

## NEWS & OPINIONS

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# Pain-free Songs in the Evangelical Approach to Suffering

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### Text

The contemporary worship music that since the 1970s has enjoyed increasing popularity in evangelical congregations around the world almost entirely lacks direct expressions of pain and suffering. Yet the worship styles employing this music are perceived by many evangelicals to be part of the church's effective response to their personal pain, and these styles and songs have been part of the church's effective evangelistic appeal even in areas where, to many Americans' thinking, pain and suffering are a regular way of life. They merit attention not only for this reason but also because they reflect and influence the mindset that many American missionaries take to the field.

These styles express a re-emergence of musical creativity after several decades of relative quiet. As you may know, at the turn of the twentieth century theologically conservative Christians in North America essentially stopped writing popular worship music, beginning to do so again only some 60 to 70 years later. This is evident in almost any church hymnal's listing of the dates the lyrics and tunes were composed. Most evangelical churches' hymnals contain a large number of songs from the middle and late nineteenth century, and then almost nothing from the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> The re-emergence of popular sacred song-writing came from an unexpected source, the out-pouring of creativity sparked by the confluence of rock-and-roll and protest music in the 1950s, 1960s, and after. Initially vilified by evangelicals as the work of the devil, the new music turned out to provide the dominant new idiom for expressing the spiritual

preoccupations of evangelicals as the world moved into the twenty-first century.

This efflorescence is found not only in the music composed in explicitly contemporary styles; even relatively traditional-sounding worship music has found new expressions. John D. Witvliet has observed that "more hymns in traditional forms have perhaps been written in the last thirty years than in any period except during Charles Wesley's lifetime" (2004, 164). Yet it is the style that is commonly labeled "contemporary" that I want to focus on here. This is the style that, in lieu of hymnbooks, employs so-called "praise choruses" written, typed, or downloaded for overhead projection and accompanied by amplified guitars, keyboards, and percussion, or as much as of the three as can be assembled, sometimes supplemented by additional instruments.

Today, a significant and still growing number of Christians in North America and around the world worship in these idioms. And what I want to note is that it was not just the musical settings and presentation styles that changed with the times. There have also been changes in the preoccupations of the lyrics.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the musical handling of pain and suffering. Expressions of pain, and the notion that additional pain might be expected in the future, were fairly directly expressed in hymns from the nineteenth century. In the new music, by contrast, these expressions are almost entirely absent, being expressed obliquely, if at all.

Consider, for example, "My burdens at last I'll lay down" in *The Old Rugged Cross* or the reference to "many dangers, toils, and strife" in *Amazing Grace*. Consider also the beleaguered imagery of *A Mighty*

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<sup>1</sup> There are, of course, some well-known exceptions, such as *Oh, the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus* and *How Great Thou Art*. But the volume of musical production, and the rate of adoption of new pieces in worship settings, was not as great as it has been more recently.

*Fortress Is Our God*, the violent imagery of *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, and especially the angst of the Negro spirituals that have been borrowed into the liturgical language of white churches (*Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child*; *Tell Ol' Pharaoh to Let My People Go*). To take just one of the latter songs at random, in the Negro spiritual *I Want Jesus to Walk With Me* there are references to “trials,” to a time “When my heart is almost breaking,” and references to “When I’m in trouble” and “When my head is bowed in sorrow.”<sup>2</sup>

The contrast is even more apparent if we consider the expressions of pain in the pages of scripture. They are readily available in most of the Psalms (e.g., Psalms 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and many more), much of the prophets, the books of Ecclesiastes and Lamentations, and of course in the voices of the martyrs beneath the altar in Revelation 6:10 (“How long, Sovereign Lord . . . until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?”). Consider these examples of ongoing angst:

How long, LORD God Almighty,  
will your anger smolder  
against the prayers of your people?  
You have fed them with the bread of tears;  
you have made them drink tears by the bowlful.  
You have made us an object of derision to our  
neighbors, and our enemies mock us.  
(Psalms 80:4-6)<sup>3</sup>

Save me, O God,  
for the waters have come up to my neck.  
I sink in the miry depths,  
where there is no foothold.  
I have come into the deep waters;  
the floods engulf me.  
I am worn out calling for help;  
my throat is parched.  
My eyes fail,  
looking for my God.  
(Psalms 69:1-3)

Oh, that my head were a spring of water  
and my eyes a fountain of tears!  
I would weep day and night  
for the slain of my people.  
(Jeremiah 9:1)

And, of course, the Apostle Paul expresses the pain of his personal sufferings in the following passage in Romans:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?  
Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine  
or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;  
We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”  
(Romans 8:35-36, quoting Psalms 44:22)

By contrast, in the songs that have made the top 25 lists compiled by the CCLI (Christian Copyright Licensing International) from 1989 to 2004, the expression of suffering is largely replaced by the expectation of victory, by talk of the bliss of the presence of God, and by songs magnifying the person of God.<sup>4</sup> It is not that pain is overlooked altogether, but in these songs it is not nearly as up-front and in-your-face as it is in the pages of scripture.

The primary themes of this music are such things as the greatness and goodness and majesty of God (*Majesty, Awesome God, Glorify Thy Name, All Hail King Jesus, Above All*), our love for God (*As the Deer, I Love You Lord*), and our offerings of praise and gratefulness to God (*Give Thanks, We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise, He Is Exalted, Lord I Lift Your Name On High, Here I Am to Worship, I Exalt Thee, Arise and Sing*). There are also references to the blessings that God has bestowed (*He Has Made Me Glad, Thy Lovingkindness, Forever God Is Faithful*) and to the need to allow God to rule in us (*I Give You My Heart, Lord Reign In Me, Lord Prepare Me to Be a Sanctuary* [titled *Sanctuary*]). These titles could be multiplied with additional references.

<sup>2</sup> Wording is as it appears in *With One Voice*, published by Augsburg Fortress, number 660.

<sup>3</sup> All Biblical quotations are from Today’s New International Version (TNIV), copyright 2005 by the International Bible Society.

<sup>4</sup> CCLI is a relatively good tool for monitoring popularity, for CCLI is the primary means of registering and paying royalties for songs that are reproduced individually within congregations rather than purchased in pre-packaged books by people outside. This format is more consumer-driven than publisher-driven, and for that reason may be a good way of getting at the pulse of what is being done in the churches.

It is not that there are no references to pain at all. For example, the line “And As I stumble in the darkness / I will call Your name by night” from the song *God of Wonders*. And in the song *Blessed Be Your Name* there are repeated references to pain, as in lines such as “when the darkness closes in” and “When I’m found in the desert place” and “On the road marked with suffering / Though there’s pain in the offering”—all of these are pretty straightforward expressions of awareness of suffering.

But in the newer music most such expressions tend to appear in individual lines rather than in extended passages. Even in *Blessed Be Your Name*, which was reportedly written in response to the death of a loved one, the lines expressing pain are outnumbered by the lines expressing praise to God. You can even count them. Out of 28 lines in the lyric sheet, there are 15 that contain the words “blessed” or “blessing” or “praise,” more than the number of lines expressing pain, suffering, and loss. Moreover, each couplet expressing pain is balanced by another couplet expressing a blessing. So this song, which might have been intended as a lament, devotes 3/4 of its lines to expressions of praise and gratefulness.

Among the other most widely used songs, references to problems are often expressed as troubles that happened in the past and are already giving way to victory. We see this assurance of victory in titles like *I’m Trading My Sorrows*. We see it also in the repeated refrain “Nothing is too difficult for Thee” in the song *Ah Lord God*. We hear it in the verse “Arise and sing ye children of Zion / For the Lord has delivered thee” from the song *Arise and Sing*.

There are also references to God as a place of refuge, as in the lines “You alone are my strength my shield,” in the song *As the Deer*. And there are times when the sense of God as refuge overlaps with needy-sounding expressions of love for God, as in the song *Breathe* (“And I I’m desperate for You/And I I’m lost without You”).

But this is about as edgy as it gets. In the corpus of the most widely used worship songs, there are no equivalents of the imprecatory Psalms, nor are there sustained lamentations of the kind that are common in the Bible. So oblique are the expressions of need that sometimes it is not clear if the songs calling for God’s aid are speaking of material help or of a metaphorical kind of assistance provided through salvation, as in these lines from *Give Thanks*: “And now let the weak say/ I am strong / Let the poor say / I am rich / Because of what / The Lord has done for us” (is it speaking of

weakness of soul? or of material needs?). And the idea of a peace of mind coming from God is stated boldly in songs like *Holy Ground*: “Peace of mind can still be found / If you have a need / I know He has the answer / Reach out and claim it child / You’re standing on holy ground.”

The preference for praise and the avoidance of direct expressions of pain has been observed among evangelicals not only in North America but also abroad, where American songs are often used in translation. Take this example from an observer of churches in Russia:

I recently visited a Baptist church in Siberia. Most if not all the songs that were sung in the service were translations of praise choruses which I have heard sung in American churches. I no longer hear so many of the Russian hymns that express the deep suffering of the people of God during times of trouble and persecution, the hymns which express a deep longing for God in the darkness of this world. (Marsden 2005)

The emphasis on the positive—which at one time was expressed even in the use of the term “praise and worship” as the commonly used term for contemporary worship music—has led some commentators to complain that in worship services today the musical and lyrical palette has gotten so reduced as to be insufficiently grounded in biblical notions of God. While the complaint is aimed most often at contemporary styles of music, some apply it also to present-day uses of the more traditional formats, suggesting it expresses a deeper cultural pattern.

Terry York (2003, 54), for example, in his book *America’s Worship Wars*, has complained that the contemporary worship style is often “imported” as a kind of “para-worship,” layered onto or replacing what had gone before as a “shortcut” that builds on work done by others (to be fair, he applied this complaint to all styles of worship, not just to “contemporary worship” styles) rather than developing it out of the congregation’s own life (to tell the truth, I’m not sure what he is asking for—pre-packaged worship has been around as long as there have been hymnbooks and liturgies—but the complaint is worth noting).

And there is concern that the purpose and meaning of the songs may be drowned out in the very act of singing them, though this problem, again, is not unique to the contemporary style. John D. Witvliet has recounted an anecdote in which he used a printed

bulletin to ask the children of a congregation, apparently one using a relatively traditional style of service, to identify what was happening in the various parts of the order of service. After identifying prayers as “talking to God” and scripture readings as “God talking to us,” the children identified the opening hymn as simply “there we are singing,” even though the words were expressing a prayer. Witvliet concluded, “So often we experience music in worship not as a means of praying or proclaiming the Christian gospel but as an end in itself. This is not only a problem for children in worship but also for adults—and for the musicians that lead them in worship” (2004, 170).

For example, Marva Dawn, in her well-known work *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*, complains of a tendency for contemporary worship to overfocus on “happiness” and “upbeat worship” (1995, 87-89). In a complaint that apparently applies, again, to the full range of worship settings, not just to contemporary styles of praise and worship, she calls for widening the lyrical repertoire to include references to God’s justice, his mercy, and his truth, and she calls for lyrics to provide more specifics on the ways his love is made manifest. In particular, she calls for a greater use of songs of lament and repentance (1995, 90-93), saying,

In our present world, in spite of the cultural optimism of the United States, we find ourselves facing the realities of loneliness, unemployment, violence, worldwide political and economic chaos, family disruptions, brokenness and suffering, the fragmentation of postmodern society. Keeping God as the subject and object of our worship enables us to deal with the darkness by lamenting it, by complaining about it. (1995, 91)

She goes on to suggest, following Walter Brueggemann (1984), that the failure to use such music is an expression of what she calls “the shallow fearfulness of some contemporary worship” (1995, 92).

So it is remarkable that this music, so free of direct expressions of pain, should be so popular in churches around the world, for much of the growth in evangelical Christianity has come in areas—such as Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe—where by American standards difficulty is a normal way of life (on the growth of the church in non-North American areas, see Jenkins 2002; Johnson 2005). And even in countries where the economic and cultural tenor are more optimistic, as it allegedly is in the United States

(though I should note that in the city where I live the optimism is harder to find these days), the music appeals even in churches where many of the congregations’ members live in personal experience of pain.

## Thesis

For many in these congregations there is a feeling that singing this music expresses not an *avoidance* of pain but a *response* to their pain. I first became aware of this response in the place where I first encountered the music—among the evangelicals in Thailand, primarily but not exclusively the Pentecostals.

When I encountered this music in the 1980s, it was being used in church worship primarily by self-identified Pentecostals and charismatics. (Widespread use by non-Pentecostal churches came later.) Even in the United States, this worship form was still relatively new. Just 15 years earlier, the use of contemporary rhythms, even in youth choirs, was often viewed as a novelty to be tolerated, at best. But by the middle of the 1980s the “contemporary Christian music” format had become popular on the radio here in the United States, and the music had become widely incorporated in Pentecostal and charismatic services. So much was this the case that in the middle of the 1980s services employing contemporary choruses tended to be called “charismatic” even if they were not associated with distinctively charismatic practices such as speaking in tongues.

Whatever its uses today (and we know that cultural forms can diffuse independent of their meanings), at the time I first encountered the form it was associated with an explicit theology of accessing divine power, and it was taught that active participation in the music could bring a special measure of the divine presence. Thai worshippers spoke of using the occasion as an opportunity to *samphat Phrajao*, which might be translated as “receiving a touch from God” or “feeling God’s presence.”

In conversion stories I collected from Thai converts to Christianity, and not just Pentecostal ones, there were frequent references to emotional release in the context of worship. For these people, worship created space—both in the singing itself and in the physical space where it happened—in which emotions could be expressed that might not have an equal outlet at home. In some cases, especially for relatively new converts, this perception of emotionality was linked directly with the sense of the presence of God. For

example, listen to this account from a conversion story I recorded. In this case, it was through observing the emotional release of a fellow-worshipper that the young woman said she first perceived the presence of God, an experience that played an important role in her conversion story. The following gives an idea of how it was said to work:

When I was in the meeting place for the worship service, I didn't know anything about what they were doing, so I watched them, wondering why they were doing this and that. Many people had their eyes closed.

While she did not provide details of the service, the following comments are worth noting:

My friend had said to me that if I wanted to know God, then I should try thinking of God and see what happens. So I turned my thoughts to God, and I felt love. It came on its own. I felt warmth (*op um*), too, like there was some great and important person that was present there.

I looked around at the others who were in the midst of worshipping God. I looked at the friend beside me, who was kneeling on the floor and crying, the friend who had brought me. I didn't understand why she was crying. She said that she had been singing along with the others, and the tears had started to flow.

I still didn't understand, [but] it was like there was a warmth in the middle of me. It's hard to explain.  
(reprinted from Zehner 2003, 110-111)

Now the context of this account hints at the kind of unregimented yet programmed freedom that at the time was associated with charismatic worship services. Here we are, in the midst of a service, in the midst of the songs, and we have a person kneeling and crying at the sense of God's presence and another person being warmed by observing her and also by the context in which it happened. This was actively encouraged in that setting.

Note that this sense of presence could be associated quite strongly with the kinds of contemporary songs we have been talking about, for, as we saw earlier, popular praise songs have been oriented explicitly toward that

awareness of God. The language of the time spoke of God "inhabiting" the praises of his people, and suggested that in him and in his praise was a "sanctuary," a place separate from the mundane. Whether or not the songs actually invoked God's presence in any material sense, which the language of the time implied, they certainly encouraged an *awareness* of that presence.

Some converts cited this collective awareness of the presence of God as one of the most attractive things about the Christian services. It was as if the worship songs brought God near. As one Pentecostal preacher told me, for many visitors new to the format, it was as if in the worship service they had gone to heaven, a place apart from the cares of daily life. When the worship was "working," it provided a kind of displacement of troubles, encouraging people to focus on God not only as escape but as a step toward potential solutions, and of course as a practice of spiritual deepening.

Whether this should be viewed as most fundamentally a case of escape or of spiritual deepening is separate from the issues I am prepared to discuss here, and there were many even in the leadership of such churches who questioned the extent to which this sense of God's presence actually provided spiritual or emotional resources people could take home with them. However, I should note that this expectation that worship should invoke a sense of God's presence is not unique to the Thai churches of the 1980s. Indeed, it may be a universal evangelical yearning. John D. Witvliet (2004, 168), for example, refers to churches in the United States "striving to make God *present*" (emphasis in the original) through the worship experience, regardless of the style of music employed.

In the Pentecostal setting as I encountered it in urban churches in Thailand, there were a number of techniques being used to invoke this presence while opening up spaces for personal expression. One was the repetition of songs, which for some worshippers created a meditative space in which they could reflect on the meaning of the refrains. Another was the practice of simultaneous congregational prayer, which at the time was common in the urban non-Pentecostal churches as well.<sup>5</sup> A third was a set of practices that combined congregational singing with prayer. For

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<sup>5</sup> Joel Robbins encountered a similar practice among the Urapmin of central highland New Guinea who had experienced a Pentecostal revival some years earlier, though in this case the communal prayer happened only at the close of the service. "One person leads the prayer by speaking loudly, but everyone else prays quietly to themselves and in their own words. The excited

example, the women might pray while the men sang, or vice versa. Or the congregation might be asked to pray while the musicians continued to play. Finally, in the Thai Pentecostal services, there was the possibility of a prophetic or exhortative word being uttered, usually (depending on the style of the particular congregation) at a particular expected moment in the service, and expectation of such a word further encouraged the sense of God's active presence.

It was in these contexts of programmed openness to diverse expressions of direct, personally-managed interaction with God that people might feel the freedom to kneel or to cry while others sang, often after having been encouraged to place their burdens on God. In such a manner people could find space to express their own praises or laments, despite the overall positive words being sung.

Having said this, I should address the issue of the provenance of the songs. As I have already noted, both the songs and the forms of the service were explicitly borrowed. Nobody seemed to know for sure where the prayer style came from (though some attributed its origins to the "Little Flock" movement in China). But the music was clearly borrowed from songs originally published and performed in English. This might be expected to raise issues of authenticity. Yet the foreign provenance made the songs no less authentic in the minds of the relatively young worshippers then being attracted to the services. Though most of the songs were translated from English, comments I heard suggested that people associated this music more with modernity than with "the West." And it is not surprising that this should be so. To those who adopt it, the modern is never "inauthentic." Rather, it is up-to-date, and not-old-fashioned. Except in the case of identity politics, judgments of inauthenticity are usually made by outsiders (see Appadurai 1996, 14-16; Abu-Lughod 1999, 122-123). And in this case the churches took ownership of the process in that they chose the songs and styles.

Thus, though I understand that the market for local Christian compositions has improved, at the time there was a clear preference for translated songs.<sup>6</sup> These songs were often directly translated by the churches using them, which meant that different churches could be using slightly different translations. Due to the small size of the Christian market, there was at the time no standardized published version of any of these pieces.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the wordings from church to church were roughly the same, despite some variations. I do not know how much explicit borrowing there was between the churches' worship teams, nor how the borrowing might have been done. However, it is important to bear in mind that the music was selected by the local congregation, just as it is in North America, and in the Thai church where I spent the most time the music was perceived—rightly or wrongly—as an integral element of the congregation's vitality.

Now, why should the music be perceived as effective in this way? Even for those who are not Pentecostal, it could be that a focus on an ethereal object of affection may in itself have therapeutic value. And I wonder if that emphasis on hope may have been honed in the years of evangelical marginality on the fringes of social discourse? If so, it might explain some of the thematic appeal of this newer music across classes and cultures. Evangelicals could not offer power or wealth—but they could offer awareness of the presence of God. Offering not necessarily a removal of the problems, but a sense that God is with us in the midst of them, providing love and giving the strength to continue. That emphasis may be part of the continued attraction of theologically conservative Christianity around the world today.

And in this the contemporary practice of turn-of-twenty-first century evangelicals parallels that of several other religious traditions. Note that many of the songs have absolutely nothing to do with day-to-day life (*Awesome God, Bless His Holy Name, I Exalt Thy Name, Lord I Lift Your Name on High, Father I*

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buzz that rises is not unlike the resonant roar produced when the Urapmin play their drums. People finish their personal prayers one by one until only the leader is left praying [alone]" (2004, 266).

<sup>6</sup> This despite the fact that some of the churches seemed to have considerable songwriting talent, which often drew on popular local musical idioms. The few times I heard such songs performed, usually composed by and for smaller groups performing for the larger congregation, they seemed to have been learned much more quickly and sung more heartily than the translated songs. However, at the time the foreign songs seemed vested with a sanctity that was not ascribed to the local ones.

<sup>7</sup> This was also shortly before CCLI came into widespread use in the United States as a means of collecting royalties for legal on-the-spot reproductions of music for use in congregational worship settings, which was itself a signal of how widespread the practice had become in the United States.

*Adore You, Awesome God, Shout to the Lord*, etc.). The popularity of such songs expresses at one level the notion that God should be praised simply because he deserves praise. At another level, especially in cases where refrains were sung repeatedly, I found myself wondering whether the service style had stumbled on a practical equivalent of contemporary popular meditation practices, which suggest emptying of the mind of day-to-day worries through the substitution of a positive (or at least non-mundane) focus, all while framing that action in a larger, comforting web of what used to be called “ultimate” meanings. Though Buddhists have been more explicit about these possibilities (as a popular Buddhist meditation movement in Thailand advertised in the 1980s, “if you could just stop thinking, then you could *really* think [*tha dai yut khit, kau khit dai*]), Christians have never been entirely ignorant of the quasi-meditative aspects of focused attention. Consider, for example, the lyrics of the classic song *Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus* which note that “the things of earth will grow strangely dim / in the light of his glory and grace.” And one might ask whether a similar outcome is being encouraged in more liturgical services, where it is the form and the setting that provide the machinery of the sacred, at least for those who have been raised in those environments.

Whether the same emotional effects are obtained in services where the songs are sung briefly or without the expectation of intensive singing is a separate question. Yet the message’s focus on the relationship with God and the centrality of his person are expressive of central evangelical themes, as are the assurance of victory or at least of meaningfulness. The idea is that the worship is an encounter with God through encounter with the music, and the themes are expressive of these evangelical emphases. And there may be many days, and many participants, for which the ritual simply does not “work.” Therefore, I do not wish to characterize all who use these worship styles, neither in Thailand nor anywhere else. I simply wish to emphasize that in that particular place, and at that particular point of time, the style of worship was thought to have a certain magic in and of itself. Whether it was derivative of the West, or expressive of local understandings of modernity, or considered another form of popular musical styles (though, if you pay attention, you may notice that the music used in churches is always just a bit off the cutting edge of popular music), whatever one’s view of these things, it is important to realize that in this particular setting there was also a rhetoric of encounter with God

through encounter with the music. The songs were about God, and the singers were to experience God.

So what of those formerly Russian Orthodox evangelicals in Siberia that I cited earlier, who were singing praise songs in place of the emotionally richer palette of the Orthodox tradition? From an outsider’s perspective it indeed appears that much is lost. Yet these songs are also expressive of the heart of the evangelical tradition, with its emphasis on a personal relationship with God and on what God can do to change lives and circumstances. The increased evangelical Christian emphasis on the personal over the course of the twentieth century is expressed in the personal, relational nature of these songs. Besides which, it might be thought, why go to church to experience a downer, similar to what might have been felt elsewhere?

### Coda

Of course, it can be asked, Does the approach actually alleviate pain? Does it change the mental frame with which people address their troubles? That I cannot say. And I should admit that the focus on the positive is not entirely new. R. Kent Hughes (2002, 145) cites a list of the hymns most frequently published in the United States between 1737 and 1960 (drawing on a list appearing in a draft of what would subsequently be published as Blumhofer and Noll 2004), and that list is similarly devoid of songs of personal suffering, including such titles as *Jesus Lover of My Soul* (ranked first), *We’re Marching to Zion* (ranked second), *All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name* (ranked third), and so on. Here, also, there was expressed an expectation of blessing and victory similar to that seen in the more recent praise songs. So what may be new is a matter of degree. And perhaps also a matter of perceptions. But that positive focus builds on a longer precedent.

Today, songs of lament are getting increasing airplay on Christian radio. And it is probably a good thing that Christian radio expresses that kind of emotional depth, because it is certainly heard in popular songs. But I would be surprised if these songs find a major place in congregational life any time soon, for they are simply incompatible with the message evangelicals have been expressing. Out of the array of potential messages provided in the Bible, evangelicals tend to focus on hope, both in their singing (focusing on the presence of God and one’s relationship with

him) and in their actions (ideally focused on helping others). That is part of the reason for the continued evangelical emphasis on missions, for in addition to the imperative of conveying the message of salvation through Jesus Christ, we consider our involvement in missions an expression of that message of hope.

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University, Tha Sala, Thailand. He is also a strong believer in supporting local church movements: In 1984 he was a member of the independent Thai Pentecostal Hope of Bangkok Church, the core congregation of the future Hope of Thailand and Hope of God International movements. Later, in 2013, he became a lay participant and lay minister in the Grace of God Church of Tha Sala District, in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, in southern Thailand, a semi-Pentecostal local church (most Thai churches today are effectively semi-Pentecostal) whose monolingual Thai pastor publicly identifies as “Baptist.”

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