



An Examination of Sovereign Grace Ministries and Getty-Townend For Use in Fundamental Christian Churches (3)

By Doug Bachorik December 27, 2012

175 SHARES

 Share

 Tweet

- About P&D
- Part 3 (Part 1 [here](#); Part 2 [here](#))
- FBFI

Doug Bachorik and Ryan Weberg

- [FBFI](#)
In [Part 1](#), the authors established the desirability of adopting new and unfamiliar music for church music ministry, but they insist all such music must be thoroughly tested before being adopted (or adapted) by local churches (and individual Christians).
 - [FrontLine Magazine](#)
 - [Regions and Fellowships](#)
 - [Chaplains](#)
- [Resources](#)
In particular, this study intends to examine the music of Sovereign Grace Ministries (SGM) and that of Keith Getty and Stuart Townend (GTM) for its appropriateness in the ministry of fundamental Christians.
 - [Featured Items](#)
 - [Recommended Books](#)
 - [Evangelism and Discipleship](#)
 - [Children's Ministries](#)
 - [Chaplain Resources](#)
 - [Church Supplies](#)
- [Missionaries](#)
Part 3 deals with questions of Text, Theology, Philosophy and the problem of

Text, Theology, Philosophy

With regard to lyrics, Keith Getty articulates well his conviction regarding the theological significance of words put to song: “What we sing becomes the grammar of what we believe.”¹ Again, he notes, “What we sing affects how we think, how we feel and ultimately how we live.”² This conviction spawns a theological intentionality and robustness that distinguishes GTM songs from many in the SGM venue,³ with an emphasis upon Christian doctrine over Christian experience.⁴ Whereas Getty grew up Presbyterian and today leads worship at Parkside Church (a non-denominational church in Cleveland, Ohio, pastored by Alistair Begg), Stuart Townend grew up Anglican, and today leads worship in a NewFrontiers church in England (a neocharismatic apostolic network of evangelical, charismatic churches). Their goal is to write music that brings believers of different geographical, theological and musical backgrounds together in worship. Theologically, SGM describes itself as “evangelical, Reformed, and charismatic.”⁵

Theologically, both ministries remain orthodox in their articulation and emphasis of the finished work of the cross, and both acknowledge the change of life that ought to result. Nor, from a theological standpoint, does the fact that these writers are Reformed pose any significant danger. While there is a pronounced focus on “kingdom” theology, it would be difficult to categorize it as postmillennial. The primary danger comes not in their explicit theology, but in their implicit philosophical tendencies toward an evangelical approach to culture and a charismatic approach to worship.

Philosophically, the evangelical (as opposed to the fundamentalist) views culture as essentially neutral – man in God’s image as co-creator. The content is what counts, the “packaging” (or genre/style) is peripheral. Therefore, he takes a more inclusive stance toward culture. The result (on a practical level) is that, while the theology of their lyrics argues *for the positional* holiness of the believer in Christ, their performance styles and, especially in the case of SGM, their musical settings subtly argue *against the practical* holiness and separation from the world that ought to result.

The other danger lies in SGM’s charismatic approach to worship. We cannot truly separate doctrine and experience in worship; nor should we try ([John 4:24](#)). But we can overemphasize experience to the detriment of orthodox worship, which is the tendency of the charismatic – both in theology and practice. The result is that (on a practical level) experience trumps doctrine, which works against the integrity of both worship and the faith it ought to cultivate.

worship and the faith it ought to cultivate.

Text/Theology/Philosophy Conclusion

Both GTM and SGM have produced lyrics that are theologically sound and deep, although not all the lyrics are of equal value and quality. At the same time, some lyrics are quite vague or are clearly Charismatic in their approach to God, thus making them inappropriate for fundamental, dispensational congregations. As with any other hymn text source, we should be careful that we select texts that reinforce *our* doctrine. Some songs from these ministries do that well and beautifully; some do not.

Association

If we truly believe that music itself communicates (which the authors do), we must give the priority in music to the music *makers* – those who *determine* the message. But what do we do about those whose music sends mixed messages? It must be recognized that the question of mixed messages goes beyond the blend of music and lyrics – and thus, beyond the realm of the music-makers themselves. It is precisely at this point that the music discussion moves into the realm of association.

Association is the message of a song conveyed not in music, nor in lyric, but in the *culture* that it represents. Because association is so intricately tied to culture, it is dictated, not by the composer, or the performer, but by the arena or context in which they operate – an arena that must be shared to some extent by the audience for an association to exist. As evidenced by 1 Corinthians 8, The Apostle Paul believed associations were significant. However, he did not believe they were ultimate (see v. 8). Two truths must be noted from this passage: 1) the limitations he imposed upon himself were with reference to that which was morally neutral (i.e., meat); and 2) he employed his restrictions not for his own benefit, but for the benefit of others.

We have already dealt with the questions of musical language and text. Now we can move to a consideration about the associations attached to the music – particularly with a view toward how one's own use of it might affect others.

While the numbers of associations that may exist are innumerable, it is instructive to inquire as to what kinds of associations a song may have. Though not a conclusive list, the following categories seem broad enough to suffice: 1) identification with a particular author/composer; 2) identification with a particular artist/performer; 3) identification with a particular genre/style; 4) identification with a particular theology/philosophy; 5) identification with a particular group/movement.

All art (of which music is a part) is produced in a culture, and therefore, is not without associations. But the question of association is rarely an issue until a work or group becomes large enough to be identified in conjunction with some aspect of the culture

that particularizes it – that is, it must become a recognizable part of, or a contributing player within culture. Increasingly, the ministries of SGM and GTM fit that qualification. Because all music has associations, we must ask of the music put out by these ministries what those associations are. Asking the question this way already classifies the music according to its authors/composers (who often serve as the artists/performers). And, having dealt with theology/philosophy with regard to the texts, only two types of associations remain to be dealt with.

Genre & Style

As we have noted, there is a recognizable difference between the two ministries. The style of the music performed by SGM is generally pop, while the style pioneered by GTM has been described as the “modern hymn” – a unique blend of Irish folk, pop, classical music and standard hymnody, meant to “bridge the gap between traditional and contemporary”⁶ by providing “a more timeless musical style.”⁷ SGM is largely written to be recorded (a notable feature of pop music), while GTM music is written with the express purpose of being sung in a church context (constructed to fit either a traditional or contemporary service setting). In their performances both ministries employ bands (bass, guitars, drums, keyboard), while GTM usually includes a violin, and sometimes a bagpipe, flute, and/or accordion. Both groups tend to perform their music in a pop vocal style, with a more casual stage presence – often dressed in jeans and un-tucked shirts, with men (and sometimes ladies) wearing hats or caps (though the SGM team tends to look more sloppy on-stage, with many of their men sporting t-shirts and tousled hair). The overall effect is that worship is a “come-as-you-are” event.

Group or Movement

Both GTM and SGM are at the forefront of what is being heralded as an idea or movement known as the “New Calvinism.”⁸ In fact, the *Time* magazine article that broaches the subject identifies music at the very core of its emergence.⁹ Mark Driscoll (identified as one of the three primary personae of the movement) lists four main differences between Old and New Calvinism:

1. Old Calvinism was fundamental or liberal and separated from or syncretized with culture. New Calvinism is missional and seeks to create and redeem culture.
2. Old Calvinism fled from the cities. New Calvinism is flooding into cities.
3. Old Calvinism was fearful of the Holy Spirit and generally cessationist (i.e., believing the gifts of the Holy Spirit such as tongues and prophecy had ceased). New Calvinism delights in the Holy Spirit and is generally continuationist with regard to spiritual gifts.
4. Old Calvinism was fearful and suspicious of other Christians and burned bridges.

New Calvinism loves all Christians and builds bridges between them.¹⁰

The fourth distinctive is what Driscoll considers a vital component – emphasizing theological orthodoxy by focusing (almost exclusively) on the historical “fundamentals” of the faith.¹¹ But (especially with regard to this discussion) the first distinctive is probably equally, if not more significant. Whereas evangelicals and New Calvinists view culture as neutral (man in God’s image as co-creator), the fundamentalists (and traditional Calvinists) view culture as non-neutral – the more it is created in a God-fearing context, by new creatures in Christ, the more “redemptive” it has the potential of being – but it happens intentionally, not automatically. The more culture is influenced by those without Christ, or by those whose thinking is not yet transformed by Christ, the more “depraved” any culture remains.

Emphasizing the finished work of the cross is essential to the message of the gospel, but so too is “growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18), and understanding what His “excellencies” are supposed to look like (2 Pet 1:2-9). This is the danger of a movement that erases all theological distinctions and champions new converts as worship leaders – whose enthusiasm is contagious; along with their lack of discernment. The (nearly) exclusive focus of this movement upon justification results in a large-scale under-emphasis upon sanctification. And both are necessary components of an orthodox gospel.

Association Conclusion

Utilizing the music of GTM or SGM is primarily a matter of musical communication, and only secondarily a matter of association. However, these associations can affect us with messages that are not necessarily explicit, but nonetheless present. What is more, as pointed out by the Apostle Paul, the messages implicitly conveyed by our choices carry influence with others. This brings us to a final consideration with regard to associations: Paul’s limitation of his “Christian liberties” places more emphasis upon the effects of his choices upon believers than upon unbelievers. A subtle shift is taking place within Christendom today, as the meetings of the church (Greek for “assembly”) become more about evangelism than about worship – that is, more about those “outside” the assembly, than about those “within.” With this shift, increasing emphasis is placed upon being “authentic” rather than upon being “holy,” resulting in an “inauthentic” gospel, devoid of victory over sin (Rom 6:14), and devoid of victory over the world (1 Jn 5:4). The lyrics or the music itself may not convey such messages, but the culture surrounding it just might. Although the authors do not minimize the need for evangelism to be a part of our public worship, in the Scriptures the focal point of worship is believers, walking in fellowship with God and brethren, giving God the glory due to His name. When this happens rightly, then the lost who are attending cannot

help but perceive that the Lord is in their midst and may turn to Him ([1 Cor. 14:25](#)).

The connection of SGM to radically different theology in some of the areas discussed above means that the use of it in our churches may open the way for weak and undiscerning brethren to be led astray. Although we can be careful to choose songs that we do agree with, and sing them in ways that are not problematic, there is a real danger for fellow Christians who are either too naïve to sort out the good from the bad, or are carnally looking for any excuse to feed the sinful flesh with rock music. Guided by the New Testament's frequent emphasis on edification, it would seem best to be very careful about the use of a potentially damaging source of music. GTM includes some of the same association problems, perhaps to a lesser degree.

Final Conclusion and Applications

The authors have taken pains (and a long time) to get to the point of application, but we felt it important to work through the issues in front of the reader, so that our personal, ministerial applications would make sense. We also hope that, by seeing the process, readers might be helped in wrestling with other issues that are not as black-and-white as we might wish.

Summary of conclusions

Printed Music:

- SGM – problematic
- GTM – mostly fine

Performed Music:

- SGM – very problematic
- GTM – often problematic

Text

- SGM – some fine texts; some vague and Charismatic-leaning texts
- GTM – some fine texts
- both – somewhat limited in range of truths presented; a seriousness about God, reflected in both the poetic language and depth of expression

Association

- both – present significant problems for a fundamental church; the use of music from SGM and GTM could lead weaker brethren either towards theological positions we hold to be unscriptural (either in terms of worship, or towards the other problems of New Calvinism) or towards worldliness.

Applications

For our respective ministries at this point in time, the authors have chosen to not include songs produced by SGM, although we recognize and appreciate some of the material produced. The potential hazards of SGM far outweigh the potential benefits, and the benefits of SGM can be found in other resources that do not bring those same hazards.

Regarding GTM, we are cautiously optimistic about using selected songs in a non-pop/rock performing style. Some of the associational issues are real, especially while the songs remain so closely tied to their original source. For this reason, the authors have chosen, thus far, to not include GTM songs in our ministries, although we are not as opposed to GTM as we are to SGM. It is likely that when we believe the inclusion of GTM songs in our ministries will be a source of edification, without bringing danger to weaker brethren, we will use selected songs. This is the pattern the authors follow with all music choices from all music-publishing ministries.¹²

Ultimately, these issues must be wrestled with and wise applications made in each local church, for it is to each church that corporate worship and edification have been given as responsibilities and privileges. The authors hope that, by God's grace, their thoughts presented here will be a help to those seeking to honor the Lord in their music.

Doug Bachorik is the director of music studies, Bob Jones Memorial Bible College, Quezon City, Philippines. He is also the author of a new book on music, see *New Heart, New Spirit, New Song* for additional information.

Ryan Weberg is the pastor of Valley View Bible Church, Telford, PA

1. <http://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/keith-getty-on-writing-hymns-for-the-church-universal/> [↩]
2. <http://www.facebook.com/keithandkristyngettyfans/info> [↩]
3. See the “top ten” songs of each (with lyrics) at <http://gettymusic.com/hymns.aspx>, and <http://www.sovereigngraceministries.org/blogs/sgm/post/Top-ten-songs-from-Sovereign-Grace-Music.aspx> [↩]
4. “Stuart Townend contends that current worship practices have often allowed the pendulum of expression to swing towards subjective experience and personal feeling about God. The Getty/Townend hymns attempt to redress that

- feeling about God. The Getty/Townend hymns attempt to redress that imbalance.” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keith_Getty) [↗]
5. <http://www.sovereigngraceministries.org/about-us/default.aspx> [↗]
 6. <http://www.gettymusic.com/about.aspx> [↗]
 7. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keith_Getty [↗]
 8. http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1884779_1884782_1884760,00.html [↗]
 9. “If you really want to follow the development of conservative Christianity, track its musical hits. In the early 1900s you might have heard “The Old Rugged Cross,” a celebration of the atonement. By the 1980s you could have shared the Jesus-is-my-buddy intimacy of “Shine, Jesus, Shine.” And today, more and more top songs feature a God who is very big, while we are...well, hark the David Crowder Band: “I am full of earth/ You are heaven’s worth/ I am stained with dirt/ Prone to depravity.” Calvinism is back, and not just musically.” (“The New Calvinism – 10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now.” Time, March 12, 2009. http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1884779_1884782_1884760,00.html#ixzz10JRp7b8s.) [↗]
 10. <http://theresurgence.com/2009/03/12/time-magazine-names-new-calvinism-3rd-most-powerful-idea> [↗]
 11. <http://theresurgence.com/2009/03/12/more-thoughts-on-time-magazine-and-new-calvinism> [↗]
 12. If the leadership of a church determines that songs from GTM or SGM are appropriate for use, it would be advisable to make some kind of disclaimer about the source, perhaps occasionally on a Sunday night or in a church bulletin, just as a pastor might quote from or recommend a book by an author, but give a word of warning about important areas of disagreement with that author. [↗]

Share this:



Facebook



Twitter



Email



Print

Related

[An Examination of Sovereign Grace Ministries and Getty-Townend For Use in Fundamental Christian Churches \(1\)](#)

December 11, 2012

In "All"

[An Examination of Sovereign Grace Ministries and Getty-Townend For Use in Fundamental Christian Churches \(2\)](#)

December 19, 2012

In "All"

[New Heart, New Spirit, New Song](#)

March 1, 2013

In "Ministry Reports"

Posted in All, Blog, Proclaim & Defend and tagged Getty-Townend, Music, Sovereign Grace

[← Holidays and Old Testament Feasts](#)

[The Eclectic Web–2012/12/30 →](#)

- Blog
- FrontLine
- Home and Family
- In the news
- Ministry Reports
- Official Statements
- Opinion Pieces

