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Book Review

EVANS, Mark. 2006. *Open Up the Doors: Music in the Modern Church.* London: Equinox. xiv + 209 pp. ISBN 1845531868 (hbk); 1845531876 (pbk). £50.00 (hbk); £15.00 (pbk).

Reviewed by: George D. Chryssides, University of Birmingham, Elmfield House, College Walk, Selly Oak, Birmingham, B29 6LG, UK.
G.D.Chryssides@bham.ac.uk

Those of us who have led field visits to Christian churches have probably encouraged students to reflect on whether service music is traditional or contemporary, perhaps making the theological point that the Church, being the totality of generations of Christians, draws on the artistic contributions of its members from ancient times to the twenty-first century. Mark Evans's *Open Up the Doors* goes much further, offering historical, theological and musicological analysis of contemporary popular congregational music. Evans's analysis is based on his own direct experience of traditional and contemporary Christian worship in Sydney, Australia, combined with an extensive range of published sources.

An early chapter provides an outline of the history of church music, from biblical times, through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation, and the proliferation of hymn writing and congregational singing that gained momentum in the eighteenth century largely through Methodism, developing into evangelical music, including the gospel songs of Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey. Evans identifies Chuck Smith's Calvary Chapel in California as the origin of the musical revolution which has substituted music groups with guitars, drums and synthesizers for the traditional choir and organ, and which uses secular rock as its basis for its praise music. Particular attention is given to the Christian City Church (CCC) and Hillsong Church (whose music is marketed by Integrity Music), both of which are Sydney-based and are in the Pentecostal tradition.

Evans rejects the view that popular congregational song is "musical kitch," unworthy of serious academic study. He argues against scholars of church music who have set up harsh contrasts between the traditional and the popular, and who have characterized the latter as superficial, discouraging reflection, appealing to sentimentality, and market-driven. Traditional hymnody, he argues, has frequently been popularist, with the sacred drawing inspiration from the secular. It is also naïve, he suggests, to contend that the Church's music is shifting from the liturgical and traditional, through the revivalist, to the "popular." Even the Hillsong Community does not reject the use of more traditional hymns, but rather attempts to inspire and empower people by using a modern idiom.

The book raises a number of important questions about church music. One issue is globalization. Hillsong and CCC are local congregations, although mega-churches, whose music originated from the experience of a local community. What features of their music enable them to have a worldwide appeal? Evans suggests that a prevalent feature in their congregational songs is the intimacy of the relationship that they imply between the individual believer and God. Frequently, he notes, these songs are expressed in the first person singular, rather than suggesting a relationship involving a community of believers.

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The author uses the term "theomusicology" to denote the analysis of the theology of religious music. Theology is most obviously expressed in the lyrics, but Evans believes that the music can also convey theological ideas such as the understanding of the relationship between God and the believer. Evans finds doctrinal components, such as creedal, christological and soteriological ideas, together with some emphasis on eschatology and judgement. Others are associated with specific points in a service, such as the call to worship or the celebration of communion. Less emphasis is placed on social justice, although the theme is not entirely absent. Of key important is the theology of "anointing." This reviewer recently accessed a YouTube recording of Hillsong music, and noticed that a previous visitor had left the comment "Very anointed!" to describe the performance. Evans explains that this is more than in-group vocabulary: it is associated with the Pentecostal notion of the Holy Spirit's anointing powers (2 Cor. 1:21–22), and the belief that the writers and performers of such music are specially chosen and commissioned by God as his messengers to proclaim the Gospel in their singing.

Inevitably the author only covers a selection of contemporary popular church music. Graham Kendrick, for example, only receives a single passing mention, despite the fact that one well-known hymnary used by Anglicans and Roman Catholics (*Hymns Old and New*) includes more items by Kendrick than by either Charles Wesley or J. S. Bach. This no doubt reflects the book's Australian character, and its author's focus on songwriters who are also performers, such as former pop-star Darlene Zschech, famed for her "Shout to the Lord!"

Open Up the Doors has the merit of making sense of a phenomenon that traditionalists either dislike or dismiss, or both. The book's value lies its detailed analysis of a phenomenon that seems superficial on initial acquaintance, but is nonetheless important as part of contemporary Christian worship.

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