

The Invitation Hymn (like hymns in general) is also missing in “contemporary” worship. Its importance is not properly understood. The use of the “7-11 hymns” sung from PowerPoint slides with words projected on a film screen, is all so much of the entertainment world, and does not convey the theology and orthodoxy of sound doctrine as proscribed in Colossians 3:16.

In worship, revivals, youth services, camp meetings, conferences, conventions, universities, and the family altar, the hymns of the Baptist tradition have been shared as a sacred part of the lives and worship of generations since the First Great Awakening in this country.

Hymn singing is one vehicle for the movement of the Holy Spirit in a person’s life. It is that movement that generates a desire in the person’s heart and life to experience the New Birth.

Hymns are an integral part of nineteenth-century evangelicalism: the public invitation. Various metaphors, images, biblical allusions, and theological perspectives are all evident within the stanzas of the invitation hymns.

Hymns reveal the meanings and significations of Baptist liturgy and faith in ways that other liturgical forms do not.

By cutting ties to the hymnal, a church is free to keep up with the latest “contemporary” music; all that is required is a license from Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI), the company that collects money from churches who use new worship songs, and then distributes that money to the copyright owner and musician.

The church is now at the whim of the “worship leader” to select songs with words appropriate to the doctrine of the church, which is problematic. Selection of mindless ditties of the charismatic variety, indoctrinates non-charismatic churches into ecstatic worship through the use of much repetition of simple words in the lyrics.

The hymnal is a faithful guardian of a church’s doctrine; the product of a long and serious process undertaken by a group of musicians and theologians, who are carefully chosen for their faithfulness and sensibilities for what constitutes good sacred music as opposed to pop music. Because of the care and caution put into a good hymnal, you can trust it far more than you could ever trust any “worship leader.”

If you want to know what’s going on in the “new” music, visit two websites to learn what is being put into your worship experience: www.ccli.com and www.worshipmusic.com. Most “worship leaders” are pop/rock musicians who love secular music styles and will bring this into your church whether you agree or not. Before you know it, the music is driven by the fads and fashions of the secular music industry and the freedom of choice you thought you were getting in the “contemporary” movement “to bring in more folks,” has turned into a slavish devotion to the new and modern tastes of a wicked world.

When this happens, the large treasury of sacred songs, which are passed down to us in the hymnal, is largely ignored.

The excuse given by un-trained pastors and “worship leaders” is that by replacing the hymnals with words on a screen will assure that people would praise God in song much better since they would be looking up rather than having their heads buried in the hymnal. What is the reality of such a trite excuse? And I have also noticed this: singing declines in the church after the transition to the screen: more people are standing around watching and listening to the “performers.” I have seen this over and over; not only at South Norfolk Baptist, but also in other churches I have attended. I have mentioned to my wife on more than one occasion, that the “silence is deafening” among the congregation, with all the singing coming from the “praise singers” on the platform down front.

A hymnal IS different from “contemporary” songs: with the hymnal you have the benefit of relying on the wisdom of godly men and women who very carefully assembled the hymnal. The pastor, who claims that he will rigorously examine every modern worship song before allowing its use in his church, has taken on a time-consuming burden that will certainly detract from his time preparing messages, visiting the people, and doing the work of an evangelist. By delegating this to a “worship leader” who is less qualified to defend the faith and the flock, he has left the congregation open to problematic theology.

When you stop using the hymnbook, you throw out God-given protections against doctrinal drift, heresy and shocking musical worldliness. In essence, the church that allows “contemporary” music has turned over the musical catechism of their children to an ecumenical music industry driven by the worst fashions and lusts of this present age.

If your “worship leader” ever complains about the cost of adding additional hymnals, ask him how much he spends on their worship/multimedia technology budget! The cost of hymnals will pale in comparison!

One of the greatest sources of Christian theology and spirituality is the old hymns. In marked contrast to most of the worship choruses found in today’s church services, the old hymns were rich depositories of biblical spirituality, theological truth, and Christian belief.

There is nothing like going back to the old hymns for spiritual nourishment, especially in times of spiritual dryness, difficulty or pain. They stir the soul, sustain the spirit, and enrich the mind. They reflect so much theological depth – compared to what we find today – that is a real tragedy that we are neglecting these stirring anthems.

James Montgomery Boice once lamented, “One of the saddest features of contemporary worship is that the great hymns of the church are on the way out. They are not gone entirely, but they are going. And in their place have come trite jingles that have more in common with contemporary advertising ditties than the psalms. The problem here is not so much the style of the music, though trite words fit best with trite tunes and harmonies. Rather it is with the content of the songs. The old hymns expressed the theology of the

church in profound and perceptive ways and with winsome memorable language. Today's songs reflect only our shallow or non-existent theology and do almost nothing to elevate one's thoughts about God.

“Worst of all are songs that merely repeat a trite idea, word or phrase over and over again. Songs like this are not worship, though they may give the churchgoer a religious feeling. They are mantras, which belong more in a gathering of New Agers than among the worshipping people of God.”

It is not just outstanding theology found in the old hymns, but very moving spiritual riches, aiding the Christian in his devotional life. Rev. A.W. Tozer was quite right when he wrote: “After the Bible the next most valuable book for the Christian is a good hymnal. Let any young Christian spend a year prayerfully meditating on the hymns of Watts and Wesley alone and he will become a fine theologian. Then let him read a balanced diet of the Puritans and the Christian mystics. The results will be more wonderful than he could have dreamed.”

Hymns of Invitation, and hymns in general, speak spiritually to the heart of the Christian and the un-saved child, young person, and adult, in a way that the entertaining “contemporary” songs of thin theology, cannot. It is a disservice to the Lord Jesus Christ, not to use great hymns of the faith, written by Christians, as a vehicle of invitation to accept Him as Lord and Saviour.