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MUSICAL WORSHIP: THE NEW SACRAMENT? THE CONTEMPORARY MEANING OF THE MUSICAL WORSHIP MOMENT AMONG BRAZILIAN BAPTIST CHURCHES ¹

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INTRODUCTION

Music has been present in the worship practices of Christian communities as far back as the early days of the Church. Its presence has not been merely tolerated but intentionally integrated into liturgical practices, sometimes reflecting practices under the old covenant, and at other times adopting other shapes. Music's meaning and power have also been variously evaluated by theologians and laypeople through the centuries. In certain segments of Christianity, music has even developed a theological relationship to concepts of *sacrament*. Such a relationship has penetrated the "worship event" in the latter part of the twentieth century and has frequently become normative for large numbers of Christians. The evidence indicates that this has occurred among Brazilian evangelical churches. This article discusses this development particularly from the perspective of Brazilian Baptist churches.

¹ This article is the English translation of an article that appeared in Portuguese in the journal *Revista Batista Pioneira* 7, no. 2 (December 2018): 281-316. The English translation is used with permission.

Whereas debates over what is crucial for “true worship” to take place, or on appropriate choices of music for worship, usually include the topics of generational gaps or musical preferences, it is possible that the dividing issues are in fact theological in nature. Could it be that the practices of musical worship have overreached their original sense, and have in fact begun to function as a *new sacrament*? But, on the other hand, could it be that, if the challenges involving music and worship were considered on the basis of music’s doctrinal role and value, participants of the musical acts of worship (pastors, music ministers, worship team members, choir singers, and church attenders at large) could discover balanced and comprehensive guidelines that would lead to greater unity in the church? Combining theological reviews of worship music, a historical overview of Brazilian evangelicalism, statements about the meaning of “musical worship” by authors and musical ministries, and practical observations of individual Christians and churches in Brazil,² this article seeks to find a more definitive source for the distinctive character of the “musical worship moment” in Brazilian churches, with special focus on traditional³ Baptist churches. The goal of this essay is to encourage biblical conversation dealing with the real issues that tend to divide God’s people, such conversation that would lead Christians, when genuinely dedicated to God’s service, into a harmonious church worship practice.

SACRAMENT

Baptists do not commonly use the term *sacrament*. The Catholic Church regards seven different rituals or events as “sacraments,”⁴ while most Reformers focus solely on two: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Baptists refer to these two practices as *ordinances* and typically object to referring

2 The practical observations this article relates derive primarily from experiences in the State of Minas Gerais. However, this author had numerous discussions on this topic with pastoral and music leaders from various parts of Brazil and has attained evidence that the issue at hand is not solely a local Minas Gerais phenomenon.

3 *Traditional* in this context refers to non-charismatic Baptist churches, usually associated with the Brazilian Baptist Convention. This is a common use of the term among Baptists in Brazil, and it is not limited to the typical North American connotation of styles of music (along with other characteristic features) used in different services.

4 Catechism of the Catholic Church, “The Seven Sacraments of the Church,” Libreria Editrice Vaticana, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P3E.HTM, accessed April 19, 2017.

to them as sacraments since this term bears the imprint of the traditional function as a “means of grace.”⁵ A further objection is the fact that the word *sacrament*, while copiously employed by Catholics and Reformers, appears to have been introduced (at least in writing) into church practice only after apostolic times, and is not found in the biblical text. In Catholic theology, it serves as a designation of both “*sign* and *instrument*”⁶ as formulated by Cardinal Ratzinger,⁷ or “sign and means” as indicated by Schmemmann.⁸ Geoffrey Wainwright, an evangelical theologian who has played a significant role in ecumenical discussions, while making allowances for different emphases, states “that a sacrament is traditionally an *efficacious sign*,”⁹ a divinely instituted act.¹⁰ The Lord’s Supper, understood as the *sacrament of the Eucharist* in Catholic and mainline denominations, stands as the focal point of a mass or service, and contains an aspect of the “real presence” of the Lord, varying in degree depending on the particular tradition. Theologians such as John Jefferson Davis, also an evangelical, calls upon all Christians to re-introduce regular Eucharistic celebrations in church services and to experience “the real spiritual presence of Christ at the Eucharist.”¹¹ Although the Eucharist is not the subject of this article, the aspects of *sacrament* and *real presence* mentioned above are foundational for its thesis.

SACRAMENTAL LANGUAGE IN VARIOUS CONTEXTS

Highlighting the significance of music in the liturgy, theologian and author John Witvliet, in his 1998 article entitled “At Play in the House of the Lord – Why Worship Matters,” made comparative observations concerning the sacramental perception of liturgical music among certain

5 John Jefferson Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God: An Evangelical Theology of Real Presence*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 2010, Kindle Location 816. Kindle Edition.

6 Geoffrey Wainwright, *Worship With One Accord: Where Liturgy and Ecumenism Embrace*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1997, 87. (emphasis mine)

7 Wainwright, *Worship with One Accord*, 103.

8 Ibid., 95.

9 Ibid., 87.

10 Ibid., 96.

11 Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, Kindle Location 1706.

groups of Christians. He states, “Speaking only somewhat simplistically: the Roman Catholics reserve their sacramental language for the Eucharist, Presbyterians reserve theirs for preaching, and *the charismatics save theirs for music*” (emphasis mine).¹² He illustrates the validity of his remark with the following account: “In a recent pastors’ conference, one evangelical pastor solicited applications for a music director/worship leader position by calling for someone who could ‘make God present through music.’ No medieval sacramental theologian could have said it more strongly. *Dare we call this ‘musical transubstantiation’*” (emphasis mine)?¹³ In his thought-provoking book *Unceasing Worship*, author Harold Best reaffirms this observation:

I can make the mistake of coupling faith to musical experience by assuming that the power and effectiveness of music is what brings substance and evidence to my faith. I can then quite easily forge a connection between the power of music and the nearness of the Lord. Once this happens, I may even slip fully into the sin of equating the power of music and the nearness of the Lord. At that point music joins the bread and the wine in the creation of a *new sacrament* or even a *new kind of transubstantiation*.¹⁴ (emphases mine)

Evangelical theologians, charismatic or not, do not hold to an identical understanding of *sacrament*, particularly the Lord’s Supper, as that of the medieval Catholic church which staunchly promulgated the belief that the elements of bread and wine literally transformed into the physical body of Christ during the celebration of the Eucharist. Reformers’ writings attest to a considerable modification of emphasis, focusing rather on the spiritual presence of Christ. John Witvliet describes Calvin’s understanding of the

12 John Witvliet, “At Play in the House of the Lord: Why Worship Matters,” *Books & Culture* 4, no. 6 (November/December 1998), <http://www.booksandculture.com/articles/1998/novdec/8b6022.html?paging=off>, 3, accessed December 1, 2016.

13 Ibid., 3.

14 Harold Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 2003. Kindle Locations 287-290.

sacrament of the Eucharist with this statement: “In the New Testament age, such union is particularly realized in the Eucharist, which Calvin spoke of as ‘the sacrament of the Supper, by means of which our Lord leads us to communion with Jesus Christ.’ Recalling spatial images, Calvin described the sacraments as being ‘like a ladder to us so that we may seek our Lord Jesus Christ, and so that we may be fully convinced that he lives in us and we are united to him.’”¹⁵

Witvliet’s article “At Play in the House of the Lord” reviews four works by contemporary writers on the topic of worship: Bernhard Lang, Frank Senn, Geoffrey Wainwright, and James White. The four authors reach at least two common conclusions, according to Witvliet: “Every community develops deep patterns for corporate worship,”¹⁶ and “that it is remarkably hard for Christian worshipers to live without a language that is, in some sense, sacramental.”¹⁷ Although these inferences may not be absolutely and universally applicable, they do present a general representation of corporate Christian worship tendencies in major denominations.

OBSERVATIONS FROM BRAZILIAN BAPTIST CHURCH LIFE

The relevance and depth of this sacramental perception became increasingly apparent during my tenure as minister of music at a Baptist church in Brazil from 2014 to 2017. Beyond the usual cultural shocks that any cross-cultural missionary might experience, previous participation in musical worship in North America and Europe aided in identifying unique features in the corporate worship practices among Brazilian Baptist churches. In this environment, the tension between traditional and contemporary musical styles continues to exist, as it does in many parts of the world, even though they do not necessarily lead to the same corporate solutions. Likewise, the perception of what constitutes “worship music” manifests the same inherent tendency towards “deep patterns” as other branches of Christianity, as mentioned by John Witvliet above.

15 John D. Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding: Windows into Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group), 2003, 121. Kindle Edition.

16 Ibid., 3.

17 Ibid.

The Theological Issues

By means of an active role in Brazilian Baptist churches' worship music, one can detect that a sacramental perception of "musical worship" (also termed "musical worship moment" in this article) could be greatly responsible for the *reliance* displayed by worship teams and church members on certain liturgical patterns, both within and around musical elements, so that "true worship" can occur (or be enacted), or for participants to "be able to worship." Barry Liesch, founder of the Music in Worship program at Biola University,¹⁸ recognizes this universal trend in his book *The New Worship*: "In our era, people equate worship with music: if the music is good, then the worship is good."¹⁹ Liesch, however, categorically denies the spiritual superiority of particular styles of worship:

The form of a liturgical service is not more spiritual than that of a thematic or free-flowing praise service. The form of Baptist worship is not more spiritual than Presbyterian; nor is the form of Methodist worship less spiritual than that of Calvary Chapel or the Assemblies of God Church. Forms are cultural phenomena. Free-flowing praise, for example, does not have a monopoly on the Holy Spirit.

It is unfair (and dangerous!) to equate spirituality with any form. I mention this even though I'm an avid supporter of flowing praise and contemporary expression.²⁰ (emphasis mine)

Although the greater part of the musical actions encountered in this setting are not exclusive to Brazilian Baptist churches, the features of the "musical worship moment" observed in this specific social situation have combined into a template containing characteristics beyond features of musical styles and have developed into a sacramental ritual that seldom

18 Biola University, "Barry Liesch," https://www.biola.edu/directory/people/barry_liesch, 2017, accessed April 28, 2017.

19 Barry Wayne Liesch, *The New Worship: Straight Talk on Music and the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group), 2001. Kindle Positions 1649-1651.

20 Ibid., Kindle Locations 265-269.

receives due analysis.

Participating and Observing

On February 6, 2014, my wife and I moved to Brazil for the primary purpose of serving in missions. The work consists of developing partnerships with missionary agencies to advance the use of local arts in South America for all areas of Kingdom work. It also includes direct work among indigenous people groups, organizing workshops for cross-cultural workers, and developing informational and educational tools (e.g., website and course curriculum) to expand the effectiveness of applied Ethnoarts. It was in conjunction with this missionary focus that I came to serve as music director at a local Baptist church in the city of Ipatinga, Minas Gerais,²¹ for a period of three years. This context would serve as a place for my wife to learn Portuguese and develop friendships, as well as a platform to reconnect with music and missions opportunities in the state of Minas Gerais and elsewhere in Brazil. The church people were openly and sincerely kind to both of us, welcomed us whole-heartedly, and became true friends.

This new phase in the music ministry of the church began with new ideas, new projects, and full enthusiasm. There was no attempt to dictate all music choices for the “worship teams,” nor many other aspects of their preparation. Some changes, however, which seemed important enough for improving the process of musical preparation, were immediately implemented: the use of scores or lead sheets for practice, a pattern of learning from a common source rather than from various YouTube videos, and an attempt to establish regular practice schedules. A subscription to CCLI²² was also procured in order to provide the music ministry with a standard source for contemporary songs already in use and for those which would be learned in the future.

The difference in approach was immediately noticed. Many of the twenty or more participants in the various worship teams tried to

21 Minas Gerais is the largest southeastern state in Brazil, about 226.5 sq. mi. in size, comparable to the size of Texas, 268.5 sq. mi.

22 CCLI – Christian Copyright Licensing International serves churches granting and mediating copyright privileges, as well as providing legal musical scores for participating institutions. www.ccli.com.

adapt at least nominally to these new procedures. Others, although not openly rebellious and always respectful, could not see the changes as an advantage valuable enough with which to be concerned. The shift probably represented a “return to tradition” for some, a view that would consider choral and traditional hymn music as ideal, although that was not the case. In fact, some even feared that this would pose a threat to their musical styles. Worship team members were often reminded that contemporary music would not – and did not need to be – eliminated from the life of the church. The musical goals would involve blended styles, or at least the introduction of a wider variety of styles into both Sunday services, and avoiding attaching the idea that worship is connected to a single musical genre. These organizational steps were not unilateral, but enjoyed the full approval of the pastor and other staff.

Furthermore, a regular choir was revived consisting of older participants as well as many of the younger worship team singers. It participated in occasional special services such as church anniversaries, and Christmas and Easter events. The occasions were joyous for the participants and the congregation, and they brought spiritual fruit. Nevertheless, the resistance among a few of the “worship team” members to blending into a “choir” remained strong. After the first year of ministry, an approach was attempted that included a specific general repertoire created together with the team leaders, and song choices for each Sunday for all worship teams, although it always allowed enough latitude for changes related to the topics of the sermons.

Continued interaction with the worship teams and with the congregation confirmed the observation that despite the continued struggle over “worship styles” among Brazilian churches as in other evangelical circles around the globe, this controversy does not display the same characteristics everywhere. A different combination of elements had come to be in the Brazilian evangelical “arena.” It became increasingly clear that the difficulties the church had experienced during the course of its history (as they were related primarily by the pastors), and also during the time I was privileged to work among them, stemmed from deeper issues than *unwillingness* to accommodate the leader’s instructions, *preference* for a set of songs, music styles, or even a lack of *commitment* to God or the music

ministry of the local church. The issues had deeply ingrained roots. Hence, various conversations with the pastors and music participants took place in order to re-evaluate the foundations and the direction of the local church's music ministry.

Parallel to the local church music ministry, I also served in the leadership of the Baptist Musicians Association of the State of Minas Gerais, first as vice president, and then as president. This involvement allowed for increased contact with many Christian musicians across that State. Opportunities increased to hold music and worship workshops at local churches, both individually and as part of a planned set of workshops on church ministries organized by the Minas Gerais Baptist Convention (hereafter referred to by the initials CBM).²³ These various interactions and innumerable conversations with pastors and music ministry contributors helped to further reveal the sources and the extent of the underlying views, the peculiar expectations, and stylistic preferences found in local churches. Clearly, theological assumptions, whether biblically justifiable or not, provided the background that guided the regular musical practices (and often led to conflict) in most local Baptist churches, as well as in churches of other denominations. The widespread norms for the “musical worship moment” informed the participants to such a degree that other approaches led to collisions.

Linguistic Issues

Besides the internationally common tendency of associating one specific style of music with “worship” (including aspects of instrumentation, rhythm, vocal style, and melodic features), a further problematic issue in the context of Brazilian worship music is linguistic in nature. It entails the prevalent use of the term *louvor*²⁴ (praise) for *praise or worship songs*. The word *louvor* is a noun, not a verbal form (which in Portuguese would be *louvar* in the infinitive and subject to further conjugation). Although it is difficult to determine the exact course of events that led to a fixed identification of *louvor* with the *praise song* itself along the history of evangelicals in Brazil,

23 In Portuguese: Convenção Batista Mineira (CBM).

24 *Louvor* is pronounced: Low (as in the opposite of “high”) – vor (as in the word “vortex” with the “r” sounding like an “H”). The accent is on the second syllable – “vor.”

the consolidation of this term as meaning *praise song* has opened a vast door for the profound infiltration of sacramental meaning, not only into the act of praising but also into the music and the current musical format.

The colloquial use of *louvor* as *worship (or praise) song* in Brazil is practically impossible to overlook. For instance, Brazilians say that “they will sing *one praise*, or two or three *praises*.” An expanded use of the term *louvor*,²⁵ important also to note, is its application not only to the individual *praise song*, but also to the “musical worship moment” as a collective term. If, for some reason, the choir were to sing for a given church service, and no discernable “worship band” were seen on the platform, presuming only the piano were to accompany the songs, one could hear questions like “Is there no *louvor (praise)* today, just hymns?” in which context the word *louvor* would have the collective sense of “musical worship moment.” While serving as vice-president of the Association of Baptist Musicians of the State of Minas Gerais in 2015, a small congress of musicians took place preceding the general assembly of the CBM²⁶ in the city of Juiz de Fora. Conversing with a couple attending the congress, I asked about their involvement in the music ministry at their church. The wife responded that her husband sang in the choir. When asked if she also sang, her response became a defining moment for my personal comprehension of the strength of the term *louvor* in present-day Brazilian evangelicalism. She said (and insisted), “Não, eu não canto. Eu só louvo.” [No, I don’t sing. I only praise.] With these words, “sing” and “praise,” this lady expressed that she perceived a clear distinction between the action of singing in general and the musical expression in song during the “worship moment.” She did not convey the impression that *louvor* was greater than *singing* – perhaps even the opposite. As a matter of fact, she perceived *louvor* (the worship moment) as a matter of necessity, commonality, and irreplaceability in every church service. In her view *singing* was elevated to a unique place. *Singing*, from this perspective, can indeed be granted a place of honor, can highlight special celebrations, but is *not* a demand for a Christian to enjoy a fresh weekly visit to the presence of God, unlike *louvor* (with all the attributes

²⁵ *Louvor*, in this case, is often preceded by the definite article “o” (the), thus saying, approximately, “the praise” in reference to the “musical worship moment.”

²⁶ Minas Gerais Baptist Convention.

mentioned so far, as well as those still to come), without which a service is incomplete.

Historical Unfolding of the Present Musical Worship Pattern in Brazil

Regular evangelical missionary activities in Brazil date back to the middle of the nineteenth century. Despite difficult beginnings, there has been much fruit since then. Although still a minority in Brazil, evangelical churches are neither few nor unknown among the general population. Since their early days, evangelicals had “one single enemy – Catholicism.”²⁷ These circumstances allowed for a certain uniformity in theology and cultic practices, particularly among Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists. Given this situation, a tendency for transdenominational exchanges in methods and practices became the norm among Brazilian churches.

Focusing more specifically on the Baptist context in Brazil, it is relevant to review an important, though difficult, moment in its history. In 1961, during the assembly of the CBM, held that year in the city of Juiz de Fora, a difficult issue was put for discussion: “the doctrinal question relating to the method of spiritual revival being taught and preached by Pastor J. R. N.²⁸ (at the time, pastor of Lagoinha²⁹ Baptist Church).”³⁰ After a meeting that lasted into the night, the Convention decided to exclude the Lagoinha church from the CBM. The charismatic movement (known in Brazil as *renovação* or “renewal”) with emphasis on spiritual gifts had entered Baptist ranks during the previous decade, particularly through the messages of Rosalee Mills Appleby.³¹

27 Jacqueline Zirolto Dolghie, *Louvor e Carisma: Uma Análise do Poder Religioso* [Praise and Charisma: An Analysis of Religious Power]. (Instituto Âncora de Ensino: Revista Digital de Estudos em Religião), 2006-2007, http://www.revistaancora.com.br/revista_3/06.pdf, 1, accessed April 20, 2017.

28 José Rego do Nascimento.

29 Lagoinha (pronounced: Lah-go-ee'-ña) is a subdivision (Port.: “bairro”) of the city of Belo Horizonte, the capital of the State of Minas Gerais, where this church was situated at the time.

30 Anderson Barbosa, *As Memórias de “AdB”* [The Memoirs of “AdB”] – *An Autobiography* (Ipatinga, MG: Edição do Autor), 2016, 148. (Translation of citations from Barbosa’s book is mine)

31 Rosalee Appleby had been a North American missionary in Brazil since 1924. Her husband, David Appleby, passed away while she was still expecting their firstborn child. Mrs. Appleby decided

This movement became the catalyst for a formal schism that deeply affects Brazilian Baptists until this day. Anderson Barbosa,³² a faithful church worker and planter in Minas Gerais, attended the meeting and voted *against* the exclusion of the Lagoinha church. He describes the atmosphere among the church representatives after the decision as reflecting “fear, shame, and mistrust.”³³ When he and his fellow church members returned to their hometown of Coronel Fabriciano, Barbosa, who was accustomed to making church visits around the region by himself, began to enjoy the company of another man from the church for these ministerial visits, all the while “not suspecting that he was being spied upon.”³⁴ The schism, while leaving many scars, also allowed for the organization of another convention of (*renovadas* or charismatic) Baptist churches. Today, the tensions between the two Baptist strands have significantly relaxed, and cooperation and interaction at the local church level take place on a regular basis. Although doctrinal differences still exist, the cessationist interpretation of spiritual gifts that served as the foundation for the resistance against the “renewal” movement rarely becomes a point of contention anymore.

Although the scope of this article cannot encompass the complete historical line of theological tendencies in music practices until the present time, the relevance of the background given above is found in the continuing story of the Lagoinha Baptist Church. This church continued to grow in influence, not only through its preaching or teaching but particularly through its music ministry. While certainly not the only influential music ministry among evangelicals in Brazil, Lagoinha is emblematic of the practice of worship music in Brazil in the twenty-first century. Particularly

to remain in Brazil as a missionary despite her husband’s passing. Source: Ministério Vigiai, “O Racha e a Dor Batista com Quase 50 anos: Renovação Espiritual” [The Division and the Baptist Pain for Almost 50 Years: Spiritual Renewal], <http://vigiai.net/artigos/o-racha-e-a-dor-batista-com-quase-50-anos-renovacao-espiritual>, accessed April 20, 2017.

32 The history of this monumental schism of the Baptist Convention of Minas Gerais (which later translated into a split in the general Brazilian Baptist Convention) is available from other, more institutional sources. I chose to relate it from Barbosa’s perspective to highlight the personal implications of this institutional move. I know Anderson Barbosa personally and attended the launch of his autobiography in 2016.

33 Barbosa, *Memórias*, 149.

34 *Ibid.*, 150.

since the nineties, André and his sister Ana Paula Valadão, children of Marcio Valadão, present-day pastor at Lagoinha, have produced more than forty high-quality music CDs including translated songs and their own compositions under the general ministry designation of “Diante do Trono” [Before the Throne].³⁵ The weekly events their ministry organizes at the church, and frequently throughout Brazil, are attended by thousands of people. The church established its own TV station – Rede Super – accessible via cable TV and internet.³⁶ It offers a wide range of programs including preaching, talk shows, children programs, as well as music.

Absolutely no question of sincerity or integrity is hereby raised concerning ministries such as Lagoinha’s. Indeed, they may have been greatly used of God for the transformation of lives throughout the years. The significance of the facts offered in this article, however, given the historical background of Brazilian Baptists and the widespread present-day practices of musical worship, is found in the indication that *more* than a new contemporary style of songs came to dominate the corporate “musical worship moment” along the course of the last few decades. Coupled with various other companion actions, contemporary music has morphed into a *new sacramental practice*.

Critics of the practices of the contemporary stylization of the “worship moment,” who also adhere firmly to Calvinistic or Reformed concepts or belong to mainline denominations, tend to primarily lament the shift of the “real presence” emphasis from the Lord’s Supper (Eucharist) to this musical portion of the church service. Along these lines, Jacqueline Dolghie, in her Master’s thesis³⁷ dealing with the neo-Pentecostal church movement “Renascer em Cristo” [New Birth in Christ], holds the transdenominational character of the Brazilian evangelical scene as responsible for aiding the shift in traditional denominations. Within the context of her analysis, she describes how “worship groups” in the 1960s and 1970s grew and brought a transformation of liturgy into most

35 Diante do Trono, “História” [History], <http://diantedotrono.com/historia/>, 2016, accessed April 21, 2017.

36 Rede Super de Televisão, “TV Online”, <http://redesuper.com.br/assista-online/>, 2011, accessed April, 21, 2017.

37 Translation of this citation and all further citations from Dolghie’s original article (a portion of her Master’s Thesis) in Portuguese are mine.

denominations. This revolution took even more shape in the 1990s with the growth of the Gospel music market. This new type of worship service brought over from the charismatic movement displays a syncretism of “sacred spaces and objects, aesthetics formation, emotionalism and magic”³⁸ as stated by Dr. Leonildo Campos and quoted by Dolghe.³⁹ In this model, she observes “a type of catharsis or spiritual ecstasy, led by means of music, under the command of the “ministro de louvor.”⁴⁰ In this context, “the group recognizes that the worship minister carries a ‘spiritual unction’ that distinguishes him from the others: he can prophesy, release,⁴¹ and heal during the worship moment.”⁴² Dolghe detects what, for her, seems to be the crux of the shift: “it is here [in the worship events or worship moments] that the protestant device⁴³ *that brings about the presence of divinity* . . . is relocated to the worship moment” (emphasis mine).⁴⁴ Furthermore, music in this worship environment “can, by itself, bring about the presence of the divinity in the [worship] service by means of [an] emotional device.”⁴⁵

Jacqueline Dolghe offers her observations with a conclusive sacramental language of “divine presence.” Her thesis does not attempt to deny the existence of a worship act or ritual that can bring about the “real [divine] presence” during a given segment of the worship service. On the contrary, she reaffirms her belief throughout her article that *preaching* has the privilege of being the “protestant device” to enact this divine encounter. On the basis of the prerogative of preaching, which she believes to be the privilege of the pastor (whom she identifies with priesthood), Dolghe also contends that the struggle of contemporary musical worship leadership reflects essentially a power struggle between the laity and the clergy. Undoubtedly, power struggles between laity and “clergy,” or between pastors and worship

38 Dolghe, *Louvor e Carisma*, 7.

39 Dr. Leonildo Campos is a professor and researcher at the Mackenzie Presbyterian University in São Paulo, Brazil.

40 Portuguese term for *praise minister* or *worship minister*. *Ibid.*, 11.

41 Literally: to “liberate”, or to cause someone to become free from some evil influence or illness.

42 Dolghe, 11.

43 The “protestant device” to which Dolghe refers is the preaching. It relates to Witliet’s reference to Presbyterian use of eucharistic language for preaching.

44 Dolghe, 13.

45 *Ibid.*, 13.

leaders, do exist. A desire for power or control of the service, however, is likely to be a shallow reason for the ongoing conflict. It stands to reason, rather, that people behave in ways coherent with their true inner belief, responding to what they perceive as necessary, proper, or right (even if their views are, in fact, erroneous). It is possible that, in the context of the major worship style shift of the last half-century, young laymen sought space for their own music and comments (including exhortations and prophecies) not due to a sinful desire for *power*, but to a felt spiritual need for a *medium* through which to encounter God. This medium – music – had been (or became) infused with perceptions of sacramental effectiveness, conceivably by the various neo-charismatic music ministries which emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century.

Augustus Nicodemus, a renowned Presbyterian minister in Brazil with a Ph.D. in biblical interpretation from Westminster Theological Seminary,⁴⁶ speaks regularly on the topic of worship groups in Brazilian churches. In a video interview,⁴⁷ he retells the basic story of the development of this worship moment, which he defines as “a worship service within a worship service.”⁴⁸ Augustus Nicodemus implicates Merlin Carothers’s book *Prison to Praise*, which by some misfortune was published in Portuguese under the name *Louvor que Liberta (Praise that Liberates or Frees)* in the development of meaning for the “musical worship moment.” Chaplain Carothers’s book relates his testimony of conversion and entrance into the charismatic movement, and he exhorts Christians to praise God under any circumstance in life and to trust Him for the results. In reality, Carothers’s book does not address music in the context of praise and worship moments at all. Yet, although the content of the book appears to have remained unchanged when translated into Portuguese, the semantic attachment of the term *louvor* with *worship music* in the Brazilian evangelical church context helped advance the popular belief that the “musical worship

46 The Gospel Coalition, “The Growing Crisis behind Brazil’s Evangelical Success Story,” <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-growing-crisis-behind-brazils-evangelical-success-story/>, 2012, accessed April 21, 2017.

47 Escola Charles Spurgeon, “O Papel dos Grupos de Louvor na Adoração – Augustus Nicodemus Parte 2” [The Role of Worship Teams in the Worship Service – Augustus Nicodemus Part 2], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0DWynDzxlM0>, accessed April 21, 2017.

48 Portuguese: “Culto dentro do culto.”

moment” (*louvor*) somehow possessed the power to liberate a person from spiritual bondage. Nicodemus is not alone in this perception of Carothers’s book (no doubt an influence not intended by the original author) on the sacramental aspect of the worship moment. The pastoral staff of the church I served in Brazil, including the youth pastor who had previously managed a Christian bookstore and who was well aware of the book’s popularity, also characterized *Louvor que Liberta* as a definitive catalyst.

An internet, radio, and TV program produced by the broadcaster “TV da Ilha”⁴⁹ [TV Station of the Island] also entitles itself *Louvor que Liberta*. The program illustrates once again the purpose and understanding of *louvor*. The announcer calls on listeners to remain tuned for the upcoming *louvores*⁵⁰ and the preaching of the Word of God. Another informational Christian site called “Conexão Eclésia” addresses the phrase *Louvor que Liberta* on one of its pages.⁵¹ The opening remarks immediately display the fixed association of *louvor* with *worship or praise music*: “What is, actually, *louvor* (*praise*)? It is different from simple singing. We can often sing but not attain or discern true *louvor*. We need to learn to ‘praise’ much more than to learn to simply sing.” In fact, what the writer is teaching is accurate; indeed, *singing* alone does not constitute intentional or conscious *praise*. What lies below the surface, however, is the assumption that the distinctive action termed *louvor* must in fact be achieved *through singing*. A page on Lagoinha’s site does attempt to clarify the fact that even though one speaks of the *louvor que liberta*, it is not the *praise* itself that frees the believer, but God *by means of praise* (*louvor*). Nonetheless, the text does not attempt to distinguish praise as *any action of glorifying God* and promoting His truth, from the *medium* by which it is expressed: music.

Lagoinha Baptist Church’s pastor, Marcio Valadão, in his short book *Louvor e Adoração* [Praise and Worship], speaks about the value of prayer, praise, and worship. The book contains biblical exhortations to come before

49 TV da Ilha Digital, “Louvor que Liberta,” www.tvdailha.com, broadcast on January 24, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71wql8SMYKg>, accessed April 22, 2017.

50 *Louvores* is the plural form of *louvor*. In essence, he is saying “praises,” meaning “songs of praise” or “segments of musical worship.”

51 Conexão Eclésia, “Louvor que Liberta,” January 15, 2014, <http://conexaoeclesia.com.br/2014/01/15/o-louvor-que-liberta/>, translation mine, accessed April 27, 2017.

God in praise and to live in a constant attitude of prayer, which indeed *can* be properly expressed through song. Still, Valadão uses the colloquial usage of *louvor* applied to music and, intentionally or not, continues to reaffirm the *mediacy* of the “musical worship moment.” In at least one instance in the book, Valadão affirms that singing was positively involved, which indeed Scripture does not validate: “In the primitive church, in Acts 2, verse 42, the brethren prayed singing.”⁵²

Besides the musical commitment of the word *louvor*, sacramental meaning has also been infused into the “worship moment” by the application of the term *levita*⁵³ for members of the worship teams.⁵⁴ It references the musical function of the Levitical tribe of Israel under the old covenant. It is an ill-fated transfer of terms which disregards the wider meaning of the Old Testament Levite, particularly the male members of the tribe of Levi, who served God in a variety of ways, and not through music alone. The sons of Asaph were the primary appointees for this service and were also joined by other Levites (e.g., 1 Chronicles 15, 16, 25 and 2 Chronicles 5, 29, 35). The use of the term *levita* for the worship musician function further imprints upon the minds of believers a priestly function⁵⁵ for worship team members and ascribes the notion of privilege for some individuals within the context of a sacramental ritual. The application of this term in this context often contradicts the beliefs of the very same churches concerning the doctrine of the priesthood of every believer.

52 Marcio Valadão, *Louvor e Adoração* [Praise and Worship] (Belo Horizonte: Igreja Batista da Lagoinha Publications, 1999/2010), 21.

53 *Levita* matches the English cognate *Levite*.

54 Núcleo de Apoio Cristão, “O que é um levita?” [What is a Levite?], <http://www.nucleodeapoio-cristao.com.br/estudos/adoracao/oquelevita.html>, accessed April 24, 2017. The use of the term “Levite” for worship musicians can be confirmed by a simple internet search and personal interaction with the Brazilian evangelical scene. I offer only this one reference since the term does not have as much strength among traditional Baptist churches, which are the focus of this article.

55 SlideShare, “Seminário sobre Louvor e Adoração,” [Seminar on Praise and Worship], <https://www.slideshare.net/rodrigocristao84/seminario-sobre-louvor-e-adorao>, slide 1, accessed April 24, 2017. In training materials for gatherings of local church musicians, one comes across terminology referring to a proposed priestly function of the musical “Levite” on a regular basis. The above-mentioned source illustrates the content of these practical seminars, also termed “Capacitações” [Training meetings] or “Oficinas” [workshops], which, while having good intentions and valuable content to offer, have the effect of reinforcing the sacramental function of *louvor* as well as the priestly function of the worship musician.

Although very popular among charismatic Christians in Brazil and not entirely absent from traditional Baptist churches, this nomenclature does face strong resistance from Baptist pastors and other church members.⁵⁶

The existence of this “moment” is recognized by Pentecostal as well as non-Pentecostal leaders, and does not represent a novel identification by this researcher. For instance, pastor and author João A. de Souza Filho, of the Assemblies of God, dedicates a great portion of his book *O Livro de Ouro do Ministério de Louvor* [The Golden Book of the Worship – or Praise – Ministry] to identifying this contemporary worship model and its issues.⁵⁷ Pr. Douglas Baptista, of the Assemblies of God of the Federal District (Brasilia), confronts the issues of the “musical worship moment” highlighting the popular tendency of “Judaization” of Christianity in Brazil this century. He states that this process, which is not new in the history of the church, is “a relative of Paganization. All this is a product of *defective hermeneutics* that does not comprehend the distinctions between the two Testaments. The criteria for their interpretation are different. The pomp and the liturgy of Judaism gave place to *an annulment of bureaucracy* in Christianity. The final word of God was given in Jesus Christ” (emphases mine).⁵⁸

Description of the “Musical Worship Moment”

Within the context of the Brazilian “musical worship moment,” a variety of activities and forms have become integral (or have become the template) to its proper enactment. Among its features are gestures such as closing one’s eyes or lifting up the hands, bodily movement, structural format of vocal participants (for instance: 4 or 5 singers, all with microphones facing the congregation), instrumental band (guitars, bass, keyboard, and drums), musical forms with predictable repetition and flow of dynamics, and the

56 Numerous informally published sources that reaffirm the application of the terms *louvor* and *Levita* in workshops on Praise and Worship can be also found in the digital library Scribd, under “Louvor e Adoração,” www.scribd.com.

57 João A de Souza Filho, *O Livro de Ouro do Ministério de Louvor* (São Paulo: Grupo Z3), 2010.

58 Casa Publicadora das Assembléias de Deus, Pr. Douglas Baptista, “Judaizantes Modernos e suas Práticas Perniciosas” [Modern Judaizers and their Pernicious Practices], June 15, 2014, <http://www.cpadnews.com.br/blog/douglasbaptista/o-cristao-e-o-mundo/91/judaizantes-modernos-e-suas-praticas-perniciosas.html>, 2014, translation mine.

distinct tone of speech used by the group leader. Overall, these are *not unique* to Brazilian churches. But beyond these, the practice of *ministração*⁵⁹ characterizes the “worship moment” perhaps more emphatically than any other distinctive action. *Ministração* serves as a collective term for (primarily) spoken actions meant to exhort the congregation, rebuke them, explain the reason for the song choice, bring the congregation into the presence of God (and hence into “true” worship), or to cause the Spirit of God to fall on the congregants in power. Barry Liesch, who strongly advocates contemporary models of musical worship such as “free-flowing praise” (not to the point of depreciating other models), responds to similar practices with a piece of advice: “In some churches the music stops after each piece and the leader explains how each song fits into the theme. I have not found this enticing. Use words sparingly.”⁶⁰ The typical *ministração* to which this study refers, however, contains more than such simple comments and may be the key element that creates the special environment with presumed spiritual power.

During the “Question and Answer” session of a music workshop which I led for a local Baptist association in the city of Mantena in the State of Minas Gerais, after pointing out that there are *no specific* biblical directives for “the”⁶¹ *ministração*, a worship leader from one of the participating churches expressed how difficult it was for her to conceive of leading “worship” without *ministração*. She also remarked that this expectation of a *ministração* sometimes comes from the pastors themselves. Unfortunately, many pastors and worship leaders miss the connection addressed by Charles Farhadian in *Christian Worship Worldwide*: “The practice of worship is inextricably linked with the *purpose* of worship” (emphasis mine).⁶² Thus,

59 The Portuguese noun *Ministração* (pronounced: me-nees-trah-Säu’) is the cognate for “ministration.” It is more widely used in evangelical circles in Portuguese than in the English-speaking world. The verbal form *ministrar* is used to denote meanings such as: serve (basic meaning), offer, provide, or enact. My supposition is that this latter meaning (enact) contains one of the main ideas that led to the association of this word to the “worship moment” practices.

60 Liesch, *Kindle Positions* 1696-1697.

61 The article “the” in quotes by the word *ministração* (in Portuguese “a”) indicates that the concept of *ministração* was a given, a fixed integral part of any worship moment.

62 Charles E. Farhadian, ed., *Christian Worship Worldwide: Expanding Horizons, Deepening Practices* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans), 2007. Kindle Location 2206. Kindle Edition.

unaware of the implications of the model, they perpetuate and promote a practice that may be inconsistent with their own set of beliefs. Concerning the rigid identification of “worship” with the block of time used for the “musical worship moment” within the church service, Souza Filho alerts his readers: “[They] criticize the old liturgy which our parents used in their worship of God, but they create *a new and rigid one*, to which everyone *feels obliged to fulfill*” (emphases mine).⁶³

The *necessity*⁶⁴ of speaking before or after a song is so deeply ingrained into the mind of worship leaders and congregants, that it has become the norm even in small group meetings. In 2015 I met a new Christian in his thirties, a member of another Baptist church in Ipatinga, who expressed the need in his church (which was without a “worship leader” at the time), for a *ministrador*⁶⁵ who could help lead the congregation in worship. His concern was that the older congregation “did not close their eyes and did not lift up their hands” when singing, and preferred the older hymns. His understanding was that a *ministrador* would remedy this situation. This young Christian was (is) truly sincere in his devotion and care for his church. But this perception illustrates once again how “worship” has become a template in such a way that one who has only recently come to participate in an evangelical congregation can easily assume that true worship must fit this “worship moment” model.⁶⁶

Many *ministradores* begin their period of musical worship with a calling to the church (often perceived as a command) to “declare”⁶⁷ the truth (or

63 Filho, 16.

64 It is important to stress that the *dependence* on this speaking practice surrounding the worship songs is at the heart of the issue of *sacramental* meaning. I am by no means arguing against the propriety of occasional comments and transitional explanations between songs in order to bring clear understanding to the congregants, and encouragement to full-hearted participation.

65 *Ministrador(es)* is the term for the individual who leads the worship team and speaks to the congregation during the “worship moment.”

66 Certainly, the impression that worship music must be guitar-led and band-played is not unique to Brazil. John Witvliet reiterates this development in his book, referring to North American churches: “Thousands of North American Christians simply assume that music in worship is properly rendered by a guitar-led praise band, not an organ, and that the basic genre of liturgical music is not hymnody but choruses and ballads.” John D. Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding: Windows into Christian Practice*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group), 2003, 235. Kindle Edition.

67 In Portuguese: “Você vai declarar . . .” [You are going to declare . . .]. The *ministrador(a)* may also

topic) of the song by singing it. At first glance, this may seem like an innocuous practice, since one indeed proclaims and “declares” the truths being sung, both as praise to God and as a communication to believers or unbelievers. However, as Augustus Nicodemus indicates,⁶⁸ this practice flows out of the “positive confession” movement that originated with the early twentieth-century Baptist pastor Essek W. Kenyon.⁶⁹ This doctrinal view attaches supernatural power to “spoken” words (presumably in accordance with God’s Word) and promotes the belief that whatever one declares with the mouth *does inevitably become reality*. A quote on the first webpage of Kenyon’s publications’ official site attests: “In the early days of my ministry I found that God’s Word, spoke[n] through my lips[,] changed men’s lives and set them free.”⁷⁰ This approach to faith developed into other varieties during the following decades and has permeated colloquial evangelicalism in Brazil. It can be identified not only in the “musical worship moment,” but also in the spoken (not sung) prayers of many Christians.

Within the *ministração* the worship leader may also offer personal testimonies, exhort the church, rebuke the church, prophesy (even in the sense of *foretelling* — this practice not being completely distinct from the doctrine of “positive confession”), and cry out to God for a number of reasons. These emotional appeals to God and to the congregation can occur before or after a particular song, or even within the context of the song itself.

John Witvliet calls these worship leaders “*liturgists*, offering commentary on the music and the progression of the service.”⁷¹ In Brazilian churches, besides the role of *liturgist*, a *pastoral* perception has also developed around the figure of the worship leader beyond what is commonly understood in North America. Although this article cannot discuss yet another colloquial

include him/herself and use “we.”

68 Escola Charles Spurgeon, “O Papel dos Grupos de Louvor na Adoração – Augustus Nicodemus Parte 2” [The Role of Worship Teams in the Worship Service – Augustus Nicodemus Part 2], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0DWynDzXlm0&t=58s>, at 1 minute, accessed April 25, 2017.

69 Kenyon’s Gospel Publishing Society, <http://www.kenyons.org/>, 2013–15, accessed April 25, 2017.

70 Ibid.

71 John D. Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding: Windows into Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group), 2003, 231. Kindle Edition.

use of terminology, it should suffice to say that the term *pastor*, which in Brazilian evangelical circles has become a key term used for *any* ordained minister whether he or she serves as a pastor in a local church, is frequently used by well-known worship singers.⁷²

Three Facets of Sacramental Perception

Three facets inherent in the concept of *sacrament* are verifiably present in the “musical worship moment” in local churches and in public events: the spiritual *entrance* into God’s presence in the Holy of Holies, *mediation* between God and man through a prearranged ritual or through ceremonial actions as “means of grace,” and the concept of *bringing* God’s “real presence” through the Holy Spirit into the midst of the congregation. These three key ideas are not totally distinct from one another and often appear to flow together during the course of the “worship moment.”

The first of these has strong biblical support from the book of Hebrews. On the basis of Christ’s sacrifice and mediation, the Christian is called upon to approach the holy places, or else, the throne of grace:

Therefore, brothers, since *we have confidence to enter the holy places* by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, *let us draw near* with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19–22)⁷³

Let us then with confidence *draw near* to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in

72 For instance: *Pr. Ana Paula Valadão*, Diante do Trono, “História - Diante do Trono,” <http://diantedotrono.com/historia/>, 2016, accessed April 26, 2017; *Pr. Fernanda Brum*, Doses de Ânimo, “Pregação da Pastora e Cantora: Fernanda Brum.” <http://dosesdeanimoblogspot.com/2012/11/pregacao-da-pastora-e-cantora-fernanda.html>, accessed April 26, 2017. Fernanda Brum has recently started her own congregation in Rio de Janeiro, but previously was referred to as *Pastora* (feminine form for pastor) although not holding the office of a pastor in a local congregation. See also the Lagoinha Baptist Church site, where reference is made to the *pastoral* function of *louvor*: <http://www.lagoinha.com/ibl-igreja/ministerio-siloe-deficientes-visuais/>, accessed May 1, 2017.

73 ESV Classic Reference Bible, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway), 2001. Kindle Locations 231013–231026.

time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)⁷⁴ (emphases mine)

The author of this New Testament book admonishes the redeemed children of God to approach the holy places without reservation and by faith. They have been granted this right by the mediation and atonement of Christ. The “musical worship moment,” therefore, can also provide an opportunity for the gathered church to draw near to God by faith. Along these lines, for instance, Pastors Wimber and Espinosa of Anaheim, California, developed a model known as a Five-Phase Worship model or “free-flowing praise.”⁷⁵ This template envisions a progression *into* the Holy of Holies, and concludes with a calm moment of intimate worship. What may have been absent during the years of the model’s development, however, was a warning to God’s people not to attach their *confidence* to the presence of musical elements in the corporate worship moment, which in turn *would* (and indeed *did*) shift their attention to the form and the format of the musical practices, rather than fix it on the simple approach to God by faith through prayer. Theologian D. A. Carson, in his book *Worship by the Book*, warns of the mysticism attached to this “moment”: “Objectively, what brings us into the presence of God is the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.” When this mystical perception is infiltrated into the “musical worship moment,” Carson says that “it will not be long before we think of such worship as being meritorious, or efficacious, or the like.”⁷⁶ This mystical meaning within the “musical worship moments” may also indicate a belief in a present-day (rather than eschatological – after Christ’s return) prophetic fulfillment of Old Testament sayings, as indicated on Lagoinha’s Praise Ministry page:

Today, we can observe the promise of restoration of the
Tabernacle of David being fulfilled (Amos 9:11), when

74 Ibid., Kindle Locations 230528-230529.

75 Barry Wayne Liesch, *The New Worship: Straight Talk on Music and the Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group), 2001. Kindle Edition. Barry Liesch discusses the model of musical worship organization entitled “free-flowing praise,” which is attributed to John Wimber, former pastor of Vineyard Church in Anaheim, CA. Liesch discusses the ideas behind this model in chapters 3 and 4 of *The New Worship*.

76 D. A. Carson, “Worship under the Word,” chap. 1 in *Worship by the Book*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 50.

praise (*louvor*) is restored to the House of God in all its forms: with dances, with new songs, with liberty of expression and worship, *bringing the prophetic ambiance [environment or atmosphere] to the Church of the Lord.*⁷⁷ (emphasis mine)

The second aspect of sacramental meaning mentioned above is *mediation*, its service as a “means of grace” (not necessarily “of salvation from eternal condemnation” in every instance, but in terms of extra benefits). Musical worship has developed significant characteristics that suggest this view. With the following statements, “Diante do Trono,” for example, states the mission and vision of its ministry, and indicates a leaning towards this perception:

Mission - To please God in all that we do, honoring Him on the stages and in the back rooms, in the processes and in the results, so that our worship may be accepted before the Throne and that the power of the Spirit may be poured out *through our mediation*, transforming lives and nations.

Vision - *Worshippers who bring Heaven to Earth*, expressing the Kingdom of God in all spheres of society for the transformation of Brazil and of the world.⁷⁸ (emphases mine)

In brief, this ministry intends to mediate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to those who participate in their events.

The New Testament uses the term “mediator” for Jesus alone. 1 Timothy 2:5 states that “there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (ESV). According to Scripture, there is only *one person* who, through his own effort or work, can enact a reconnection between sinful man and a holy God. This person is the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, certain actions, institutions, or individuals are viewed

77 Igreja Batista da Lagoinha, “Igreja” – “Ministério de Louvor da Lagoinha,” <http://www.lagoinha.com/ibl-igreja/ministerio-siloe-deficientes-visuais/>, 2017, accessed May 1, 2017.

78 Diante do Trono, “Missão e Visão” [Mission and Vision], <http://diantedotrono.com/historia/>, 2016, translation mine, accessed April 21, 2017.

as “mediatory” because they were instituted by Christ or His Father to lead a person to God. In this sense, for instance, the Holy Spirit “mediates” the presence of the Son in the believer’s life continually. In his book *True Worshipers*, worship leader and musician Bob Kauflin cites J. I. Packer explaining: “The distinctive, constant, basic ministry of the Holy Spirit under the new covenant is . . . to *mediate* Christ’s presence to believers.”⁷⁹ (emphasis mine) He highlights that “theologian Wayne Grudem agrees when he says that a main role of the Holy Spirit ‘in the new covenant age is to manifest the presence of God, to give indications that make the presence of God known.’”⁸⁰ Furthermore, individual believers, when making intercession for others, practice a form of “mediation.” It may have been on the trail of this proper biblical perspective that ritual actions or events, in the end, attained the mediatory status of *sacrament* during the course of history.

It is crucial to understand, however, that whatever privileges of *mediation* the church or individuals may have, they bring them to God solely through Jesus Christ. They serve only as introducers or communicators. Acts of mediation or intercession can be illustrated by the disciple Andrew’s participation in the leading of his brother Simon Peter to Christ (John 1:40-42). Andrew presented Peter to Christ, but the One who did in fact bridge the gap to God was Jesus Himself. Thus, in a communicative way, not a redemptive one, the capacity of *mediation* can be applied to other persons or actions.

Geoffrey Wainwright presents another aspect of “mediation” that is more specifically connected to traditional sacramental doctrine. He cites Beinert who ascribed this role to the Church within the context of Catholic theology. Beinert presents the church as “the sacrament, that is the *sign* and *instrument*, of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humankind.”⁸¹ Catholic interpretation differs from Protestant views of

79 Bob Kauflin, *True Worshipers: Seeking What Matters to God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway), 2015, 130. Kindle Edition.

80 Ibid., 130.

81 Geoffrey Wainwright, *Worship With One Accord: Where Liturgy and Ecumenism Embrace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1997, 87, citing: W. Beinert, “Die Sakramentalität der Kirche im theologischen Gespräch” in *Kirche und Sakrament*, vol. 9 of *Theologische Berichte*, ed. J. Pfammater and F. Furger (Zürich: Benziger, 1980), 13-66.

the church in that while Protestants (generally including denominations considered to be evangelical or of the Reformed tradition) understand the church to be a communicator and representative of Christ on earth, they do not attribute to it the power to confer salvation or blessing as an institution, as the term *instrument* has come to mean.

Mediation, within the theological view of *sacrament*, most commonly involves *an action or ritual*, not primarily human beings as mediators. In the case of “Diante do Trono’s” ministry, it is doubtful that it intentionally places itself or its work as an absolute mediator, nor does it portray itself as the *one* church or institution through which one *must* come to God. It stands to reason that Lagoinha’s intention is to communicate for God about His will for their lives and thus be used to bring people to Christ, the *one mediator*, and to serve as catalyst for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Apart from the theological overtones that have developed around the “musical worship moment” in the course of time, the difficulty once again relates to the solid association of *lowvor* with *worship music*. This connection has led masses of people to reinforce the belief that such *mediation* (subliminally understood as more than “communication”) takes place by *worship music* itself, particularly in the context of the “worship moment.” Additionally, the belief in the mediatory power of worship music could be partly responsible for the (often unspoken) assumption that contemporary genres are the only effective agents of worship. Whether stated or not, the various actions exercised during the “musical worship moment” contain clear sacramental overtones. This “template behavior” not only shapes the contemporary worship service but ultimately communicates a message that may contradict the church’s own doctrinal position.

The foundations frequently offered for the assumed power of *musical praise* to liberate or free the believer from satanic powers or illnesses (one of the *graces* expected in some circles as the outcome of *lowvor*), are these biblical instances: 1. the fall of the walls of Jericho (book of Joshua) after the priests sounded the trumpets and the people shouted; 2. the effect of David’s singing and playing on the evil spirit that had taken over King Saul (1 Samuel); and 3. Paul and Silas’ songs of praise when in prison at Philippi (Book of Acts). Marcio Valadão’s *Lowvor e Adoração* illustrates well the attempt to practically equate *musical praise* to *praise itself* in its use

of these passages throughout the various chapters of his book.⁸² Although on the surface, a functional link between musical praise and liberation or victory appears to exist in these texts, no clear evidence of effectual and definitive power is attributed by the Scriptures to the *medium of music*. The walls of Jericho did fall by the operation of God. The marches around the city served as obedience to God's command in that specific instance (it never became a pattern for conducting war among the Israelites), and upon the sounding of the trumpets (likely a signal of war and not a "song"), the people obeyed by shouting, not singing. Although the sounding of the trumpets and the people's shout could certainly be viewed as praise, they do not represent a coordinated musical composition, and they were neither pre-created nor improvised.

In the case of David and Saul, although music did calm Saul's spirit initially (1 Samuel 16:23), this did not occur in another related incident:

The next day a harmful spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house while David was playing the lyre, *as he did day by day*. Saul had his spear in his hand. And Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, "I will pin David to the wall." But David evaded him twice.⁸³ (1 Samuel 18:10-11) (emphasis mine)

Despite all the positive influence that David's music had on Saul's spirit day by day, in this instance, the harmful spirit was not bound by the musical sounds produced by David. David had to "run for his life."

Regarding Paul and Silas' musical praise in Acts 16, it should be noted that the apostles were praying *as well as* singing praises (*hymns* in the ESV). Nothing in the text indicates that they believed that *through musical actions* a miracle would categorically happen. Counting it joy to be persecuted for Christ's sake, they expressed their confidence in God by worshipping Him through prayer and song. Luke follows this statement by highlighting the immediate effect of their worship expressions: "and the prisoners were listening to them."⁸⁴

82 Marcio Valadão, *Louvor e Adoração* [Praise and Worship] (Belo Horizonte: Igreja Batista da Lagoinha Publications, 1999/2010).

83 ESV Classic Reference Bible, Kindle Locations 46337-46346.

84 Ibid., Kindle Location 207382.

The third facet of sacramental meaning encountered in the “musical worship moment” in Brazilian churches involves experiencing God’s “real presence” in the midst of the congregation. As referenced early in this article, the sacraments, particularly the *Eucharist* as understood in Catholic and certain Protestant branches of Christianity, are mediatory for the bonding with the “real presence” of God. John Jefferson Davis states that “the central reality in a New Testament understanding of the Lord’s Supper is that the risen Christ, alive and present in the Spirit, continues to meet his people in joyful fellowship *at the table*. Jesus Christ is *really present* in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, not on the table, circumscribed by the elements, but *at the table*, as the true minister and celebrant, continuing to enjoy fellowship with his disciples as he did during his earthly ministry” (emphases mine).⁸⁵ Davis correctly states that “Jesus Christ is *really present* in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.” He is, however, still present when the Lord’s Supper is not being celebrated. Davis criticizes believers such as the reformer Zwingli whose approach to the table regards it solely as a memorial: “Protestant Zwinglian (bare memorial) reactions to transubstantiation tended to produce a sense of the *real absence* of Christ at the table.”⁸⁶ The overall impression given by sacramental liturgists, whether intentionally or not, is that Christ is really present *only* when the Lord’s Supper is observed. Admittedly, certain writers temper this perception by indicating that the Lord is present with the church “in a *unique* way on different occasions.”⁸⁷

With this impression in my mind, adepts to the practice of the “musical worship moment” in Brazilian churches tend to believe that *louvor* (*worship or praise music* in the context of the “musical moment” template) has the capacity, yea perhaps even the duty, of making Christ *really present* through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This is clearly evidenced by the *ministrações* and the prayers offered during or at the end of the cycle of songs. “Diante do Trono’s” Vision speaks of “worshippers who bring Heaven to Earth.”⁸⁸ Taken as a metaphor for godly living at the present

85 Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, 359-352.

86 Ibid., 355.

87 Kauflin, *True Worshipers*, 132. Kindle Edition

88 Diante do Trono, “Missão e Visão” [Mission and Vision], <http://diantedotrono.com/historia/>,

time on Earth, or even eschatologically, their proposed “Vision” represents the godly desire of anyone who hungers and thirsts for righteousness. Nonetheless, the constant cultural and linguistic association of *louvor* with the *worship songs* or the “musical worship moment” continue to add support to Lagoinha’s and other ministries’ hermeneutical proposal that now, before the return of Christ, prophecies of restoration such as the re-establishment of the Tabernacle of David are being fulfilled through this worship practice.⁸⁹

Calvin Stapert’s study of the writings of the early church fathers regarding music sheds an important light on this latter facet of sacramental meaning. His book *A New Song for an Old World: Musical Thought in the Early Church* gives special attention to early church Christians’ perceptions of music. He discusses the purposes for music (especially liturgical) within pagan cults and their distinction from the Judeo-Christian perception. Quoting James McKinnon, Stapert condenses the purpose of Christian song to the idea of a *mode of expression*, and places the emphasis on the word “joy.”⁹⁰ The “frame of mind” of joy, he states, “is a direct inheritance from Judaism”⁹¹ and stands in direct contrast to the common Hellenistic cultic intent. Pagan ritual music had the important function of *beguiling the deity*.⁹² Stapert explains:

“To beguile the deity” nicely describes an important function of pagan ritualistic music; it falls into the category called *epiclesis*. The term itself (derived from the Greek *epikaleo*) is neutral: it simply means “to summon,” “to call upon,” “to appeal to.” But in pagan ritual, *epiclesis* was not so benign. Johannes Quasten goes so far as to say that “all antiquity was convinced that music had the power of *epiclesis*.” And “power” is the key word. As Quasten explains, music “was understood to exercise a magical influence over the gods, so that it became a means by which men controlled the deities.”

2016, accessed April 21, 2017.

89 Igreja Batista da Lagoinha, “Igreja” – “Ministério de Louvor da Lagoinha,” <http://www.lagoinha.com/ibl-igreja/ministerio-siloe-deficientes-visuais/>, 2017, translation mine, accessed May 1, 2017.

90 Calvin R. Stapert. *A New Song for an Old World: Musical Thought in the Early Church* (Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.), 2007. Kindle Location 266.

91 Stapert, *A New Song for an Old World*: Kindle Locations 267.

92 Ibid., Kindle Locations 274–282.

Christian ritual also includes *epiclesis*. . . . But, unlike pagan *epiclesis*, there is no magical power in it – musical or otherwise. The Holy Spirit is not beguiled into filling those who pray. Christian *epiclesis* is petitionary, not manipulative, and in a peculiar way it asks for what is already granted.⁹³

The “musical worship moment” displays characteristics of *epiclesis* on a regular basis. The petitionary aspect by itself, including prayer for the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of the participants fully, does not propose anything contrary to Scripture. But the language used in the “worship moment,” the tone or mode of the *ministrador’s* speech, and the accompanying musical crescendos to “inaugurate” the presence of Holy Spirit in the congregation seem to tell a different story. A personal visit to a Baptist church service in a city in the southern part of Minas Gerais in February of 2015 can serve to illustrate this practice. After the morning service, the interim pastor extended to me an invitation to preach in the evening service. I accepted. During the typical (now almost “traditional”) “musical worship moment,” a group of four young people led a set of three songs, the last of which gave rise to a moment of *epiclesis*. Towards the end of that song, the *ministradora* began a moment of intense, fast-paced, repetitive, and loud prayer, calling on the Holy Spirit in ecstatic fashion. The actual switch into this mode (*epiclesis*) probably seemed awkward even to those who belonged to that congregation. The impression left was of a purposefully programmed ritual, not a genuine manifestation of the leader’s sudden and intense desire to experience the Holy Spirit’s presence.

It is important to reiterate that this critique does not intend to reflect negatively on the genuineness of the worship team’s faith and dedication. Upon meeting the members of the worship team mentioned above, their demeanor left no concerns about their love of God and dedication to serving Him. Likewise, all the comments and citations from various authors and musical ministries used to demonstrate the thesis of this article should not serve to indicate any perceived or real malice from those with whom this author may disagree. The crucial point which this article attempts to point out is the apparent reliance on the “means” – worship

93 Ibid., Kindle Locations 274–278.

music and the composite actions of the musical worship moment – to achieve certain benefits from God, to come into the presence of God, or to achieve an open manifestation of the Spirit in their midst. This reliance, I would argue, represents the practical (even if not dogmatically stated) existence of a “new sacrament.”

APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

Practices of musical worship in the new covenant may enjoy the liberty of varieties of expression. The New Testament texts do not command or disallow the greater part of the characteristics encountered in contemporary worship styles and their accompanying actions. This present discussion is not intended to restrict or demand changes from any of its subjects. But it is aimed at challenging Christians to take seriously their worship expressions; to reopen their “boxes” or templates; and to analyze their plans, programs, patterns, and expectations through properly biblical hermeneutical lenses. A solid harmony between declarations of faith and the practical expressions of faith should exist. Once this challenge is taken to heart, an accurate perception of the significance of the “musical worship moment” should help worship leaders, pastors, and other collaborators in the music ministry to align their worship practices with their true theological views. Through prayer and on the basis of Scriptural and spiritual discernment, theological consensus can lead evangelical churches to grow in unity and respect. It is my hope that church leaders among Brazilian Baptist churches, from which this text has had its initial impulse, as well as any church or Christian organization around the world, will be earnest in this re-evaluation of the “musical worship moment.”

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