

“While human sin can be a participation in outright evil, often it seems to be a more insidious twisting of, or idolatrous obsession with, that which is ontologically good in the created order. In *Music of Darkness: The Peril of Worshiping the Creation Over the Creator*, Brian L. Hedrick rightly posits that, ‘Music is a good created thing, but when we turn it into the ultimate thing . . . we make it an idol.’ Music certainly can be redolent of the truth, goodness and beauty of God, but it is ultimately not God. All those involved with church music, paid or volunteer, need to read and heed this vitally important and engaging book.” —James R. Hart, President, Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies

“This is a lively and very readable discussion of a vitally important topic. To be released from idolatry is one of the glories of new life in Christ. This book aims to show how and why this is crucial for all Christian musicians.”—Jeremy S. Begbie, Thomas A. Langford Research Professor of Theology, Duke Divinity School; Affiliated Lecturer, Faculties of Divinity and Music, University of Cambridge; Author of *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (Christianity Today 2008 Book Award)

“Written from the perspective and experience of a pastor and professional musician, Brian Hedrick’s *Music of Darkness* deals with a vital question every Christian musician encounters at some point in his or her journey: ‘Do I find my identity in my artistic talent and success or in Jesus Christ, who gave me life and talent in the first place?’ Hedrick’s work is a welcome and necessary addition to the libraries of professional musicians, music educators, students, and those serving in music ministry.” —Joseph R. Crider, Dean of the School of Church Music and Worship, Professor of Church Music and Worship, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Brian Hedrick presents a thoughtful, compelling, and carefully considered diagnosis of musical idolatry, whereby a gift intended for our good and God’s glory becomes one of many ‘little gods’ that vie for our attention and devotion. Hedrick’s book provides a helpful corrective for Christ-followers, reminding us to seek first the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33), to live in harmony with the Holy Spirit and with others (Eph. 4:1-3), and to sing forth the word of Christ with thankfulness and an undivided heart (Col. 3:16, Ps. 86:11-12).” —Joel S. Davis, Associate Professor of Music, Director of Theory/Composition/Musicology, Samford University School of the Arts; Instrumental Associate, Shades Mountain Baptist Church Worship Arts Ministry

At the dawn of Time were Three who were One. Creator, Spirit, and Word. As the Spirit hovered over the formless waters, the Creator stretched out his hand, bidding the Word to begin an eternal Music that brought light and form to the universe.

Empty space shifted and became solid. Matter rose green from the elements, and the Spirit breathed into the green matter life but not awareness, and ordained that it should bear seed and spread across the earth suspended in the darkness amidst countless masses of flame and shadow.

Afterward the Creator brought forth creatures not bound by root and soil. They held awareness but lacked will. Governed by the personalities imbued, they spread and multiplied.

The lights were divided, as were the waters, and the seasons. The earth crawled with life given dimension amidst light and shadow. Dew condensed and fell, sprinkling the ground with the scent of life. And the Creator saw that it was good.

But the Creator's vision was yet incomplete, for the most beautiful themes of the Music still roamed the halls of Timelessness. So the Creator descended and walked the fields, gazing at all he had done in so short a span of Time.

He dipped, grabbed a handful of soil, and said to the Word and the Spirit, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over all living things." So the Creator made man and woman in his image, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, subdue the world and have dominion."

But the man and woman were not satisfied with dominion. They wanted to transcend the boundaries the Creator constructed for them.

They grasped fruit too high for their arms to reach, and ate what they should not have eaten. They became aware of a second Music, of darkness amidst the Light, and they aligned themselves with that second Music, and death entered their forms.

However, even this faltering of steps was planned in the first Music that would sweep up the faltering into a melody more beautiful than any other. The Creator told the man and woman of this coming theme in the first Music, of a babe to issue from the woman's womb—of the one who would be the undoing of death.

Brennan S. McPherson
Prologue, *Flood: The Story of Noah and the Family Who Raised Him*



They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. (Rom. 1:25, NIV)

Music of Darkness

The Peril of Worshiping the Creation Over the Creator



By Brian L. Hedrick

Foreword by Camp Kirkland

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Published in the United States by Nurturing Faith, Macon, GA.
Nurturing Faith is a book imprint of Good Faith Media (goodfaithmedia.org).
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

ISBN: 978-1-63528-134-7

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Webber Institute Books

Webber Institute Books (WIB) serves as the publishing arm of the Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies (IWS). The Institute was founded by the late Robert E. Webber for the purpose of forming servant leaders in worship renewal with the perspective that “the way to the future necessarily runs through the past.” IWS is the only school in North America dedicated solely to graduate education in biblical foundations, historical development, theological reflection, and cultural analysis of worship. Its vision emphasizes that its graduates will “participate intentionally in the story of the Triune God” to “bring renewal in the local and global church by shaping life and ministry according to that story.” In scope it is “gospel-centered in nature and ecumenical in outlook, embracing and serving the whole church in its many expressions and variations.” Those interested in obtaining further information concerning the Institute should consult www.iws.edu.

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It is the prayerful concern of both IWS and WIB that the information contained in these works will stimulate further reflection and discussion. The results of such exchange of ideas hopefully will enhance worship renewal within the various segments of the Christian church. Moreover, in keeping with the hopes and dreams of Bob Webber, may all that is done through this publishing enterprise enable Christians to reject the narcissistic patterns prevalent in contemporary society and give the glory to God who sent Jesus, the Christ, to provide for human transformation and in concert provided humans with the divine triune presence through the Holy Spirit.

Robert Myers
General Editor

James Hart
President

Gerald L. Borchert
Founding Editor



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Foreword

Anyone who has lived as a believer in Christ knows that it is far too easy to be swayed, diverted, or drawn to “things” that can make us lose sight and devotion to our one true living God. They may even be “good things” that are not necessarily bad for us, but they move up the ladder of emphasis in our lives and may even move to the top of the ladder! Brian Hedrick reminds us of the need for the love of our lives to be our Lord—with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

The wonderful gift of music that God gave us and is encouraged in all of Scripture is one of those “good things” that has the ability to entrap our hearts and become too big of a focus of our hearts. Music has incredible power to communicate, encourage, inspire, and resonate in our entire being. It’s not just an aural experience as listener or technical showcase as performer. God gave us this gift as a tool for worshiping him. But God also allows it for teaching and praise. How many of us remember the light and fun Sunday School songs that taught us about God and God’s goodness? Music is an amazing gift in so many ways. That includes the music of the great masters with symphonies and choral works.

I have many memories of attending symphony concerts and being moved to tears at the pure beauty of the music and artistry of the performers. When I left the concerts, I literally could not speak or I would have burst into tears of emotion realizing the incredible gifts that were given to the composer and the performers by our great God. I also remember similar experiences in moments of worship through music where I was moved by God’s goodness to love us the way he does. Music does have power!

I have served as God’s musician for more than forty years, with the focus of my craft being to create musical offerings for worship of our Lord and Savior. I know that God gifted me to do this, but I have never lost sight of the purpose of this music. It is solely to glorify God and not me!

As you read Brian Hedrick’s words of direction and encouragement, look at your heart closely. It’s not about us; it’s all about God.

*Camp Kirkland
Professional Arranger and Orchestrator
Music Director, Global Missions Project*

Acknowledgments

Even though the initial inspiration for this book may have come from my experiences in secular musical groups, I must acknowledge my profound gratitude to the volunteer instrumentalists of Johnson Ferry Baptist Church, who exemplify for me the ideal attitude toward music, as I serve with them as their director. They utilize the tool of music well, as they lead our congregation in worship every Sunday. I am truly honored to be their director and a fellow servant with them in the house of the Lord.

As far as my acknowledgement to those that assisted me with the writing of this book, I am deeply indebted to Larry D. Ellis, who was a classmate in all three years of my doctoral study at the Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies (IWS). When I first approached Larry about the idea for this book, he responded very enthusiastically, offering me great encouragement to pursue the concept. When I forwarded an early draft to him, he responded almost immediately, with detailed feedback for me that was extremely helpful. He has also been a source of encouragement in potential publishing options, being a published author himself.

In the midst of his busy duties, James Hart, president of IWS, took the time to give me direction on this book, and I am grateful. Jim introduced me to the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing), which was the missing piece of the puzzle for my opening chapter. When I searched for resources to explain this doctrine, I was delighted to find the perfect source, co-authored by William Lane Craig, who is a friend and member of the church I have served for twenty-six years. He was a helpful resource in my doctoral studies and continues to be a significant influence in the writing of this book.

Robert Myers, general editor for Webber Institute Books, has also been a tremendous source of encouragement in this project, showing great patience as he offered many suggestions to expand the scope of the book.

When I was pursuing my doctorate in worship studies at IWS, Andrew Hill was my thesis supervisor, for which I was extremely grateful, given that he is a respected Old Testament scholar. My gratitude extends to him, as he reviewed an early manuscript of the book and gave me practical, insightful feedback and ideas for crucial content.

I also want to thank Will Fulkerson, a very talented young man, who generously agreed to provide his profound testimony for this book. Because of a medical condition in his hands, Will is unable to type, so he agreed to record his testimony, at my request. He also agreed to read an early version of the book, to better understand how his testimony would fit into the scope of the book. Prior to hearing his story,

I was praying for relevant testimonies to include in this book; his story was the perfect answer to that prayer.

Jana Young graciously agreed to review the manuscript and contribute her perspective on the subject, as a Christian college professor working in a secular music setting. I am grateful for her testimony on how to be light shining in the darkness (Matt. 5:16).

In the final stages of the writing process, Ken Hughes provided firm but thoughtful criticism of the manuscript, challenging me to consider that musicians can be equally devoted to music as to Christ, without making music an idol. Thank you, Kenn, for speaking the truth to me in love.

I would like to thank my wife, Mellonee, for putting up with my obsession with getting this book written. I truly felt God's leading in addressing this issue and although she struggled at times to understand my perspective, I am grateful for her support and encouragement.

Finally, and ultimately, I thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who is the object of and inspiration for all our worship. To him be glory and honor and blessing, now and forever. Amen.

Introduction

As a lifelong church instrumentalist, I have often participated in community orchestras, in addition to playing regularly in church instrumental groups. I enjoy the beauty and challenge of secular classical music and consider my participation a chance to be a representative for Christ outside the four walls of the church. Since I am a church instrumental director, I welcome the experience of simply being a player-participant in rehearsals and concerts, rather than my usual practice of directing every rehearsal and only playing for worship on Sunday.

As I have played in these community groups over the years, I have noticed an attitude from the musicians toward the higher ideal of music that is strikingly similar to the way we revere Jesus Christ in worship. In the same way that we might say, “It’s all about Jesus,” I have heard them say with equally great conviction, “It’s all about the music.”

The more I observed this reverence for music, the more I realized that music had essentially become an idol to many players in the community orchestras in which I participated. One of the fundamental commandments in both Judaism and Christianity is “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exod. 20:3). Only God should occupy the throne as Lord of our lives, but these musicians had effectively taken God off the throne and replaced him with their divine concept of music. In fact, they were willing to sacrifice much for the sake of this idol: long rehearsals and late nights at weekend concerts. They sacrificed family time for the lifestyle required to participate in these groups and committed themselves to hours and hours of practice. As Christians, we are asked to sacrifice much for the sake of the gospel, and the level of sacrifice for these musicians’ “god” can be strangely similar.

Music is also conspicuous as an idol in the popular music culture, and it includes idolization of the musicians who perform music. This is evident by the sheer number of television shows, beginning with *American Idol*, that exalt the talents of the next great musician and singer. These shows include *America’s Got Talent*, *The Voice*, *Britain’s Got Talent*, and *The X Factor*, among others. In the established music industry, popular musicians have cult-like followings from their fans, and many of them encourage this passionate and irrational devotion, which smacks of idolatry.

Perhaps the most disturbing part of this musical idolatry is realizing that the same mindset can occur inside the church. We live in an era where worship leaders are often hired based on their musical qualifications, with no compelling consideration for their spiritual walk and Christian testimony. Many times these staff members, whose role is to guide others in worship, are considered solely on their musical experience and expertise. Such factors are important but should not be relied upon as the

only determinants in their qualifications. Musical background and skill level, in these cases, have superseded all other job qualifications, signaling an alarming imbalance in essential church priorities. This observation is confirmed by Daniel I. Block: “Ministers of music are hired for their musical skill, achievements, creativity, or enthusiasm on stage, without sufficient concern for their knowledge of Scripture, their orthodoxy, or their theology of worship.”¹

Another area where this misplaced devotion is evident is in the Praise and Worship Movement, where music is often viewed as synonymous with Christian worship, ignoring the historical prescription in worship, established over the centuries, of the priority of Word and Table. I have heard stories of two- to three-hour worship services, with only a fifteen-minute devotional from the pastor and no observance of the Lord’s Supper. Everything else in the service focused exclusively on the music. Of course, music can be a great expression of worship, but services such as these are extremely out of balance in the full expression of biblical worship.

Equally disturbing is the phenomenon of Christians choosing churches to attend, based on the reputation of the music or the musicians leading worship: “They have great worship” (synonymous with music) or “they have a great worship band.” This factor often seems to be often more important in their church choice than the sound biblical teaching of the pastor, the quality of the fellowship, the devotion of the congregation to Christ, or the outreach ministry of the church. In the words of Block, “Delighted—if not intoxicated—by the crowds, we may be oblivious to the reality that a packed house may be proof of disingenuous (calculated) worship rather than the worship acceptable to God.”²

Sharperiron.org, a website hosted by people of historic fundamentalist conviction (based on Prov. 27:17—“Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another”), conducted a survey in March 2014, asking the question, “Do you think music has become an idol in our churches?”³ The survey sample was relatively small (only 24 individuals), but the results still support the concern in this area:

Yes, in most churches	33% (8 votes)
Yes, in many but not most churches	38% (9 votes)
Yes, in some instances but not commonly	17% (4 votes)
Unsure	8% (2 votes)
No	4% (1 vote)

After an exhaustive search for surveys related to this topic, this solitary and modest poll was all my search uncovered—which reflects a relative lack of concern for this important issue in our culture.

W. David O. Taylor affirms that “The possibility for misuse and abuse of the arts [music] in worship remains a constant danger for churches in all traditions and contexts. This includes, for instance, the possibility of idolatry (confusing Creator and creature).”⁴ Consider Paul’s words in his letter to the Romans: “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen” (Rom. 1:25, NIV).

Please note that this book is not an indictment against intensely devoted Christian musicians, who are passionate in their devotion to Christ, while being equally passionate about their music. My main concern is with individuals, both inside and outside the Christian faith, who have displaced devotion to God with devotion to music.

I should mention that this book is written mostly from a Western music perspective. The standard music history textbook used while I was in college, Donald Jay Grout’s *A History of Western Music*, identifies Western music as “the musical system of western Europe and the Americas” and “is but one of several among the civilizations of the world.”⁵ Music from ancient Judaism and early Christianity is also considered in chapter 2, but the perspective of the book as a whole is decidedly Western.

I humbly offer this book for the reader’s consideration, in the interest of greater awareness of music idolatry that often goes unnoticed by most individuals and with the goal of emphasizing the proper practice of honoring God in the expression of worship. We urgently need to put music back in its proper perspective and rightful place, both inside and outside the church. I love music and have loved it since I was a child. In fact, I have devoted my life to music, both as a music educator and a church musician. But it is not the driving force in my life as a believer in Jesus Christ. There is only one occupant on the throne of my life, and it is not music. To God alone be the glory (*Soli Deo Gloria*)!

NOTES

¹Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 236.

²Ibid.

³Ed Vasicek, “Do you think music has become an idol in our churches?,” March 26, 2014, <https://sharperiron.org/forum/poll-do-you-think-music-has-become-idol-our-churches> (accessed Nov. 1, 2019).

⁴W. David O. Taylor, *Glimpses of the New Creation: Worship and the Formative Power of the Arts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2019), 245.

⁵Donald Jay Grout, *A History of Western Music*, rev. ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1960), xi.

About the Author

Brian Hedrick was exposed to music at a fairly early age, patiently enduring piano lessons in elementary school, taking advantage of an elementary school band program, and learning to play the trumpet. Upon entering junior high, he was given the option either to be one of several French horn players or one of many trumpet players; he made a choice that would impact the rest of his life.

Playing the French horn through junior high, high school, and college—and even meeting his wife in the French horn section in the college marching band—he had every reason to have an elevated view of music. But as he approached college graduation, through the influence of the home church of his wife-to-be, he made the decision to surrender his life to Christ, and was eventually called into full-time music ministry.

Brian Hedrick is a graduate of Florida State University (BME, 1981), Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (MM, 1985), and the Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies (DWS, 2008). He has served churches in Texas, Arizona, and Georgia, and has been the assistant pastor for instrumental music at Johnson Ferry Baptist Church in Marietta, Georgia, since 1994, where he is also director of the Johnson Ferry Conservatory for the Arts.

Johnson Ferry Baptist Church averages about 4,000 worshipers between its five Sunday services. Brian directs four groups that participate regularly in worship: the 50-plus-member Johnson Ferry Orchestra, the 20-piece Gospel Jazz Band, the 5-octave Bells of Johnson Ferry, and the 40-piece Youth Orchestra.

The Johnson Ferry Conservatory for the Arts offers private music lessons and art classes to the community in a Christian environment. More than 150 students are enrolled, studying music and art under the leadership of more than a dozen teachers.

Brian has published three arrangements for church orchestra and one book, *The Biblical Foundations of Instrumental Music in Worship: Four Pillars* (Outskirts Press, 2009). He is a member of the Metro Instrumental Directors Conference, and hosted the annual meeting of church instrumental directors from around the country in 2018. Brian and his wife Mellonee have four children and five grandchildren.