") appears in 36 psalm titles as well (with the two often occurring together in the same titles; e.g., Pss 65-68 [LXX 64-67]). Interestingly, psalmos is also found in the titles of seven of the pseudepigraphal Psalms of Solomon (1st century BC), but humnos ("hymn") is found in the titles of three others, with "no discernable difference in style or content."⁷¹ Usage of psalmos in Philo and Josephus is similarly instructive:

Philo does not have the term, either for "plucking of strings," or for "song of praise" or "psalm." Quoting from David's psalms he uses humnos or one of its derivatives . . . It would appear that he deliberately avoids psalmos, unfamiliar in the meaning of "song" to a heathen audience. The evidence from Josephus points in the same direction. He has psalmos and psallein several times, but always in the meaning of "plucking strings," "playing a stringed instrument." For the psalms he uses humnoi and odai, sometimes together.⁷²

⁶⁹Ralph P. Martin writes, ". . . in a Hellenistic environment such as Corinth there is no certainty that psalmos would be interpreted according to its LXX background [where it occurs frequently in the psalm titles], and in any case the 'hymn' of 1 Corinthians 14:26 seems clearly to be a newly produced composition made available by a gifted member of the church" ("Worship," Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993] 986).

⁷⁰Hengel, "Hymns and Christology" 79. Cf. G. Delling, "humnos, humneo, psallo, psalmos," TDNT 8.499; H. Balz, "psalmos," Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, vol. 3, eds. H. Balz and G. Schneider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 495.

⁷¹Delling, TDNT 8.493 n. 34.

⁷²Bastiaensen, "Psalmi, hymni, and cantica" 17.

2. Hymns. The term humnos occurs in the New Testament only here in Colossians 3:16 and in the parallel verse of Ephesians 5:19. The verb humneo ("sing a hymn") occurs four times (Matt 26:30; par. Mark 14:26; Acts 16:25; Heb 2:12 [quoting Ps 22:22]), with its first appearance (Matt 26:30) almost certainly referring to the singing of an Old Testament Psalm (or Psalms).⁷³ In that passage we find Jesus and his disciples having gathered to share in the Passover meal (cf. Luke 22:15), and their time together ends with the singing of a hymn. Given such a context, it is highly probable that "the 'hymn' here refers to the second part of the Hallel (probably Pss 113-18), which is sung after the concluding prayer of the actual Passover meal over the fourth goblet of wine."⁷⁴

In the LXX, humnos occurs twenty-eight times (with the verb form occurring seventy-one times). This includes appearances in six Psalm titles (Pss 6, 54, 55, 61, 67, 76), as well as the conclusion to Book 2 of the Psalms, where it is stated, "The prayers [humnoi] of David the son of Jesse are ended" (72:20, NASB). Further, turning now to Philo and Josephus, "The term humnos, besides applying to David's psalms, is frequent in both authors in its original broad meaning of "religious song," qualifying even songs in honour of pagan gods."⁷⁵

3. Spiritual Songs. The term ode, aside from its appearance in Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19, occurs in the New Testament only in the book of Revelation, and always with a modifier (5:9 and 14:3, "new song"; 15:3, "song of Moses" and "song of the Lamb"; cf. Col 3:16 and Eph 5:19, "spiritual songs"). This may be explained as follows: "The words psalmos and humnos have in themselves a specifically religious import, whereas the more general ode could more readily be understood as either a religious or a profane song."⁷⁶ However, it should be

⁷³Contra K. H. Bartels, "Song, Hymn, Psalm," NIDNTT, vol. 3, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 669-70.

⁷⁴M. Rutenfranz, "humneo, humnos," Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, vol. 3, eds. H. Balz and G. Schneider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 393. Cf. Carson, "Matthew" 539; Leon Morris, The Gospel According to Matthew (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 662.

⁷⁵Bastiaensen, "Psalmi, hymni, and cantica" 17.

⁷⁶Smith, Musical Aspects of the New Testament 61 n. 7.

noted that in the LXX the word always refers to a song in praise of God (including, as noted above, its appearance in 36 different Psalm titles), and in Philo and Josephus it appears "often accompanying μνος in its broad sense to denote songs in praise of God."⁷⁷

The modifier here, "spiritual" (pneumatikais), agrees in gender with the nearest noun, odais, but it can just as easily be qualifying all three nouns, and this may in fact be the case.⁷⁸ However (as indicated above), "since ode is the widest term, denoting any type of song, and psalmos always and humnos usually bear a religious sense, a restriction of the meaning of ode is apposite."⁷⁹ Pneumatikos itself ordinarily refers to the Holy Spirit, with Fee concluding that "this most likely indicates a kind of 'charismatic hymnody' in which Spirit-inspired, and therefore often spontaneous, songs were offered in the context of congregational worship" (cf. 1 Cor 14:15-16, 26). He adds, however, that "It is doubtful, as some contemporary charismatics would have it, that it includes singing in tongues as well, since one neither teaches nor admonishes with unintelligible words."⁸⁰

To sum up this examination of "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs," it would appear that the three words are not to be understood as representing three specific or distinct categories of Christian song (although the tendency to view them in this way often remains even after studying the terms⁸¹). The New Testament, the LXX, and the writings of Philo and Josephus all seem to

⁷⁷Bastiaensen, "Psalmi, hymni, and cantica" 17.

⁷⁸See O'Brien, Colossians 210; Barth and Blanke, Colossians 428; Wolter, Kolosser 190; and Lohse, Colossians 151.

⁷⁹Harris, Colossians 169.

⁸⁰Fee, God's Empowering Presence 653 and 654 n. 71. Cf. Dunn, Colossians 239; Wolter, Kolosser 190; and Smith, Musical Aspects of the New Testament 61, 79-80. However, based on 1 Corinthians 14, it could be argued that singing in tongues would in fact be appropriate as long as such offerings were followed by an interpretation.

⁸¹It is interesting to note that most commentators, even after confirming the virtual impossibility of differentiation, can scarcely resist the temptation to suggest what three categories of song Paul might have had in mind. For example, Harris believes that the phrase might be referring to "songs from Scripture, songs about Christ, and songs from the Spirit" (Colossians 169). Noted church music scholar Donald P. Hustad goes a step further, seeing "a trinitarian outline here: psalms were prayers to YHWH; hymns

support this conclusion. However, this is not to say that the use of the three terms is entirely insignificant (as Paul was surely expressing more than a tendency to be redundant!). There is indeed "a certain diversity about the terms"⁸² and therefore Paul was probably indicating something of the variety and richness that was to characterize the songs included in corporate worship.⁸³ This much can be reasonably affirmed. The question of what the New Testament church actually sang (e.g., Did the Colossians ever sing any Old Testament Psalms?) simply cannot be decided on the basis of the three terms Paul used here.⁸⁴

Clause Two: Singing in Your Hearts to God. The second participial clause (also dependent upon the opening imperative, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly") is clearly related to the previous one (where the Colossians were called to teach and admonish one another with a variety of songs), although Paul now calls for the singing to be directed to God. This balance is important to understand, and leads Fee to observe that each of the clauses "expresses the twin dimensions of Christian worship—horizontal and vertical—with the various kinds of songs as the `swing

expressed the truth that Jesus was God's Son, our Redeemer; and spiritual songs were a gift of the Creator Spirit" ("Christian Worship: Is this one of God's Terrible Springtimes?," Crux 28.4 (December 1992) 33. Cf. idem., Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing Company, 1993) 146-148.

⁸²Arthur G. Patzia, Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990) 81.

⁸³"Taken together, [these terms] describe the full range of singing which the Spirit prompts" (Lohse, Colossians 151). N. T. Wright adds, "Together, these three terms indicate a variety and richness of Christian singing which should neither be stereotyped into one mould nor restricted simply to weekly public worship" (Colossians and Philemon TNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986] 145). Cf. Smith, Musical Aspects of the New Testament 63.

⁸⁴"It is sufficient here to state by way of summary that the three terms in themselves do not decide the question one way or the other as to what the New Testament church sang" (Smith, Musical Aspects of the New Testament 65). On the question of psalmody in the early church, see J. A. Smith, "The Ancient Synagogue, the Early Church and Singing," Music and Letters 65 (January 1984) 1-16; James W. McKinnon, "On the Question of Psalmody in the Ancient Synagogue," Early Music History 6 (ed. Iain Fenlon; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 159-191; and Hughes Oliphant Old, "The Psalms of Praise in the Worship of the New Testament Church," Int 39.1 (January 1985) 20-33.

component' that conceptually ties the two parts together."⁸⁵

The opening prepositional phrase, en te chariti, is often translated "with gratitude," which is both lexically possible (cf. 1 Cor 10:30) and thematically consistent (cf. Col 3:15, 17).⁸⁶ However, as Fee notes, "there is no other place in the NT where charis means "gratitude" when the article appears with it"⁸⁷ (and te is indeed found here). The article also appears with it in 4:18 (cf. Phil 1:7), giving the sense of "God's grace," and we should read it similarly here. Adding the preposition en, the phrase can be translated "in the grace [of God]" (or perhaps "by the grace [of God]"), probably referring to "our standing in grace that makes such singing come from the heart."⁸⁸ Fee provides this concluding insight: "Thus the focus is not so much on our attitude toward God as we sing, but on our awareness of his attitude toward us that prompts such singing in the first place."⁸⁹

The participle "singing" (adontes, from ado; cf. Eph 5:19; Rev 5:9; 14:3; 15:3), according to the previous discussion, probably carries instrumental force in its relation to the main verb. Thus it further clarifies how the Colossians were to let the word of Christ richly dwell in their midst. With a growing understanding of God's grace, they were to continually embrace the teaching concerning Christ with sincere devotion and great joyfulness, singing the praises of their great and glorious God. This is surely the point of the remainder of the verse.

The phrase en tais kardiais humon ("in your hearts") is often connected with en te chariti, giving the sense of "with gratitude [or grace] in your hearts" (NRSV; NIV; cf. NASB), but it most

⁸⁵Fee, God's Empowering Presence 653.

⁸⁶BAGD 878. Cf. O'Brien, Colossians 210.

⁸⁷Fee, God's Empowering Presence 654. There is obviously nothing wrong with the idea that our singing should be characterized by gratitude (in fact, Col 2:7 [cf. 3:15, 17] affirms that we are to be constantly "overflowing with thankfulness"). Such an emphasis may be implicit in 3:16, but it does not appear to be the meaning of en te chariti.

⁸⁸Fee, God's Empowering Presence 655. Cf. Dunn, Colossians 239; Gnllka, Der Kolosserbrief 201; Lohse, Colossians 151-52; and Harris, Colossians 170.

⁸⁹Fee, God's Empowering Presence 655.

naturally modifies the participle that immediately precedes it. Thus, the phrase should read, "singing in your hearts." This is not to say that the singing should remain in the heart, as if Paul was advocating some sort of silent praise (for nothing could be farther removed from the context). Rather, the apostle is simply underscoring the fact that true worship (when it is offered in song, or in any other way) originates in the heart and is an expression of the entire person (and not just the lips! cf. Isa 29:13; Matt 15:8). As Bruce puts it, "The voice must express the praise of the heart if the singing is to be really addressed to God."⁹⁰

The final phrase, to Theo, makes it clear that such wholehearted singing is to be directed to God. As with the previous phrase, some connect to Theo with en te chariti, resulting in the rendering "with gratitude [or grace] in your hearts to God" (NIV; cf. NRSV), but this is almost certainly incorrect.⁹¹ As Fee explains, "Since the dative 'to God' not only goes naturally with the participle 'singing,' but also stands closer to it in the sentence, it is altogether unlikely that Paul intended it to modify en te chariti (even if he did intend 'with gratitude')."⁹² Thus, singing that is to be directed to one another for the purpose of instruction and admonition is at the same time to be directed wholeheartedly to God.

Some Implications for Music in Worship

What does all of this have to say about the role of music in worship? The following implications (some of which have already emerged in the exegesis above) may be offered as a first step in applying Colossians 3:16 to Christian worship today.

1. Music in worship has a horizontal as well as a vertical dimension. As J. D. Crichton has

⁹⁰Bruce, Colossians 159. Cf. Dunn, Colossians 240; and Lohse, who sees this as a Semitic expression: "Man should not only praise God with his lips. The entire man should be filled with songs of praise" (Colossians 151).

⁹¹Pace N. T. Wright, Colossians 144-45.

⁹²Fee, God's Empowering Presence 656.

rightly concluded,

In the liturgy there is vertical movement, the out-going of man to God. But there is also a horizontal movement. Liturgy is celebrated with others and the relationships between the members of the worshipping community are of the highest importance. Private acts of public worship are a contradiction in terms⁹³

Concerning our music in particular, Paul makes it clear that we are to sing wholeheartedly to God and we are to teach and admonish one another with a variety of songs.⁹⁴

This primarily applies to our attitude and understanding during times of corporate worship. As we gather, we are not merely individuals who are expressing our personal worship to the Lord; we are also members of one body who have the privilege and responsibility of encouraging one another through music and song. Both of these dimensions must be kept in mind. In fact, it may be needful to ask ourselves such questions as, "What am I communicating to those around me during our times of singing to the Lord?" or "How am I building up others as we worship in song together?"

This dual understanding may also be applied to the songs that we select for (or contribute to) our times of worship. Some should be addressed to God, while others ought to be directed to the congregation, and still others may include both perspectives. Nowhere is such balanced worship better exemplified than in the Book of Psalms (see, in particular, Pss 30, 66, 95, and 104, as examples of songs with a dual emphasis). Such marvelous expressions of praise serve as models of the kind of songs and singing that will help the church today maintain the two dimensions of music in worship.

2. Music in worship is an important means of instructing each other in the faith. Paul's great desire in Colossians 3:16 is that the word of Christ would dwell richly in the community of

⁹³J. D. Crichton, "A Theology of Worship" in The Study of Liturgy Revised edition, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold and Paul Bradshaw (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 20.

⁹⁴It has recently been suggested that we struggle with the concept of the horizontal dimension "perhaps because it seems more natural to praise God through music than it does to speak to other people or allow ourselves to be challenged through it" (Wayne A. Mack and David Swavely, Life in the Father's House: A Members Guide to the Local Church [Phillipsburg, PA: P & R Publishing, 1996] 105).

believers, and, according to the text, this is accomplished by means of mutual edification and praise to God through song (keep in mind that the apostle could have emphasized something else here, including preaching and teaching by leaders).

This may be difficult for us to fully understand and apply, but as Dunn writes, "Prior to the invention of printing, hymns and songs were a necessary and invaluable means of implanting Christian teaching—and even after."⁹⁵ Furthermore, truth set to music has the potential to engage the whole person (and not just the mind), as illustrated in the following prayer of Augustine (reflecting back on the early days following his conversion):

How much I wept at your hymns and canticles, deeply moved by the voices of your sweetly singing church. Those voices flowed into my ears, and the truth was poured out in my heart, whence a feeling of piety surged up and my tears ran down. And these things were good for me."⁹⁶

Music is indeed a powerful tool that can strengthen and encourage us in our understanding of and obedience to "the word of Christ."⁹⁷ We would do well to remember this, and to approach our times of singing with undivided hearts and minds that are ready to learn, eager to serve, and longing to glorify the Lord (cf. Ps 86:11-13).⁹⁸

3. Music in worship should be primarily verbal in character. While the emotional impact of the melody can (and should) greatly enhance the message being sung (as noted in the quote above),⁹⁹ it is this message—the word of Christ—that is of utmost importance (cf. Rom 10:17).

⁹⁵Dunn, Colossians 237.

⁹⁶From his Confessions ix, 6, quoted in McKinnon, Music in Early Christian Literature 154.

⁹⁷Which is perhaps why it is to be approached ἑν ᾧ πάντες ("in all wisdom" or "in a wise and tactful manner"). This, of course, has particular ramifications for those who are responsible for planning and leading corporate worship.

⁹⁸For more on the practical implications of the didactic role of music in worship, see Mark Edwards and Allen Walworth, "The Teaching Ministry of Congregational Song," Southwestern Journal of Theology 38.2 (Spring 1996) 33-39.

⁹⁹J. Gelineau appropriately adds that "Melody can allow a text to unfold in a way that allows time for contemplation. Music appeals to the emotions rather than to reason, and this too is important when we

As Richard Melick states,

The medium of music, therefore, must remain secondary to the message it conveys. Music [in worship] is legitimate only when it is a medium pointing beyond itself to the exhorting and encouraging of other believers and the evangelization of unbelievers. Christian musicians must give primary attention to what is communicated and secondary attention to how it is communicated.¹⁰⁰

In other words, we must make sure that our song lyrics accurately reflect biblical truth and are understandable if they are to serve to teach and admonish the community of disciples (cf. our emphasis on intelligibility in the previous chapter). In addition, any instrumental accompaniment that we provide must serve to highlight and reinforce the words being sung.¹⁰¹ Worship leaders, in particular, need to be mindful of these things as they plan and lead corporate worship.

4. Music in worship should be largely Christological in content. Beyond the general implication of being primarily verbal in character, our worship should specifically highlight the truth concerning Christ. According to Paul, there was nothing more important to the life and ministry of the church at Colossae (or anywhere, for that matter) than an ever-deepening Christology. Colossians 3:16 (and the letter as a whole) makes this explicit.

As for music in worship today, we must maintain this Christological focus in our singing. We gather not only to celebrate Christ with joyful abandon, but also to deepen our understanding of who he is and what he has done for us.¹⁰² As Peter reminds us, we are to "grow in the grace

remember that the Spirit appeals to the whole person" ("Music and Singing in the Liturgy" in The Study of Liturgy Revised edition, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold and Paul Bradshaw [New York: Oxford University Press, 1992] 493).

¹⁰⁰Melick, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon 305.

¹⁰¹"Because congregational song is the central musical action of the church, the main function of instruments in congregational song is to introduce and support the singing" (Harold M. Best, Music Through the Eyes of Faith [San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993] 196).

¹⁰²As Everett Ferguson has recently stated, "Christ is the ground and the content of Christian song. Christians sing about Christ. If they sing about God, it is especially what God has done through Christ; if about the Holy Spirit, it is the Holy Spirit as the gift of Christ; if about instruction to one another, it is the life in Christ" (The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996] 269).

and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:18), and our singing should contribute to such growth. Those who compose Christian songs—as well as those who lead us in corporate worship—would do well to keep this primary focus in mind.

5. Music in worship should be characterized by active participation. Paul clearly stated that the Colossians were to teach and admonish one another with singing. In fact nowhere does the apostle ever suggest that the primary role of those gathered for worship is that of an audience. As Robert Webber has memorably and emphatically put it, "WORSHIP IS A VERB. It is not something done to us or for us, but by us."¹⁰³

Therefore, to put it simply, "Music of the congregation needs to be congregational. Old or new or specific styles are not nearly so important as whether unrehearsed congregations can sing the music."¹⁰⁴ Worship leaders must remember this.¹⁰⁵ However, this is not to imply that there is no place for "solos" or so-called "special music" in church; it is only to emphasize that opportunities should abound for people to contribute to and participate in the musical aspects of worship (cf. 1 Cor 14:26). The health and growth of the Christian community depends on it!¹⁰⁶

6. Music in worship should include a rich variety of songs. The diversity implicit in the phrase "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" suggests that all kinds of songs should be utilized in our worship.¹⁰⁷ Again the Psalms are instructive here, as are the various hymns allegedly scattered

¹⁰³Robert E. Webber, Worship is a Verb: Eight Principles for a Highly Participatory Worship (Nashville: Abbott Martyn, 1992) 2.

¹⁰⁴Paul Westermeyer, "What music should we use in worship?" in What is "contemporary" worship?, Open Questions in Worship, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995) 11.

¹⁰⁵As Marva J. Dawn emphasizes, "Those who lead music function only to help the congregation sing better" (Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995] 190).

¹⁰⁶For more on this important aspect of church life, see Paul Westermeyer, "The Future of Congregational Song," The Hymn 46.1 (January 1995) 4-9.

¹⁰⁷However, Russel M. Yee observes that "Even while the basic significance of Paul's meaning persists—that believers should employ a rich variety of music in their worship—the real-life application changes, if only because the available variety of music and people's relation to the music are always changing" ("Shared Meaning and Significance in Congregational Singing," The Hymn 48.2 [April 1997]

throughout the New Testament (cf. chapter 2). Some are joyful expressions of praise and thanksgiving, while others provide us with profound statements of biblical doctrine. Further, some (in fact a great many of the Psalms) give wings to troubled emotions, while others provide words of challenge and encouragement to God's people. And, as we have already emphasized, the vast majority will express some facet of the truth concerning Christ (point 4 above). The list is perhaps endless, and this variety should be reflected in the songs that we sing in Christian gatherings today.¹⁰⁸

In addition, the phrase "spiritual songs," if referring to spontaneous songs inspired by the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 14:15-16; 26), suggests that there is also a need for variety in the origin of the music shared in the context of congregational worship. Long-established songs, such as Old Testament Psalms or Christological hymns, provide a rich heritage of worship expressions for the church, but new expressions are to be just as welcome—provided that they serve to teach and admonish the congregation. According to Dunn, "we should recognize that a lively, spontaneous, charismatic worship (including glossolalia?) continued to be a feature of the Pauline churches (including those he had not himself founded or visited), at least for the full length of his own ministry."¹⁰⁹ Balance is the key concerning the variety that should characterize our times of worship.

7. Music in worship must be expressed with sincerity and devotion. As Harold Best points out, "it is not what music does to us, it is what we choose to do with music, by virtue of the condition of our heart."¹¹⁰ Indeed, according to the phrase "in your hearts," singing is to come

7).

¹⁰⁸There is practical value to such variety in singing as well. Basil the Great pointed this out back in the fourth century: "I think it useful to have diversity and variety in the prayer and psalmody at these appointed times, because somehow the soul is frequently bored and distracted by routine, while by change and variety of the psalmody and prayer at each hour its desire is renewed and its concentration restored" (quoted in McKinnon, Music in Early Christian Literature 68).

¹⁰⁹Dunn, Colossians 239.

¹¹⁰Harold M. Best, Music Through the Eyes of Faith (New York: HarperCollins, 1993) 57.

from the heart, and therefore we, as worshipers, must do everything we can to ensure that we are not merely paying lip service to God (and to one another) when we sing together. May Isaiah's words never be fulfilled among us: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men" (Isa 29:13; cf. Matt 15:8-9).

Furthermore, our whole lives should be a sincere and encouraging "song" to others as well as a sweet sacrifice of praise to God. As the writer of Hebrews put it, "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Heb 13:15-16). Augustine understood this point perfectly: "Let not your voice alone sound the praises of God; but let your works also be in harmony with your voice. . . . To please then the ear, sing with your voice; but with your heart be not silent, with your life be not still."¹¹¹

8. Music in worship is encouraged by a proper understanding of God's grace. Finally, the phrase "in the grace [of God]," if we have understood it correctly, suggests that Christian singing will be greatly enhanced as believers grow in their understanding of God's wonderful grace (cf. Zeph 3:14-17). Paul himself frequently burst into expressions of praise as he contemplated the grace and mercy of God toward us (see, for example, Rom 11:33-36; 2 Cor 1:3ff.; Eph 1:3ff.). Worship leaders would do well to constantly emphasize God's grace, for this will lead not only to powerful, heartfelt worship, but also to joyful obedience where the word of Christ indeed dwells richly in the Christian community.

¹¹¹Ps. 147.1; quoted in Everett Ferguson, "Toward a Patristic Theology of Music," Studia Patristica 24 (Leuven: Peeters Press, 1993) 277.