

FROM TEXT TO EXPRESSION: “FITTINGNESS” AS A GUIDELINE FOR BIBLICALLY-INFORMED WORSHIP MUSIC

by
Scott Aniol¹

Christianity has always encouraged the translation of the entire Bible from its original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek into new languages as Christianity spreads to new civilizations, and this is equally true for musical expressions of biblical truth. From early plainchant, Lutheran chorales, to American folk hymns, and beyond, God’s people have expressed God’s truth in diverse musical forms that reflect the biblical standard of songs like David’s Shepherd Psalm and Mary’s Magnificat. Yet while a biblical standard can easily provide guidelines for the theological and poetic content of contemporary musical expressions, some Christians have questioned whether the Bible has anything to provide in terms of guiding the *musical forms* of contemporary Christian worship music.

This article will argue that since Scripture itself expresses truth through various aesthetic forms, what kinds of poetic and aesthetic expressions God chose to use in the communication of his truth in Scripture should inform the kinds of contemporary musical expressions Christians produce as they communicate the gospel and disciple believers. Employing the principle of “fittingness” as articulated by both Kevin Vanhoozer and Nicholas Wolterstorff, the article will suggest how the literary aspects of Scripture provide important aesthetic guidelines for diverse contemporary worship music by way of similarities across artistic modalities. Consequently, if those writing contemporary worship music desire to accurately reflect the meaning of Scripture in the songs they compose, then they must give careful attention to aesthetic correspondence between Scripture’s meaning and the contemporary form.

The Form of Scripture

Scripture’s Form

The basis for my argument of extending the authority of Scripture

¹Dr. Aniol is Associate Professor of Church Music and Worship and director of worship doctoral studies at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, TX.

to its aesthetic forms is the doctrine of verbal-plenary inspiration. The Holy Spirit of God inspired every word in the original autographs of Scripture. This implies that while the word choices, grammar, syntax, poetic language, and literary forms were products of the human author's writing style, culture, and experiences, we must also affirm that these aspects of the form of Scripture are exactly how God desired his truth to be communicated.²

Those who hold to verbal-plenary inspiration rightly insist that what words biblical authors chose are important, as are how those words were put together into sentences and paragraphs. We rightly emphasize that how we interpret the meaning of biblical passages is directly dependent upon our understanding of the historical/grammatical context. We must understand the language, historical circumstances, and cultural conventions of the original author and audience to correctly interpret a given passage of Scripture.

But an implication of verbal-plenary inspiration I believe we often fail to recognize is the focus of this article, namely, the equally important aspect of aesthetic form in Scripture for both interpreting its meaning and communicating that meaning to others. This is a point Kevin Vanhoozer has been arguing for years, insisting that "biblical authority is a matter not only of revealed information (i.e., propositions) but also of larger-scale patterns of information processing (i.e., poetics)."³ This flows directly from the doctrine of inspiration. He notes, "It has been said...that poetry is 'the best words put in the best order.' Similarly, because we are dealing with the Bible as God's Word, we have good reason to believe that the biblical words are the right words in the right order."⁴ Vanhoozer observes that while exegetes give lip service to the aesthetic aspects of Scripture, they often acknowledge the literary forms as a means to aid them in drawing out what they believe to be the more important "propositional content" of the text. They often view the form as something they have to "get through" in order to "get to" the revelatory content and then, as Vanhoozer criticizes, their end goal is to "restate symbols and metaphors in terms of univocal statements."⁵ With this view, understanding what the literary form communicated to the original audience is important for interpretation, but not much more. The aesthetic forms do not influence the way Scripture is read or preached—every sermon is structured as if the text were epistolary.

²See Rodney J. Decker, "Verbal-Plenary Inspiration and Translation," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 11 (2006): 25–61.

³Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Love's Wisdom: The Authority of Scripture's Form and Content for Faith's Understanding and Theological Judgment," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 5 (2011): 251.

⁴Kevin J. VanHoozer, "Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48 (2005): 96, 100.

⁵Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 87.

What this betrays is a modernistic understanding of the nature of truth and human knowing and in effect denies the authority of what God inspired. As Vanhoozer notes, I think correctly, “Evangelicals have been quick to decry the influence of modernism on liberal theology but not to see the beam of modern epistemology in their own eye.”⁶ Leland Ryken similarly observes, “It is one thing to recognize that parts of the Bible are literature. It is quite another actually to approach those texts in a literary manner.”⁷ The common evangelical perspective fails to recognize that “everything that is communicated in a piece of writing is communicated through the forms in which it is embodied.”⁸

For this reason, Vanhoozer argues the importance of recognizing that truth in Scripture is more than merely scientific fact statements—it is “more than divine data.”⁹ The Bible does contain many statements of theological fact, much of its content can be summarized in theological propositions, and doctrinal affirmations remain important for defining various aspects of biblical orthodoxy. Nevertheless, the truths of Scripture are not Scripture’s propositional content that just happens to be contextualized in certain aesthetic forms. Truth in Scripture is content plus form, considered as an indivisible whole. As Clyde Kilby notes, these aesthetic forms of Scripture are not merely decorative but part of the essential presentation of the Bible’s truth: “We do not have truth and beauty, or truth decorated with beauty, or truth illustrated by the beautiful phrase, or truth in a ‘beautiful setting.’ Truth and beauty are in the Scriptures, as indeed they must always be, an inseparable unity.”¹⁰ Leland Ryken expresses it this way:

*We can rest assured that the Bible as it was written is in the form that God wants us to have.... If the writers of the Bible were at some level guided and even “carried along” by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21), it is a logical conclusion that the Holy Spirit moved some biblical authors to write poetry, others to imagine prophetic visions, and so forth. The very forms of biblical writing are inspired.*¹¹

Ryken insists, “A literary approach takes the images of the Bible

⁶Ibid., 26.

⁷Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 20.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 5.

¹⁰Clyde S. Kilby, *Christianity and Aesthetics* (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 21.

¹¹Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 129–30. I am aware that Ryken states this as an argument in defense of a more formal rather than functional translation of the Bible, and I agree with Decker, who argues that transmitting the *meaning* of the original form with sometimes requires putting it into an entirely different form in the receptor language. Nevertheless, Ryken’s underlying point is correct and supports my overall argument about aesthetic form in Scripture.

seriously as something that embodies and communicates truth.”¹²

Scripture Forms

The reason Scripture's aesthetic forms are so important to its truth is that our perception and interpretation of truth depends upon our imagination of that truth. God's Word employs aesthetic devices of the imagination to communicate God to us in ways that would not be possible with only fact statements. Since God is a spirit and does not have a body like man, since he is infinite, eternal, and totally other than us, God chose to use particular aesthetic forms to communicate truth about himself that would not have been possible otherwise. These aesthetic forms are essential to the truth itself since they present an interpretation of God and his world beyond the ability of mere propositions to articulate. Ryken helpfully explains how imagination affects our perception of truth and what we do with truth:

It is a fallacy to think that one's worldview consists only of ideas. It is a world picture as well as a set of ideas. It includes images that may govern behavior even more than ideas do. At the level of ideas, for example, a person may know the goal of life is not to amass physical possessions. But if his mind is filled with images of fancy cars and expensive clothes and big houses, his behavior will likely follow a materialistic path. A person might say that God created the world, but if his mind is filled with images of evolutionary processes, he will start to think like an evolutionist. Someone may know that he should eat moderately, but his appetites override that knowledge when his mind is filled with images of luscious food. The imagination is a leading ingredient in the way people view reality. They live under its sway, whether they realize it or not.¹³

For this reason, God intends for the truth of Scripture to form, not just the intellect, but also the imagination. The Bible uses tools of the imagination not simply to decorate truth or make it more interesting, but in order to rightly shape our imagination of truth. As Vanhoozer notes, “Literary forms are less containers than lenses; they do not simply deliver information but are rather means of information processing that organize the data in meaningful patterns.... One cannot reduce a form to its informative content, then, without losing the very pattern of information processing.”¹⁴ This reality reveals the essential importance of the imagination in the presentation of truth. Ryken observes,

The point is not simply that the Bible allows for the imagination as a form of communication. It is rather that the biblical writers and Jesus found it impossible to communicate the truth of God without using

¹²Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 15.

¹³Leland Ryken, “The Bible as Literature Part 4: ‘With Many Such Parables’: The Imagination as a Means of Grace,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (Oct–Dec 1990): 393.

¹⁴Vanhoozer, “Love's Wisdom,” 256.

the resources of the imagination. The Bible does more than sanction the arts. It shows how indispensable they are.¹⁵

Indeed, Vanhoozer argues, “Form and content work together, both to teach us concepts (i.e., convey information) and shape our conceptions (i.e. process information).... It is for the sake of forming right judgments that we must view biblical authority in other than merely propositionalist terms.”¹⁶ Thus even the forms of Scripture are by necessity authoritative.

Translating Scripture’s Form

I am arguing that the authority of Scripture extends to both its content and form, but does not imply Scripture cannot be translated. Unlike Islam, which teaches that the Koran must not be translated into other languages, Christianity encourages translation of the Bible. But, as Rod Decker argues, “If we accept the Bible as inspired and inerrant in the original autographs, then we will be very concerned to represent it accurately in translation.”¹⁷ “The goal of Bible translation,” Decker argues, is “accurate communication of an objective, historically-rooted, written divine revelation.”¹⁸

But if verbal-plenary inspiration requires attention to the very words, grammatical structures, and historical context of the original texts in translation, then it follows that faithful translation also requires equal attention to the aesthetic forms and devices biblical authors used in their writing as well. Therefore, just as determining the meaning of texts of Scripture requires knowledge of the language, grammar, and history of the original text, so it requires knowledge of the aesthetic forms of the text as well. And, just as the original grammar and context provides regulation for translating the text into a new language, so the original aesthetic forms and devices likewise regulate how the Bible’s texts are translated into new aesthetic forms. The important factor is that the *meaning* of the original text is accurately rendered in the new translation, and meaning is found in words, grammar, syntax, history, culture, *and* aesthetics.

Aesthetic Correspondence

Vanhoozer’s concern, however, is not really Bible translation, that is, rendering the content and forms of the original autographs in Scripture as closely as possible in a new Bible version—his concern is that Scripture’s truth be translated—or better yet, transposed—to all of life: “Just as propositions expressed in one language can be expressed in

¹⁵Ryken, “The Bible as Literature Part 4,” 392–93.

¹⁶Vanhoozer, “Love’s Wisdom,” 266.

¹⁷Decker, “Verbal-Plenary Inspiration and Translation,” 41.

¹⁸Ibid., 33.

another, so theological judgments expressed in one situation with its particular conceptuality can be expressed in another.”¹⁹ His concern here is in doing theology, moving from the biblical text to formulating its truth “in our own words,” so to speak. He notes, “The challenge lies in knowing how to move from biblical to theological discourse in a way that rightly respects *how* what is said is said.”²⁰ And the very purpose of such Scripture-formed theology is that we will be able to translate that truth “into various forms of language, logic, and life.”²¹ This is the essence of Christian discipleship:

The company of faith transmits the faith not only by translating Scripture but also by performing the gospel: living out what is in Christ, speaking and displaying understanding. Doing church becomes nothing less than a matter of world-for-world translation, that is, of unfolding and continuing the world in front of...the biblical text in new cultural contexts. The purpose of such translation is not to replicate the past but to enact the way of truth in new settings, to make Christ live in new contexts.²²

Part of the way this happens is when we put God’s truth “in our own words” as we teach, preach, catechize, and formulate doctrinal confessions. This is particularly true within the church’s corporate worship, which Vanhoozer suggests “trains the evangelical imagination for workday witness and wisdom.”²³ Expositional preaching, creeds and confessions, and hymns are each examples of transposing Scripture’s truth in new ways that help to form that truth in believers’ lives.

Nevertheless, even these extra-biblical expressions of biblical truth must accurately correspond to Scripture. Vanhoozer articulates this essential concern when he asks, “How do we know whether a given performance or improvisation [of Scripture]...is actually a translation or representation of the drama [of Scripture] rather than a mistranslation or misrepresentation?”²⁴ What we say about God and his truth in our own words—in our theology and in our worship—must *mean* something consistent with what the Bible means. This is fairly straightforward with regard to *what* the Bible says. Any theologically conservative Christian will insist that theology, sermons, creeds, and the texts of hymns accurately correspond to the truth of Scripture.

However, I am extending Vanhoozer’s argument about the *way* the Bible expresses truth—its aesthetic forms—to the contemporary

¹⁹Vanhoozer, “Love’s Wisdom,” 266.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 262.

²¹Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 17.

²²*Ibid.*, 199.

²³Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Pictures at a Theological Exhibition: Scenes of the Church’s Worship, Witness and Wisdom* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 38.

²⁴Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, 199.

aesthetic forms we produce. We may—and should—express God’s truth in new ways, but the aesthetic way we choose to newly express biblical truth, even our musical expressions, should accurately correspond to the aesthetic way God chose to express truth in his Word. Scripture must govern not only what is said from the pulpit or the lyrics of the hymns—Scripture’s forms must govern our worship forms. In other words, if we believe in verbal-plenary inspiration, then the *meaning* of the aesthetic forms we employ in our contemporary worship must accurately correspond to the *meaning* Scripture’s aesthetic forms embody.

James K. A. Smith represents this idea when he argues that we must concern ourselves not just with the “what of Christian worship,” that is, the content, but “also the how,” that is, the poetics.²⁵ Smith is worth quoting at length here because I would like to develop and build on his argument, extending it a bit further. He argues,

There is a reason to our rhymes—a logic carried in the meter of our hymns and the shape of our gestures. Worship innovations that are inattentive to this may end up adopting forms that forfeit precisely those aspects of worship that sanctify perception by forming the imagination. Hence wise worship planning and leadership is not only discerning about content—the lyrics of songs, the content of a pastoral prayer, the message of a sermon—but also discerning about the kin/aesthetic meaning of the form of our worship. We will be concerned not only with the *what* but also with the *how*, because Christian faith is not only a knowing-*that* but also a kind of know-how, a “practical sense” or *praktognosia* that is absorbed in the “between” of our incarnate significance. Because meter and tune each *means* in its own irreducible way, for example, the form of our songs is as important as the content.²⁶

Worship wisdom requires that we be attentive to the practical sense of aesthetic forms, lest we end up singing lyrics that confess Jesus is Lord accompanied by a tune that *means* something very different.... Worship that intends to be formative—and more specifically worship that intends to foster an encounter with God that transforms our imagination and hence sanctifies our perception—must be attentive to, and intentional about, the aesthetics of human understanding.²⁷

As Vanhoozer aptly summarizes, “Does it really matter how we worship? Yes it does, because ultimately it is not only a question of *how* but also of *what*. Questions of style are not unrelated to questions of substance.”²⁸

²⁵James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 106.

²⁶James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 174.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 175.

²⁸Vanhoozer, *Pictures at a Theological Exhibition*, 110.

Most evangelicals today view art forms as simply pretty packaging for truth or at best a way to “energize” the truth. Worship music, for example is just a way to make truth interesting and engaging in worship. But imaginative forms are not incidental to truth—they are essential to the truth, expressly because they are fundamental to the way Scripture expresses truth. Therefore, like with Scripture, contemporary art forms help to express the imaginative aspect of truth in ways that propositional statements alone cannot; they communicate not just the *what* of biblical content, but also *how* that content is imagined. As Vanhoozer observes, music in particular “projects a ‘world of the text,’” or in the case of music without words “a sense of the world,” an interpretation of reality.²⁹ He notes further, “What music communicates is one’s sense...of what it is ‘to be in the world.’”³⁰ Ryken explains, “Art aims to convey not primarily the facts of life but the truth and meaning of those facts.”³¹ “Artists do more than present human experience; they also interpret it from a specific perspective. Works of art make implied assertions about reality.”³² “Works of music, literature, and art” he suggests, “are a window or lens through which we perceive reality.”³³

Thus, the kinds of imaginative forms God chose to communicate his truth in Scripture should shape our art forms. The Bible’s aesthetics should be the source of our contemporary worship aesthetics. Choices of what art forms we will use to express God’s truth and worship him are not merely about what is pleasing, authentic, or engaging; what forms we choose for our worship must be based on the criterion of whether they are true—whether they correspond to God’s reality as it is imagined in his Word.

Fittingness

The question becomes how we derive guidance from the Bible’s aesthetics for contemporary music. What we need to concern ourselves with is what both Kevin Vanhoozer and Nicholas Wolterstorff call “fittingness.”³⁴ Wolterstorff defines fittingness as “similarity across modalities.”³⁵ Modalities are different forms of expression—literature, music,

²⁹Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “What Has Vienna to Do with Jerusalem? Barth, Brahms, and Bernstein’s Unanswered Question,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 63 (2001): 136.

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹Leland Ryken, *The Liberated Imagination: Thinking Christianly About the Arts* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 26.

³²*Ibid.*, 126.

³³*Ibid.*, 113.

³⁴Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 108ff, 257ff; Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, 147; Vanhoozer, *Pictures at a Theological Exhibition*, 35; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Towards a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

³⁵Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 99.

rhetoric, architecture, drama, visual arts, etc. What he means by fittingness is that the character of one aesthetic expression can be similar to the character of another aesthetic expression, even across kinds of art forms. This is why we can describe the character of music using terms more regularly associated with other art forms such as the visual (like color) or the tactile (like soft or hard) or qualities of taste (like sweet) or spatial measurement (high, low, short, or long). Music is not really blue or soft or sweet or low, but we naturally recognize similarities across these modalities.

Some aspects of fittingness are culturally determined, but Wolterstorff notes that most cross-modal similarity is natural: "Something's being larger than something is (intrinsically) more like something's being louder than something than it is like something's being softer than something. Something's being faster than something is (intrinsically) more like something's being sharper than something than it is like something's being duller than something. And so forth."³⁶ He cites an extensive study by C. E. Osgood that resulted in 90% cross-cultural agreement in determining cross-modal fittingness.³⁷ The research found, for example, that most people cross cultures associate a jagged line with restlessness and an undulating line with tranquility. Because art communicates most naturally by reflecting common human experience, especially human physical expressiveness, we instinctively discern what art forms across modalities similarly express joy, lament, sobriety, reverence, or fear, and even more nuanced meanings and moods that cannot be precisely defined with words. Wolterstorff observes, "The expressiveness of objects inheres not in their casual effect on percipients but rather in *the relations of fittingness* that the aesthetic character of those objects bear to the qualities which those objects express."³⁸

Musicologists concur with this observation. For example, Leonard Meyer argues that music has "embodied meaning," which he defines as meaning based on natural associations with common experience: "A stimulus or process may acquire meaning because it indicates or refers to something which is like itself in kind—as when the rumble of distant thunder on a sultry day and the piling up of storm clouds (antecedent natural events) indicate the coming of a rain storm (a consequent natural event)."³⁹ The meaning in music, according to Meyer, is "based upon the similarities which exist between our experience of the materials of music and their organization, on the one hand, and our experience of the non-musical world of concepts, images, objects, qualities, and states of mind, on the other."⁴⁰ Likewise, John

³⁶Ibid., 99.

³⁷Ibid., 107.

³⁸Ibid., 112.

³⁹Leonard B. Meyer, *Music, the Arts, and Ideas: Patterns and Predictions in Twentieth-Century Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 6.

⁴⁰Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: University of

Hospers insists, "There are times when we can say that, quite objectively, this expresses that. We can do it with regard to human facial expressions and gestures; this one expresses grief, another expresses perturbation, another jubilation, and so on.... Now, if publicly observable facial features and gestures can be expressive, why cannot publicly observable patterns of sounds or colors also be so?"⁴¹ Stephen Davies argues similarly for a correspondence of meaning between what he calls "emotion characteristics" in human behavior and music: "Just as a willow can be sad-looking, or a person's face happy-looking, music can present an expressive appearance in its sound."⁴² And, like Wolterstorff, Davies insists that this occurs cross cultures since it relates to common human experience: "Because I hold that expressive behaviors owe as much to our common humanity as to our various cultures and that music is expressive in being experienced as like human action, I think that there is a common expressive element found in the musics of different cultures."⁴³

Because of the reality of naturally-occurring cross-modal similarity in art, correspondence of meaning across art forms can occur across cultures. Wolterstorff concludes,

To what extent is the perception of cross-modal similarities shared across cultures? The answer is *massively*. Of course, the agreement is not total. But then neither is the agreement total within a culture on many *intra*-modal similarities. Yet it is hard to imagine anyone in any culture thinking that a jagged line fits better with tranquility and an undulating line with restlessness.⁴⁴

Attention to cross-modal "fittingness"—what I like to call "aesthetic correspondence"—is how we can take the character of aesthetic literary devices and forms in Scripture and compare them to the character of other kinds of art forms (like music) in contemporary culture. We can determine the meaning specific aesthetic forms or devices in Scripture embody, and then discern aesthetic forms—literary and musical—in our current cultural context that are fitting to Scripture, those that have similarity in meaning. Since, as Vanhoozer observes, "some shapes accord to reality better than others,"⁴⁵ we need to ask questions of our worship expressions like Ryken articulates: "Does the interpretation of reality in this work conform or fail to conform to Christian doctrine or

Chicago Press, 1956), 260.

⁴¹John Hospers, "The Concept of Artistic Expression," in *Introductory Readings in Aesthetics*, ed. John Hospers (New York: Free Press, 1969), 166.

⁴²Stephen Davies, *Musical Meaning and Expression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 277.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 244.

⁴⁴Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 108.

⁴⁵Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 108.

ethics?"⁴⁶ Smith articulates well the underlying importance of this: "Worship wisdom requires that we be attentive to the practical sense of aesthetic forms, lest we end up singing lyrics that confess Jesus is Lord accompanied by a tune that *means* something very different."⁴⁷

This kind of emphasis requires that biblical interpreters, pastors, and church musicians have both a thorough understanding of what various art forms in Scripture are expressing (or at least be equipped with resources to help them understand this) and a thorough understanding of the art forms of their current context so that they can make the proper judgments concerning correspondence. The importance of these skills is why aesthetics was part of the quadrivium in premodern education and why Luther insisted that those he ordained have an understanding of music. Theologians in the premodern era understand that a healthy understanding of aesthetics was necessary for biblical interpretation, biblical preaching, and biblical worship.

Seminaries today expect their graduates to have a thorough grasp of the grammar and historical context of Scripture in order to correctly interpret, explain, translate, and apply it to contemporary Christianity; why do we not also expect pastors and Bible scholars to understand the aesthetics of Scripture? And I mean more than a cursory discussion of how to preach various biblical genres. I mean giving careful consideration to what the Bible's poetic forms, narrative structures, literary devices, and rhetorical strategies *mean*. We also teach pastors how to best preach and explain the meaning of Scripture and apply it to contemporary life; why do we not also equip them with how to parse the meaning of contemporary art forms and make judgments about what art forms today express sentiments similar to what the art forms of Scripture express?

Conclusion

Contrary to conventional wisdom today, Scripture does speak to aesthetic form, but rather than doing so through propositions, it does so through its own aesthetic form. Some scholars such as Kevin Vanhoozer, Leland Ryken, Tremper Longman, and Abraham Kuruville have begun recently to have discussions like the one in this article, although they are mostly looking at how the aesthetics of Scripture affect interpretation, translation, and preaching. Nevertheless, they are trying to carve out an evangelical position that does not fall into the traps of higher critical cultural-linguistic philosophy or what Vanhoozer calls the "dedramatized propositionalism"⁴⁸ that characterizes most forms of the historical-grammatical philosophy. These scholars are asking not just what does the Bible *say*, but also what does the Bible *do*, and they

⁴⁶Ryken, *The Liberated Imagination*, 179.

⁴⁷Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 175.

⁴⁸Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 87.

are advocating for how can we faithfully interpret and communicate that. I would like to extend that biblical authority even to our worship: If we believe that Scripture must regulate our worship, and if we believe that God inspired every word of Scripture, then we must be sure that how we express God's truth aesthetically today is similar in meaning to how Scripture expresses God's truth.