



Worship and the World to Come *Exploring Christian Hope in Contemporary Worship*

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Glenn Packiam (Doctor of Theology and Ministry, Durham) is the associate senior pastor of New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado. He is the songwriter of more than fifty worship songs, including “Your Name” and “Mystery of Faith,” and the author of several books, including *Blessed Broken Given: How Your Story Becomes Sacred in the Hands of Jesus* and *Discover the Mystery of Faith: How Worship Shapes Believing*. He is also a visiting fellow at St. John’s College at Durham University and an adjunct professor at Denver Seminary.

Expressing Hope through Contemporary Worship

What motivated you to write this book? What particular need are you addressing?

Glenn Packiam: We need to reflect deeply on how our worship practices—particularly contemporary worship songs and services—are forming us. Furthermore, one aspect of theology that is anemic in evangelical Christianity is a robust vision of Christian hope. Instead of resurrection and new creation, the focus is on heaven.

This book explores what role contemporary worship songs have played in malforming our hope.

At the same time, too much criticism about contemporary worship has been thin and narrowly focused on lyrics. But the text of a ritual is not the same as the performance of it. A thick analysis of contemporary worship services that employs ethnography and sociological tools is much needed and what this book provides.

Briefly summarize your thesis. What is distinctive about this idea and/or your approach or methodology?

Glenn: The book explores how hope is encoded in contemporary worship songs and experienced in contemporary worship services. The contemporary worship songs we call “songs of hope” are overly focused on the present tense, the proximate space, and the personal dimension. Yet the hope experienced in services in which contemporary worship songs are sung is consistent, resilient, and available in variant means.

This may be accounted for by a theology of the Spirit as God’s eschatological presence, God’s powerful and empowering presence, and God’s sacramental presence.

Yet this does not excuse pastors, worship leaders, and songwriters from thinking more deeply about how our sermons, songs, and service shape form our theology.

What do you hope your book contributes to the study of worship and theology?

Glenn:

- Presents original empirical research on contemporary worship that includes thick sociological analysis of both songs and services (as opposed to just a study of song lyrics).
- Tests the popular theoretical claim that worship practices are formative by exploring in what ways and to what extent.
- Adds to the growing field of “theological ethnography,” where theological reflection is combined with empirical research.



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