

In Defense of Repetition: A Philosophy for Planning Music for Corporate Worship

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“Worship is best when the actions of worship are second nature, when we don’t have to be constantly asking ourselves, ‘What do we do now?’ As long as we are thinking, ‘What comes next?’ or ‘Do we stand, sit or kneel?’ we are not worshipping. We are still learning to worship.”²

Carl Schalk, the composer, musicologist, and author wrote the statement quoted above in 1998 after nearly seventy years of being deeply and intentionally formed by Lutheran liturgy. Although significant changes were undoubtedly made to the liturgy during the course of his lifetime, there seems to have been an obvious thread of consistency that would lead Schalk to such recognition. For Schalk, it seems that the “best” worship takes place when the participants are familiar with the pattern of the liturgy. “Best” worship happens when the actions of worship have become habitual, when they are ingrained in the very DNA of the congregants. If one were unaware of Schalk’s background it might seem as though he were arguing against anything new in worship. However, as Schalk is a composer of hymn tunes and choral anthems, he would be arguing against his own livelihood and creative impulse to suggest that nothing unfamiliar has a place in worship. It can thus be inferred that Schalk is not arguing against contemporary elements (in the timely sense of the word), but instead he is suggesting that they must fall within a familiar structure. People can best join in worship that is hospitable and allows for maximum participation without the elements of the service standing in the way of the formation of deep spiritual connections. This leads to the question, how does familiarity happen?

In one word: Repetition. Nothing in life is learned without repetition. Repetition is a powerful teacher, and what is repeated will stick with us, whether we like it or not. Think about that annoying commercial jingle that plays over and over, that even with the best attempts to silence it, finds its way into the soundtrack of life when trying to go to sleep at night or concentrating on a task. Certainly the advertising industry is aware of the inherent power of repetition!

Another prominent role for repetition is in education. It should be noted that repetition is not simply used in the educational process; *repetition is the educational process*. Students of any age learn by reading, hearing, and writing information over and over until it becomes a part of their collected memory. Elementary math students are sent home with pages upon pages of multiplication problems until they know that $7 \times 7 = 49$. Then they come

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² Carl Schalk, *First Person Singular: Worship through Alice's Looking Glass: And Other Reflections on Worship, Liturgy, and Children* (St. Louis: MorningStar Music Publishers, 1998), 13.

back to class and have board races, pop quizzes, and tests until they have mastered the foundational concepts and are ready to move on to the next challenge. Likewise, students of any instrument are forced to learn scales and to practice them until they no longer have to look at their hands or consciously think about technical fingerings. Why should the teaching of the truths of faith be conceived of any differently? Why do we create a dichotomy between learning in different arenas of life?

These questions have recently been at the heart of the thinking and research being pursued by James K. A. Smith, a philosophy professor at Calvin College. His ponderings have appeared in a series of books examining the concept of liturgical formation, and his work is having an impact among a diverse group of writers and practitioners. In a statement from *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, Smith points out the inconsistency of belief among many Protestants.

We, especially we Protestants, have a built-in allergy to repetition in worship, though we are quite happy to affirm the value of repetition in almost every other sphere of life, from study to music to sport to art. We affirm the value of ritual repetition if we're learning piano scales or learning to hit a golf ball but are curiously suspicious of repetitive ritual in worship and discipleship.³

It should be argued here that Smith verges upon using the term Protestant too broadly, as Carl Schalk represents a branch of Protestant faith that falls within a liturgical tradition. However, the point that he is making stands without contention. To further limit the scope of this paper, the following conversation will primarily discuss Free Church Protestants.⁴ Churches within the Free Church tradition have been guilty of neglecting the value of repetition, or as many have argued, have too quickly surrendered to vain repetition.

This paper will examine the concept of repetition in relation to church music biblically and historically in order to set the foundation for a discussion of the value of repetition in current Free Church worship practices. This paper will not seek to make prescriptive statements for how much repetition of texts and/or tunes should take place in a particular local congregation, but instead the goal will be to foster a deeper appreciation for habit-forming repetition among those who are responsible for planning worship within a local context. However, these discussions also bear consideration for those who lead worship in conference settings and in the hallowed halls of theological education. Ultimately, worship planners in any venue must recognize that worship is a formative practice, and those in positions of power must ask what they are forming people into and how valuable tools such as music are being used in the process.

³ James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 181.

⁴ Christopher J. Ellis, *Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 25. In an attempt to define Free Churches, Ellis writes, "It is easier to describe the Free Churches than it is to offer a precise definition because the term refers to a stream of disparate groups and not to a single organization. . . . In some ecumenical discussions the term has referred to what was once called 'the old dissent', meaning Baptists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Quakers, with the later addition of Methodists. To this list we need to add many others—Churches of Christ, Brethren, Independent Methodists, Pentecostals, Independent Evangelical Churches and those newer groups which emerged out of the Charismatic and Restoration movements of the 1970s and 1980s."

Liturgical Renewal

D. G. Hart suggests,

The solution, of course, is not for evangelicals to rediscover the value or appeal of liturgy. Rather it is for evangelicals to take stock theologically of what constitutes biblical worship, the real purpose and ministry of the church, and genuine Christian piety. But that kind of stock-taking would undo evangelicalism. For it would send evangelicals off to the riches of the Reformed, Lutheran, and Anglican traditions where these matters have been defined and articulated and where worship is the logical extension of a congregation's confession of faith and lies at the heart of the church's mission. And it would get rid of those awful praise songs. Keep that thought.⁵

Regardless of Hart's feelings about those "awful praise songs," he expresses a longing for evangelicals to rediscover the riches of the liturgical tradition without adopting the moniker of liturgical. Hart makes a common mistake that only recently has been examined at length by liturgical scholar Melanie Ross in her text *Evangelical versus Liturgical?: Defying a Dichotomy*.⁶ Ross argues that liturgical theologians and lay people alike have been guilty of conceptualizing a "well curve"—one that pits evangelical churches against the liturgical renewal movement and allows for little ground in between. Her unique task is to bridge this divide and to remind thinkers on both ends of the spectrum that they have more in common than is believed and more to learn from one another than they ever could have imagined.

Unfortunately, Hart and other leading evangelical voices continue to fall prey to the dichotomy that Ross highlights. To make her point, Ross quotes the liturgical theologian Aidan Kavanagh who reminds Christians of all varieties, "An aliturgical Christian church is as much a contradiction in terms as a human society without language."⁷ All worship services have some sort of overarching structure, and most free churches follow a more standard pattern than they would often admit or immediately recognize. Ross and Smith are a part of a new generation of scholars who are helping the "non-liturgical" churches to discover the wealth of historical worship practices, as well as to imagine what might be to come.

Worship renewal will ultimately require moving past issues of contention that have caused congregations to remain stagnant for far too long and have specifically led to the "burnout" of those individuals responsible for the church's song.⁸ The issue of repetition has been one of those stagnating contentions, and arguments have been heard over and over against the "7-11" sorts of songs.⁹ Many individuals who have made such overarching claims

⁵ D. G. Hart, *Why Evangelicals Think They Hate Liturgy*, September 25, 2008. Accessed April 19, 2016. http://www.onthewing.org/user/Ecc_Why%20Evangelicals%20Hate%20Liturgy.pdf.

⁶ Melanie C. Ross, *Evangelical versus Liturgical?: Defying a Dichotomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

⁷ Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (Yonkers, NY: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1992), 120.

⁸ C. Randall Bradley, *From Postlude to Prelude: Music Ministry's Other Six Days*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: MorningStar Music Publishers, 2015), 43–52.

⁹ "7-11 Song," *Dictionary of Christianese*, August 13, 2015, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://www.dictionaryofchristianese.com/7-11-song/>. This website's motto is "the casual slang of the Christian church . . . authoritatively defined."

have often not looked closely at the music they deem to be worthy or inspired and have ultimately lacked honesty.¹⁰ At the same time, it must be realized that this is a pastoral issue at heart and cannot be dealt with through sweeping declarations. Discussions of this nature take time and patience, as does the renewal of worship.

Repetition in Scripture

As good Protestants have done since the early sixteenth century, we must return *ad fontes*, to the sources and to the ultimate authority for Christian faith and practice, God's Word. The Bible is a book full of examples of repetition. However, few would claim that any of this repetition is in vain. Each retelling enlightens a new meaning and contributes to the polyvalent nature of Scripture. Just like any great orator or writer, the Bible uses repetition as a tool to provide emphasis. Simply think of the power of repetition in one of the most famous examples from the twentieth century, Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. Not only is this a shining example of repetition used purposefully, but also King, being the consummate preacher that he was, brings numerous scriptural passages to life through his oration. In this section we will briefly discuss the use of large-scale and small-scale repetition and then examine a few passages of Scripture that have implications for the use of repetition in congregational music.

There are several portions of Scripture that repeat almost verbatim entire narratives. Think of the four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Why do we need four books in the Bible that tell essentially the same sequence of events? Two important principles can guide readers. First, the use of repetition in the Bible usually emphasizes the importance of a person, theme, or event. The multiple recountings of the life of Jesus speak to his importance as the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. Likewise, the Ten Commandments are repeated in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 because of their importance to Israel's understanding of God's law. Astute biblical scholars will have no trouble finding other such passages, like the longer narratives in Kings and Chronicles.

Second, the repetition of the Gospels and other such passages allows for stories to be told from multiple perspectives. Each of the evangelists is telling the story to a slightly different audience with a unique purpose in mind.¹¹ Matthew is writing to Jewish readers, and so the book spends a considerable amount of time referring to Jesus as the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy. Luke does not spend time with the genealogy of Jesus as Matthew does, as it seems he is writing to a primarily Gentile audience. The books of Kings and Chronicles function similarly as 1 and 2 Kings are believed to have been written before Israel's exile to Bab-

¹⁰ C. Randall Bradley, *From Memory to Imagination: Reforming the Church's Music* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 53.

¹¹ Richard A. Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus?: A Symbolic Reading* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 18–22. Burridge discusses the way in which the authors of the Gospels write for intended readers, implied readers, and how we understand ourselves to be the actual readers, as the books continue to make demands on us.

ylon, and 1 and 2 Chronicles are written after the Israelites return from the Babylonian Exile.¹² While this type of repetition might not be exact, word-for-word repetition, it is nonetheless valuable. Thematic repetition of this sort in a worship service might mean that a certain song is repeated with a different framing in mind.

Small-scale repetition also abounds in Scripture and is likely most visible for many Christians in the book of Psalms, which has been central to Christian Scriptures, both literally and figuratively. The Psalm texts have held great significance for both Jewish and Christian worship. It is likely that the Psalm texts were used extensively in Jewish worship, and this carries over into the worship of the early church. John Witvliet says it this way: “the Psalter is the foundational and paradigmatic prayer book of the Christian church. Time and time again, worshiping communities have returned to the Psalter for inspiration and instruction in the life of both personal and public prayer.”¹³ The Psalms have been a significant part of every major liturgical reform from the sixth-century monastic communities, to the sixteenth-century Calvinists, and even to the Liturgical Movement of the twentieth century. They truly deserve much more attention than we can give them here.

While there are formalized Psalm types as set forth by Old Testament scholars like Herman Gunkel, there are also generic forms like refrain-psalm. Examples of this type of Psalm are Psalm 42, 46, 59, 80, 107, and 136, among others. These texts heavily utilize repetition and the repetition certainly had a liturgical function when the text was compiled. Likely the most familiar example is Psalm 136 where the phrase “His steadfast love endures forever” is repeated after each line, totaling twenty-six times. Each brief statement serves as the Psalm’s refrain, and they play a significant interpretative role. This type of small-scale repetition, which is so often found in songs in the “praise and worship” genre, provides the worship planner with the opportunity to utilize them with such thematic development when used in tandem with other elements of the liturgy.

Looking outside the Psalms we continue our investigation of Scripture with Isaiah 6. This passage has greatly influenced the way many worship leaders plan and lead services. Donald Hustad writes, “This account of Isaiah’s worship experience is replicated in the order of a Sunday morning service in many Christian churches and also in the macrocosm of God’s self-revelation and human response in all history.”¹⁴ In this significant narrative, we hear the angels proclaiming to one another, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:3). The importance of this repetition must not be overlooked. In Hebrew grammar there is not a comparative way of dealing with adjectives “such as saying good, better, best—and so in order to place emphasis on a word the word is repeated. A triple repeating of a word would be equivalent to the superlative way of looking at it in the English language. For us, the expression would be that God is the “holiest of all.”¹⁵ In his article “In Defense of ‘7-11 Songs,’” Zac Hicks points to Revelation 4, which indexes Isaiah’s vision,

¹² For more commentary on Kings and Chronicles, see Bruce C. Birch et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005).

¹³ John D. Witvliet, *The Biblical Psalms in Christian Worship: A Brief Introduction and Guide to Resources* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 13.

¹⁴ Donald P. Hustad, *Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Pub., 1993), 102.

¹⁵ Chuck Gartman, “Genuine Worship,” Youth Online Bible Study, <http://www.bgct.org/TexasBaptists/Document.Doc?&id=188> (accessed April 19, 2016).

where the living creatures incessantly chant, “Holy, holy, holy” over and over again.¹⁶ While Hicks does not provide a musical example of a “7-11 song” that exhibits the incessant quality of the Revelation 4 passage, “I Could Sing of Your Love Forever” certainly comes to mind as an example of a praise and worship song that fits this paradigm. There are also numerous examples from Taizé and global songs that would function as equivalents, reminding us once again that repetition is not an issue to be conflated with musical style.

Repetition in Pre-Reformation Worship

In the Roman rite of the Catholic Church the term for the chief service is “Mass” (Missa), which is derived from the dismissal at the end of the service: *Ite Missa est*. Luther even retains this term in his first translations of the service into the vernacular, the *Formula missae* (1523) and the *Deutsche Messe* (1526). The Mass centers upon the celebration of the Eucharist, although the service is divided into two main divisions: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Table. There is evidence that by the fourth century, Christian worship was highly developed, and as Christianity was no longer forbidden by the Roman emperor, it was free to flourish.

The liturgy continues to expand from the fourth to the fifteenth centuries, and a large chant and hymnic repertoire develops alongside the expansion of the liturgy. The Roman rite reaches its greatest splendor in the 1500s and is revised and shortened at the Council of Trent in 1562 and again at the Second Vatican Council in 1962, partly in response to the Protestant arguments about the inaccessibility of the Latin language and the excesses of repetition. The Mass is celebrated in three basic formats in the four hundred years between these two councils. (1) The Low Mass or spoken mass, (2) The Sung Mass, the principal Sunday or holy day service in parish churches, and (3) The High Mass (Missa solemnis), which was also sung and frequently involved a choir.¹⁷

The elements of the Mass are divided into two categories, the Ordinary and Proper. The ordinary movements included the Kyrie eleison, Gloria in excelsis Deo, Credo, Sanctus et Benedictus, and Agnus Dei. While the proper movements corresponded to certain times of the liturgical year and certain feast days, the ordinary movements are in nearly every Mass. The Mass therefore deeply embraces repetition. In addition to the same texts being repeated with each service, there is also significant repetition within some of the movements of the Mass ordinary. The Kyrie eleison is one such example. “Kyrie, eleison” (Lord, have mercy) is sung three times, followed by “Christe, eleison” (Christ, have mercy) sung three times, and concluding with “Kyrie, eleison” sung three more times. This repetition provides the worshipers with time to recognize and confess their own sinfulness while magnifying the call for Christ to have mercy. The triple repetition is also understood to be a reference to the threefold mystery of the Trinity.¹⁸ Other ordinary movements also include significant repetition such as the Sanctus, which utilizes the “Holy, holy, holy” texts of Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 as discussed above. William Dyrness reminds us, “even for those who call themselves non-liturgical, the medieval shape of the Ordinary of the Mass . . . is surely foundational for all

¹⁶ “In Defense of ‘7-11 Songs,’” *Zac Hicks // Worship. Church. Theology. Culture.*, May 29, 2009. Accessed April 17, 2016. <http://www.zachicks.com/blog/2009/5/29/in-defense-of-7-11-songs.html>.

¹⁷ Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 175.

¹⁸ Robert Webber, *Worship, Old and New*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 158.

subsequent developments in worship, whether churches followed this order closely or at a distance.”¹⁹

While the Mass includes some repetition, the greatest repetition to be found in Catholic worship takes place in the celebration of the Offices (also known as the Service of the Hours). This practice develops as a part of the monastic tradition, in which the Rule of St. Benedict eventually codified the Offices. However, the convention of praying at stated hours of the day undoubtedly stemmed from Jewish prayer practices. Office worship was the central work of monasteries, although it was also observed in cathedrals and collegiate churches. The monks sought to live out a life of *Ora et labora*, which meant seeking a balance between work and prayer. The daily Offices consisted of eight hours: Matins at 3 or 4 am, Lauds at sunrise, Prime after breakfast, Terce at 9 am, Sext at noon, None at 3 pm, Vespers at sunset, and Compline at bedtime. During the course of each week the monks would pray (chant) all 150 Psalms and the canticles. Catherine Bell argues that the most common characteristic of ritual-like behavior is the quality of invariance, which manifests itself as a disciplined set of actions marked by precise repetition and physical control.²⁰ A comprehensive example of invariance would be the routines of monastic life, which encouraged the ritualization of all daily activities—dressing, eating, walking, and working.

It is important to remember James K. A. Smith’s observation that “Protestants have a built-in allergy to repetition in worship.” The source of that allergy surely is found in the reforms of the sixteenth century. Jeremy Begbie spends a chapter in *Resounding Truth* examining the contributions of the three key theologians of the Reformation: Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli. Here he points out Zwingli’s acerbic reaction to the repetition of Medieval worship.

Zwingli bemoans what he sees as the empty “babbling” of repeated prayers, phrases recited over and over again, for it encourages a degeneration of worship into hypocrisy and empty exhibition. The choral and instrumental music of the Catholic Church, of course, was full of the repetition of words, and it comes in for some of Zwingli’s severest condemnations.²¹

Zwingli, despite being perhaps the most consummate musician of the three principal reformers, is the most extreme in his reaction to Medieval worship practices and takes literally Paul’s admonishments in Colossians 3 and Ephesians 5 to “sing with our hearts” as meaning not to sing with our mouths, but internally. Fortunately, Protestants have recovered in some ways from Zwingli’s fanatic zeal to reform. Hopefully now we can begin to recover an understanding of the necessity of repetition.

¹⁹ William A. Dyrness, *A Primer on Christian Worship: Where We’ve Been, Where We Are, Where We Can Go* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 24.

²⁰ Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 150.

²¹ Jeremy Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 114.

Modern Thoughts on Repetition

Important to worship's shaping of our theological perspectives are the elements of repetition and memory. In the free church tradition, where worshipers do not regularly read prayers, recite the Creed, or speak other liturgies, *music is the only element that benefits from frequent repetition*, and it is the only element beside Scripture that is frequently memorized.²² (emphasis added)

Randall Bradley highlights the theologically formative nature of liturgical worship practices by contrasting the practices to those who worship in the Free Church tradition. What he astutely observes is that while liturgical churches have an abundance of mediums through which to form memories, free churches have to rely heavily upon the medium of music to shape its congregants. Lest we bemoan our sorry state as people in the Free Church tradition, listen to this narrative:

Don Saliers asked a group of older adults which hymns meant most to them, and why. One factor was body memory: people remembered when they first sang the song, and memories of sight, hearing, smell, and touch associated with it. The songs that meant most had been learned in happy social situations and reinforced by being sung on different occasions, in different types of gathering.²³

Whether or not these people were brought up in the free church tradition is beside the point. What is important to note is that this group of older adults powerfully connected their experience of faith to embodied moments of singing. They did not just connect to the text of the song. There was a visceral memory that was shaped and reshaped with every repetition. It seems that spirituality is not just an invisible concept; it is an embodied reality. Robert Wuthnow, sociologist and professor at Princeton, says that spirituality needs "carriers," and artistic objects such as music often serve as indispensable carriers of a person's spirituality. He concludes, "Religious teachings are validated almost aesthetically, through repetition and familiarity."²⁴ Wuthnow's findings validate and affirm the experience of worshipers and help those of us who plan worship to think twice before dismissing any congregant's desire for greater repetition of those songs that have carried meaning for them.

Likewise, Clive Marsh and Vaughan Roberts caution us from disregarding those who might be receptive to popular music that seems full of trite repetition. They write, "Repetition is an important feature in all music, within a single piece, in the act of playing (practicing) and in the act of listening. To be critical of popular music's repetitiveness fails to respect this feature of music per se and by extension disrespects ritualistic dimensions of human life more generally."²⁵

²² Bradley, *From Memory to Imagination*, 144.

²³ Brian A. Wren, *Praying Twice: The Music and Words of Congregational Song* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 110.

²⁴ Robert Wuthnow, *All in Sync: How Music and Art Are Revitalizing American Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 54.

²⁵ Clive Marsh and Vaughan Roberts, *Personal Jesus: How Popular Music Shapes Our Souls* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 7.

Bradley's quote above also mentions how repetition forms our theological foundations. Simon Chan clearly reminds readers of the ancient formula *lex orandi est lex credendi*, which is most often interpreted as "The rule of praying is the rule of belief." This saying, often attributed to the fifth-century monk Prosper of Aquitaine²⁶ can be taken in one of two ways: (1) the church's practice of prayer/worship shapes the belief of the church, or (2) the belief of the church shapes the church's prayer/worship practice.²⁷ Aidan Kavanagh goes so far as to say "the liturgy is 'primary theology' from which 'secondary theology' or doctrines are derived."²⁸ In his own discussion of primary and secondary theology Chan writes, "Protestants are generally more favorably disposed toward the idea of doctrine's shaping worship."²⁹ The idea that what we do in worship might shape our theology should cause many churches to reconsider their weekly worship practices.

While James K. A. Smith is writing about the concept of formation related to formal institutions of Christian education, a vast majority of his assertions have direct application to localized worshiping communities. Allow me to quote at length from a passage he uses to discuss how Christian worship has failed to recognize the formative powers of repetition.

Having fallen prey to the intellectualism of modernity, both Christian worship and Christian pedagogy have underestimated the importance of this body/story nexus—this inextricable link between imagination, narrative, and embodiment—thereby forgetting the ancient Christian sacramental wisdom carried in the historic practices of Christian worship and the embodied legacies of spiritual and monastic disciplines. Failing to appreciate this, we have neglected formational resources that are indigenous to the Christian tradition, as it were; as a result, we have too often pursued flawed models of discipleship and Christian formation that have focused on convincing the intellect rather than recruiting the imagination. Moreover, because of this neglect and our stunted anthropology, we have failed to recognize the degree and extent to which secular liturgies do implicitly capitalize on our embodied penchant for storied formation. This becomes a way to account for Christian assimilation to consumerism, nationalism, and various stripes of egoisms. These isms have had all the best embodied stories. The devil has all the best liturgies.³⁰

The truth is that we in the Free Church tradition would like to believe that our theology drives our worship praxis, but it could be argued that this is rarely the case. Smith calls out the fact that churches have neglected the habit-forming repetitive practices inherent in Christianity and instead have allowed secular liturgies to inform the way we worship.

²⁶ Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 48. The actual phrase from Prosper is *legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*: "Let the rule of supplicating establish the rule of believing."

²⁷ Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 137.

²⁸ Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 7–8.

²⁹ Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, 49.

³⁰ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 39–40.

Application for Church Musicians

The final section of this paper will seek to provide some application for local church musicians in regard to creating habit-forming repetition. It must be recognized that there are a multitude of factors at play when designing or curating worship.³¹ In fact, shelves of books have been written in just the past few years about planning worship, and it seems that worship renewal as it has been described here is becoming a topic of conversation in Free Church and more broadly Protestant worship gatherings like the Calvin Symposium on Worship and the National Worship Leader Conference. However, in the many books recently published or the national conference gathering, very few authors and speakers have discussed building a canon of congregational song repertoire for a particular congregation with the concept of repetition in mind. This congregation might be in a local church context, a conference setting, or a seminary chapel that occurs weekly or daily.

Let us not simply ask if a song is too repetitive and therefore use repetition as a criterion for throwing songs out of the canon, but we might also need to ask how often are we repeating these songs? In a day when hymnals no longer hold the entire canon of what is sung in worship, possibilities of what could be sung in worship are seemingly limitless. While many worship leaders will understand this proliferation of congregational song choices to be a healthy step forward, it also brings with it a set of problems that must be discussed. Where do leaders find new songs? What attributes make a song suitable for congregational use? What criteria are used to determine if a song would be edifying for a particular congregation? As a worship planner's knowledge of the broad spectrum of liturgical music expands, it becomes increasingly difficult to plan with repetition in mind.

Sandra Van Opstal, a leader in the movement toward multicultural worship in North America, has posed many related questions in her recently released *The Next Worship: Glorifying God in a Diverse World*. One of the arguments she makes is that "one of the greatest challenges of our generation is that people make choices based almost exclusively on preferences. We have hundreds of restaurant choices, and if we want to stay home we order online or call. The options are endless. And we view our Christian practices (church, podcast, worship) similarly."³²

It must be noted that the principal responsibility for what is sung in worship falls to those in positions of leadership, and all too often leaders fall into the traps of eclecticism and contemporaneity. Mike Harland, director of LifeWay Worship, the music arm of LifeWay Christian Resources, published a blog post in 2010 lamenting that "They are Not Singing Anymore." One of Harland's main points is that congregations are not singing because they no longer know the songs they are being asked to sing. He writes, "by the time a worship leader brings a new song to the church, he or she will have lived with it for weeks and grown in their familiarity with it. The worshippers in our churches should have the same opportunity

³¹ Mark Pierson, *The Art of Curating Worship: Reshaping the Role of Worship Leader* (Minneapolis, MN: Sparkhouse Press, 2010). The term "curating" worship has been coined by emergent church pastor Mark Pierson in order to discuss how pastors shape and design worship much like a museum or great art exhibit is curated.

³² Sandra Van Opstal, *The Next Worship: Glorifying God in a Diverse World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 27.

before springing it on them on a Sunday morning.”³³ It must also be noted that musicians are trained to digest music by sight-reading quickly, performing, and then moving on to the next piece in the repertoire. Congregations are not trained in this way and enjoy the repetition that often drives worship leaders crazy.

To draw a few conclusions from our study of repetition in Scripture, it should be mentioned that worship planners must think with large- and small-scale repetition in mind. Large-scale repetition of congregational song would necessitate asking “what songs is my congregation singing over a given period of time?” What themes are being expounded upon? Planning with these sorts of questions in mind will mean that the worship planner must have in mind the goal of long-range sustenance instead of simply finding songs that match the sermon theme each week. A good practice for worship planners is to keep records of how often songs are used.³⁴ This may seem pedantic, but the practice will ultimately allow leaders to monitor the frequency with which particular songs are used and manage thematic/musical content.

Small-scale repetition might refer to repetition of themes, musically and textually, within a singular service or even a particular song. Michael Hawn speaks and writes extensively about the value of cyclic musical forms. Cyclic forms are textually and musically compact and can be sung with little or no reference to printed text or music once the song has become familiar. Most congregations can quickly latch onto these simple melodies. Hawn writes, “one of the common misunderstandings about cyclic structures by those trained in Western classic hymn traditions is that they are repetitive. While this appears to be the case on the surface, I have observed that the enliveners of cyclic songs creatively vary nearly every cycle in some modest way.”³⁵ Hawn uses songs from Taizé and songs from around the globe as examples of cyclic songs, exhibiting that cyclic song embraces a variety of musical styles.³⁶ Many modern worship songs also incorporate cyclic structures, which can become the source of conflict as previously mentioned with 7-11 songs. It is important to note here that the form and function of cyclical songs is different from that of traditional hymnody with a strophic form. Worship planners should be careful not to attempt one form to perform the function of the other.

As previously mentioned, there are a plethora of concerns for church musicians, and repetition is simply one. Jeremy Begbie helpfully reminds us of the value of context when discussing repetition:

³³ Mike Harland, "They Are Not Singing Anymore...," *Worship Life*, October 28, 2010, accessed April 4, 2016, http://worshiplife.com/2010/10/28/they_are_not_singing_anymore/#.UdeORm37my0. Greg Scheer makes a similar point saying, “the worship leader sings each song ten or twenty times more during preparation than the congregation does during worship, so the temptation is to move on to new material quickly. This can be a disastrous impulse!” (Greg Scheer, *The Art of Worship* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006], 86).

³⁴ Brian A. Wren, *Praying Twice: The Music and Words of Congregational Song*, 112. Wren makes this suggestion, along with several others, in a very practical exploration of the formative nature of congregational songs.

³⁵ C. Michael Hawn, *One Bread, One Body: Exploring Cultural Diversity in Worship* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2003), 134.

³⁶ For several expositions about the role of repetition in the music of Taizé, see Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis, "Overt Participation, Implied Participation," in *On Repeat: How Music Plays the Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Judith Marie Kubicki, *Liturgical Music as Ritual Symbol: A Case Study of Jacques Berthier's Taizé Music* (Leuven: Peeters, 1999).

The way in which musical repetition will function and be received in any particular setting depends on a vast network of constraints—acoustics, expectations, the music people are used to hearing, biological makeup, the way the music is introduced, and so forth. We can properly highlight theological resonances in musical repetition in a way that is highly instructive for theology and, by implication, for the way music is used by the Church. But this does not mean that we can instantly translate our findings into a project which outlaws some types of music and promotes others in order to guarantee a specific theological “effect” on the hearers. Musical communication depends on a complexity of intersecting variables; any intelligent enquiry into the effects of music would do well to remember this complexity.³⁷

It is encouraging that church musicians in Free Church contexts are following in the trend to begin thinking deeply and intentionally about the habit-forming rituals inherent in Christian worship. Seeking to recognize the variety of contexts within and outside of this tradition, this paper has sought to raise questions instead of pose answers. However, these questions have been raised with the biblical and historical contexts of repetition clearly in view. Hopefully as the church embraces its memory and imagines a new future, worship planners can remember that as Debra and Ron Rienstra say, “Repetition is only meaningless when we don’t mean it.”³⁸

³⁷ Jeremy Begbie, *Theology, Music, and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 175.

³⁸ Debra Rienstra and Ron Rienstra, *Worship Words: Discipling Language for Faithful Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 83.