

Music and worship draw focus of Baptist scholars

January 9, 2017

SAN ANTONIO (BP)—Topics such as the biblical argument for congregational singing and a case for multigenerational worship services are drawing the attention of Baptist scholars.

At the most recent Evangelical Theological Society in San Antonio, at least eight presentations—five by scholars at Baptist-related institutions—focused on worship-related topics.

Case for congregational singing

Jonathan Welch, pastor of worship development at The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, N.C., presented a theological case for congregational singing, arguing Scripture demonstrates at least 10 functions of corporate singing among God's people.

Worship leaders entrusted to select music for worship services should “choose songs that facilitate the full breadth of theological functionality” represented by 10 points he identified, said Welch, a doctor of philosophy student at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Congregational singing praises God, expresses worship in particular cultural forms associated with the singers, can connect worshippers with history, orients believers toward an eternity of worship, allows worshippers to proclaim God's word to each other, expresses unity and solidarity within body of Christ, teaches doctrine, expresses and influences emotions, can be an evangelistic witness and is a type of prayer, Welch said.

“The gospel of grace frees the Christ-follower from the works-

righteousness of singing to please God,” Welch said. “But Christians who abstain from singing practically disavow the 10 theological functions of congregational song.”

‘Radical participatory nature’ of corporate worship

David Toledo, assistant professor of music ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, drew insights for planning and conducting worship services from 1 Corinthians 14. That passage, he argued, “provides the rationale and scriptural basis for the balance of form and freedom that is cherished by those in (the) Free Church tradition.”



David Toledo, assistant professor of music ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, argues for the “radical participatory nature” of corporate worship. (File Photo) Toledo argued for “the radical participatory nature” of corporate worship, noting the Apostle Paul’s teaching that each person in the congregation has a spiritual gift to be exercised in corporate gatherings.

“Congregations must recover the appreciation of the giftedness of the entire assembly” rather than focusing worship services exclusively on talented leaders through a concert-like setting, Toledo said,

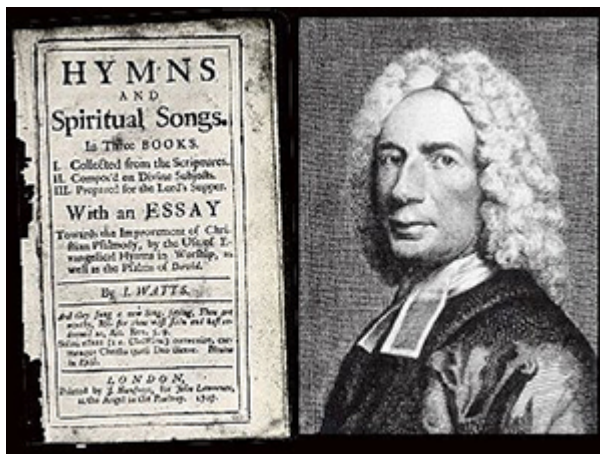
Toledo drew on Paul’s teaching about the use of tongues in worship—although he did not advocate speaking in tongues—to offer insight on corporate prayer. Such prayer should be characterized by

“Spirit-led expression” and “tempered by an understanding that the other members of the congregation must be able to offer their affirmation and endorsement of the spoken prayer.”

Freedom in worship should be balanced by “a fierce commitment to the supremacy of the word of God in all matters of practice and theology,” he asserted.

‘Questionable’ doctrine but memorable hymns

Scott Aniol, assistant professor of church music at Southwestern, argued the hymn writer Isaac Watts expressed his views on the Trinity “in questionable ways” at times in sermons and writings, despite his legacy of hymns with strong Trinitarian lyrics.



Watts, an 18th-century English minister who has been called “the father of English hymnody,” wrote “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” and “Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed,” among other hymns.

Charges that Watts was “less than orthodox in his doctrine of the Trinity” stem largely from works he published in the mid-1720s, Aniol stated. Although Watts seemed to affirm orthodox Trinitarian doctrine earlier and later, he argued between 1724 and 1727 that Jesus possesses “two distinct persons”—God and man. Traditional Christian doctrine asserts Jesus possesses one indivisible person and two natures.

Watts also said he could not reconcile “both the literal deity and literal personality of the Trinity,” Aniol said, and Christ may be due “mediate or

subordinate forms of worship.”

By the end of his life in 1748, it appears Watts reversed “some of his more questionable views from earlier works,” but he continued to argue “belief in a particular explanation of the Trinity is not necessary for salvation,” Aniol said.

In the end, whether Watts rejected a traditional view of the Trinity at some point in his life is far less significant than the lasting impact of his hymns, Aniol insisted.

“Many of his hymns are strongly Trinitarian” and “have inarguably had a more lasting influence upon Christians and their worship than his treatises,” he said.

UMHB professor touts benefits of multigenerational worship

Robert Pendergraft, assistant professor of church music at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, argued the work of developmental psychologist Erik Erikson suggests all generations within a church would benefit from attending corporate worship together.

“Age segregation in worship stunts maturation and growth of the congregants by not embracing the needs of those at varying developmental stages,” Pendergraft said.

“This is not just a critique of those that separate children from the service, but also is directed toward any generational marketing, be it toward children, youth, young adults or senior adults.”

Pendergraft traced the eight life stages proposed by Erickson—a 20th-century psychologist who drew from Judeo-Christian monotheism—and argued aspects of corporate worship benefit individuals at each stage. For example:

- “The presence of children with their parents in worship allows the infant to develop ... trust (in parents) ... and allows the congregation to be constantly reminded” of its need to trust God in the same manner, he asserted.
- Intergenerational worship allows children “to begin mimicking the actions of those in the congregation,” he said.
- In corporate worship, mature believers can “walk alongside” adolescents “who are searching for a place of acceptance and point them toward the right defining source of their identity, the unchanging gospel of Jesus Christ,” Pendergraft said.
- Older adults can observe a new generation of worshippers and “realize they have left a legacy for the future,” he said.

Logistical considerations of intergenerational worship were beyond the scope of the paper, Pendergraft said in an interview.

“All congregants should have parts of the service in which they can cognitively and physically participate,” he insisted.