A Conversation on the Contemporary Church and Traditional Worship

John M. Buchanan and John W. W. Sherer

Buchanan: Back in the 1960's a psychiatrist by the name of Eric Berne took the intellectual and religious community by storm with a new therapeutic methodology called Transactional Analysis, "TA" as we learned to call it. One of the TA school, Thomas Harris, wrote a best seller called I'm OK—You're OK. The book was required reading for clergy and the source of countless sermons on grace and unconditional love, and, after its underlying thesis was examined more carefully, the source of some pretty good humor. "I'm OK—You're Not So Hot, Actually," for instance, or "If I'm OK—and You're OK—Why is it That I Still Can't Stand You?"

Eric Berne's more substantial contribution was Games People Play, in which he proposed that in interpersonal relationships we play carefully structured games with rules—although we are not conscious of it. The purpose of these games is to allow us to talk about what concerns us, and to derive satisfaction from airing our grievances, hopes, pains, and needs, without ever having to do anything about them. The game I remember most clearly is, "Ain't it awful?" It requires at least two players, but can be played by an entire group, or colloquy as the case may be. The first player states the subject with a comprehensive declaration about how bad things are in whatever arena has been chosen: the quality of public education, the President's foreign policy, General Motors' marketing of SUV's, violence on television, or the declining quality of public worship in the mainline Church. "Ain't it awful..." Other players join in by taking up the theme and adding other anecdotal material of ascending awfulness. "You think that's bad, let me tell you about what's happening over at Westminster Church."

I've been a participant in a fair number of games of "Ain't it awful" about worship, and my hope is that we will not waste our time today with another round, or with the opposite and even less attractive game—"Aren't we wonderful," for being so smart, so tasteful, and so classic compared to those dull, shallow evangelicals with their praise bands and praise choruses.

The truth is we have a problem, and people like us haven't been very good or helpful in dealing with it. The problem is that a seismic cultural shift has happened, and is still in process, and our very best thinkers are struggling to understand it, name it, and describe it for us. There are a thousand ways to define it. One of them is ecclesiastically, or theologically. In a recent issue of Context Martin Marty quotes a new book about what is happening to Christianity in Europe—the old Christendom. The late Henri Nouwen, whose name still resounds around the Yale Divinity School, made a melancholy trip before he died to his boyhood home in the Netherlands, where in one generation Roman Catholicism had faded to a quaint ritual. A few months before his death, Nouwen spoke to a paltry crowd of thirty-six students at the seminary he had attended, once bustling with hundreds of eager candidates for priesthood. Not long ago ninety-eight percent of Dutch people attended church regularly; today it's under ten percent. Almost half the church buildings in Holland have been converted into restaurants, galleries, condominiums, or have been destroyed.¹

An institution—the church, and an ethos—Christendom—that dominated Western Europe for fifteen hundred years is changing radically, dramatically, and in one sense disappearing right before our eyes. And given history's inexorable movement from East to West, one has to wonder about the future of religion and the institutional church here, and its traditions, its practice of worship in the future.
Sherer: When I graduated from Yale in 1989, I loaded all my worldly belongings into my Mazda two-door hatchback and began driving across the country to St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Walnut Creek, California, where I was to be the new organist and choirmaster. What I didn't realize when I got there was that St. Paul's, and nearly every other church in Christendom, was experiencing massive changes. One of those changes was the death of a thirty-five hundred year old patriarchal system through the ordination of women. Another change, growing in momentum, has been the merging of denominations through liturgical resources and polity, changes we have seen most recently between the Lutherans and Episcopalians.

We have entered a post-Christian society that began with the Enlightenment, but that greatly accelerated in the late twentieth century, when secular humanism or any other morality was considered equal, or even superior, to the Christian teachings. More changes grew out of the Second Vatican Council, reverberating throughout the church in every denomination. The increase of lay control, an effect of Vatican II, was felt at St. Paul's and many other churches in which I have worked.

Another significant change was a societal shift owing to the maturing of the baby boom generation, the first to outnumber the previous generation. This allowed them to take control of church vestries, and corporate boardrooms, and determine what traditions would live and what traditions would die. At St. Paul's, Walnut Creek, the folk group was the most powerful force in the church, and instituted many changes in music and liturgy.

Another influence in recent times has been the re-emergence of liturgical awareness throughout the denominations. Even non-liturgical churches are suddenly experiencing Advent, Lent, and liturgical renewal.

A huge change affecting all churches is the increase of technology in worship. Every bit as big as the Gutenberg Bible, this change is manifested through big screens, blaring sound systems, tele-evangelism, compact disks, and computers. All these technologies changed how the church worships God. There has been a burst of new hymns and praise choruses, of which we are currently in the process of separating the wheat from the chaff. It will be our children who will decide how well we have done this. There is an old saying, "Whoever weds the popular culture of today will become a widow in the next generation." That is why it is so important to do music that is destined to survive, so our children can be hearing this music and know this music when they become adults.

The last change I want to mention is the influence of Christianity from Africa, and other countries throughout the world, on the American church. This influence has been felt in church polity, music, and liturgy.

All of these changes were affecting St. Paul's, and they are currently affecting The Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago, as well as nearly every church in Christendom.

Buchanan: We are talking, of course, about what the scholars are calling postmodernism. And instead of spending my time trying to nail it down more tightly than you have no doubt already done, let me proceed anecdotally.

The culture doesn't know the vocabulary or the story any longer. The quintessential example for me came after I preached a somewhat controversial sermon in the middle of President Clinton's
crisis with a White House intern, with a distinct possibility of impeachment. I told the story of King David, how flawed and human he was, and how God has a way of using even flawed, sinful people for God's purposes. A reporter for The Chicago Tribune called. "I heard you preached about Bill and Monica," he said. "Well, not exactly," I answered—and discovered what we're up against when he asked next, "Who was that David guy you were talking about?"

The Christian, or Judeo-Christian, or Western Christendom consensus is gone, Walter Brueggemann says. The culture doesn't even know the story any longer. What the culture most knows is something radically different from the story that used to define and organize it. Bill McKibben, author of Returning God to the Center: Consumerism and the Environmental Threat, says that what defines and shapes our culture is not the biblical story, or the Christian consensus, or the Judeo-Christian tradition—but television. America's kids watch an average of four and a half hours a day. McKibben "gathered 2,400 hours of videotape—all the programs offered on TV during one day," studied them for a year, and concluded that the distillation of "all those thousands of game shows and talk shows and sitcoms and commercials" was the simple notion, "You are the most important thing on the face of the earth. Your immediate desires are all that count. Do It Your Way. This Bud's for you."

In that context—unique, a little frightening, not a little discouraging—you and I have an enormous responsibility. We have to be wise, discerning, and faithful; to be creative, and at the same time authentic; to know what's happening around us, and what it is our own faith calls us to do and be.

My guess is that for most of us, who we are, what we believe, and how we view the world, was shaped originally by our experience of public worship. That is the place where religion and the world most dramatically intersect, and where art—even for us stodgy heirs of the Puritans—art in windows, architecture, music—shapes our faith.

I can recall with precision what the church in which I worshiped as a child looked like. I can recall the feel of the pew cushion, the slightly musty odor, sun streaming through the stained glass window of Jesus praying in the garden Gethsemane. I spent a lot of time looking at that window, wondering at how young Jesus looked, how seemingly unconcerned with what was happening around him—you could see the vague shape of Peter and his friends sleeping in the background—at how clean his white robe was. I can recall Mary Wertz playing the organ up in the loft, of singing with my parents "Holy, Holy, Holy," "For the Beauty of the Earth," and "This is my Father's World." I can recall the people who sat around us—my Uncle Charles and Aunt Helen always on the aisle, the Crawfords immediately in front of us, the Winters directly behind us—Diane, and Paul, who is now a jazz musician and artist in residence at St. John the Divine, who recorded and plays with whale songs and wolf howls and who, although standing outside the church and traditional theology, finds a way to bring Bach and Isaac Watts and "Abide with Me" into his music. I remember staring at Mrs. Crawford's fabulous fox fur which she wore wrapped over her shoulders. The fox head, with glass eyes, was directly in front of me, and he and I spent many an hour staring at each other. I recall mints from Mother's purse, and Dad's railroad watch which he took from his vest pocket and wound, a little too ceremoniously, when he decided the preacher had gone on too long. I recall the small door in the chancel through which the robed minister emerged—from what I thought must be a mysterious holy of holies—and watching him bow his head and put his head in his hands to pray during the prelude, an act of very impressive piety. I recall the Elders, on Communion Sunday—when Elders were elderly,
older men, with white hair—walking solemnly and reverently to the first pew, to sit around the table. I recall Betty Troxell, with a soprano vibrato at least a major third in breadth, who recruited her husband, Harold, the County Coroner to sing with her. When my Dad told me what Mr. Troxell actually did for a living I could never stop thinking of that every time I saw him, especially on Christmas Eve, when he and his soprano wife knocked me out cold with a powerful "O Holy Night." A lot about who I am, and what I believe, was put in place, or at least framed, by that experience of worship.

Our greatest challenge in the overwhelmingly narcissistic context of postmodernism is to hold on to a novel idea: namely, that worship is not a consumer product. In fact—and this is somewhat shocking—worship is not even "for" the worshipper. Worship is "for" God. Kierkegaard had it right when he said that people ordinarily come to worship in the frame of mind they would if they were attending the theater. They come as an audience to enjoy a performance put on by a professional cast: preacher, organist, choirs, sometimes dancers, bell ringers, actual chancel drama, and poetry readers. God, he said, was—one hoped—the prompter, standing off stage and occasionally giving the performers some lines. The actual rubric, Kierkegaard said, was theater, to be sure. Only God is the audience, the professionals—clergy and musician as the prompters, the congregation as actors—are people who have come to do an act of worship.

**Sherer:** One of the guiding principles I try to keep in mind every Sunday is that I am one of the prompters. The worship leaders are the prompters, the actors are the congregation, and God is the audience. If you keep that priority in focus, it sets in motion a wonderful series of events. If you get that out of focus and begin to think of the congregation as audience, a lot of problems begin to come into ministry and worship leadership. As Brother Roger of Taizé said, "Liturgical music must be like John the Baptist, always pointing to Christ, never pointing to itself."

**Buchanan:** Try telling that to Mrs. Smith whose very description of what she is doing at 11 a.m. on Sunday is eloquent: "I think I'll go hear Dr. Adams this morning." Or Mr. Jones, who lets you know that the organist played the hymns so loud or so fast that you ruined his morning. Or Mrs. Brown, who ruined your morning by calling to say she's going to Willowcreek for services from now on because she doesn't "get anything out of worship" at old First Church, and besides Willowcreek has coffee and bagels with low-fat cream cheese, before and after, and a Tai Chi class on Monday morning! Or, for that matter, while I'm on the subject, try telling Melissa and Kevin that it isn't actually "their wedding." it's the church's wedding, which they want the church to celebrate for them, so it's no more appropriate for them to write their own vows than it would be for you to create your baptismal questions. But I digress.

My concern with what is euphemistically called "Contemporary Worship" is not at all with its contemporaneity, but with its narcissism: its shift of the focus of the act of worship from God to the individual worshiper, from praise and adoration of the Almighty to the emotional stimulation of Mr. Jones and Ms. Brown. Marva Dawn, in *A Royal "Waste" of Time*, writes: "If we sing only narcissistic ditties, we will develop a faith that depends on feelings and that is inward-curved instead of outward-turned"(p. 68). The same criticism should be made of preaching: sermons that focus congregational attention on the preacher are no better than narcissistic praise music, only a whole lot longer.

God is the point. Feelings, emotions are not bad, God forbid! It is a matter of heart, as well as
mind and spirit. But God, not the emotions or feelings of the congregation, is the point, and a point we need to remember—because one of our basic needs is a longing, a veritable hunger for God. And if somewhere in our own hearts we don't believe that, the whole exercise has little purpose, except our own ego-needs to be listened to and complimented.

Douglas John Hall, who wrote powerfully and profoundly about the end of Christendom and, by the way, the beginning of Christianity, says we have four well-documented needs:

- Meaning and Purpose
- Moral Authenticity
- Community
- Transcendence—some experience of the Holy, the Other, that which is greater than me, greater than all of us put together, the transcendent.

In the final analysis I’m going to put my money on Hall, and on the great liturgical traditions that are ours, rather than on the narcissism of the moment.

Besides, the traditions themselves, particularly the Reformed Tradition, are based on taking the world as seriously as possible, using the best of what human beings create and write and sing and build and act and employ in the praise and adoration of God. Marva Dawn writes:

> Music, songs, sermons, liturgical form, architecture, are all means by which God invites, reveals, and forms us. If we use shallow [she did not say simple] materials, they will not reveal truth about God. Instead, shallow materials will shape shallow theology and form us superficially; songs with cheap or sentimental lyrics or banal music belie the coherence and integrity of God.

"The Church," she says, "needs preachers and musicians with great faithfulness to give worship participants what they need instead of what they think they need, to offer that which is needful instead of catering to neediness."4

**Sherer**: Worship should be vital, serious, inspiring, hopeful, not dull or pallid. On any Sunday morning Fourth Presbyterian Church has a lot of competition. There are children’s soccer games everywhere throughout Chicago, there is the urge to sleep in, coffee and the newspaper, or a weekend excursion. Worship must be done well for people to feel at ease. Only then can the worshippers go beyond the worship leaders, or prompters, to reach the divine.

Robert Hovda writes, "Our limits and sins impose such ugliness upon the world. Public worship should reveal its beauty in every way it can."

Here are a few principles that guide me. First, worship should not blindly imitate the past. I often see churches that are stuck in a rut because whatever they are doing is safe. The danger of this is at best a warm feeling of nostalgia, and at worst, idolatry. Also, too many churches are trying to imitate cathedral programs or trying to do music that really isn't possible for them to accomplish well. Holy shoddy is still shoddy. On the other hand, worship should not be entertainment. There is a fine line between entertainment and worship, but if entertainment becomes the chief end of worship, again, we have arrived at idolatry, and we must never
I recently attended Willow Creek Community Church in Barrington, Illinois. I was very surprised at how well done their worship service was. I was also surprised at how similar it was to worship in the twelfth century. It was very passive, and there was actually a morality play. The majority of the congregation of nearly five thousand did not actively participate. Almost no one sang. The singing was done by a small group of people who were amplified at an incredibly high decibel level. The whole effect was very entertaining, but for me, not worshipful.

Worship should be set apart from our worldly experiences, because worship is about awe and mystery. One of the mysteries that worship can reveal is the two natures of Jesus Christ, divine and human. Too often through our art, architecture, and music, we emphasize the human nature of Christ by stripping away all mystery, all symbolism, and all beauty. That only represents the human side of Jesus. Many praise choruses fall into this category. The divine nature of Jesus Christ can be represented through inspiring architecture or through beautiful music that has inspired people for centuries. As worship leaders we should lift up both natures of Jesus Christ in diverse and creative ways.

One of the problems that Willow Creek is experiencing now is that many people come there to worship for a while, but they don't stay. They can't figure out how to get people to keep coming back. There are many refugees from Willow Creek who come down the road to Fourth Presbyterian Church.

**Buchanan:** I'm not at all convinced that traditional worship is no longer viable and that people find it boring, irrelevant, and uninteresting. Or, put more accurately, nothing about traditional worship must, of necessity, be boring, irrelevant, and uninteresting. It often is. You and I know it is, but not because it's traditional. Boring and uninteresting worship can come in any style. I would make the case that traditional worship has a far better chance of being energetic, creative, interesting, because there is so much more to work with. I'm so tired of hearing the pipe organ blamed—for anything. A pipe organ played by an energetic, creative, and lively musician is irresistible; an organ played by a boring, unimaginative musician is boring, but then so is an electric guitar played by a boring guitarist.

At Fourth Presbyterian Church we are almost as traditional as we can be. The liturgy is pure Reformed; the prayers and responses are from *The Book of Common Worship*, the hymns are from *The Hymnal*. But the music is thoughtfully chosen, carefully coordinated with the theological themes of the day, and lovingly and energetically presented for the congregation's worship. The choir is robed and so are the clergy: in black, with clerical collars and Geneva tabs. People sit in pews in a 1914 Gothic sanctuary with absolutely no architectural space to do much of anything in except worship, Reformed style. And that is what we do, four times every Sunday, with a full sanctuary at 9:30 and 11:00 a.m.

In seventeen years, I have never heard anyone say that worship is boring, or that we need to change styles in order to be relevant. That's not quite true. One formerly active member regularly tells me that our liturgy is out of date, and sends me tapes and compact disks of praise music. But he's unhappy with everything Presbyterian these days, and obviously unhappy with me on a lot of fronts. But what I have heard, over and over again, is gratitude for the integrity and power and opportunity to reflect on the mystery of life and death, of love and passion, of human hopes and dreams and fears, and the God who creates and loves and graces all of life.
We are not boring. We add brass once a month, and a children's choir at 9:30 weekly. We try to mix old and new hymns, spirituals, and Isaac Watts. We parade in and out on Palm Sunday, and light lots of candles at Christmas, and, week in and week out, preachers take their homiletic responsibility and opportunity with utmost seriousness. And week in and week out, John Sherer and friends bring to worship their amazing musicianship, and—even more importantly—commitment to the act of public worship.

Sherer: Let me talk a little about worship at Fourth Presbyterian Church. First of all, worship should provide carefully nourished links to our heritage. We should never get stuck in any one style. At Fourth Presbyterian Church, we do a lot of chant, Renaissance polyphony, Baroque music, Mozart, plus much, much more. This forms the core of the music program. The first time I had the choir sing music by Josquin des Prés, I was amazed at the reaction at coffee hour—the members of the congregation loved it. They were so astounded at the ethereal quality. The divine nature of this music touched them.

Worship should include music of our time that is destined to survive. The church should always be a center of creativity, and a forum for great artists. It's tragic that we have lost our reputation for being that. I urge you to reclaim the role of being an innovator, of being a leader of the arts within the church. Contemporary composers I like to feature at Fourth Presbyterian Church are Messiaen, Taverner, Arvo Pärt, Dan Locklair, Morton Lauridsen, Benjamin Britten, to name but a few. I have commissioned many new works for Fourth Presbyterian Church, both instrumental and choral. This is a wonderful way to engage composers to support your ministry and to give the community something that they can truly call their own.

In 1997 I got a memo from John Buchanan asking me to start a jazz service at Fourth Presbyterian Church. My first reaction was one of fear. I didn't know how to do it, I didn't know why to do it, and I didn't know much about jazz. It took me several years, but I realized that he had the right idea. Now we have several services each year that incorporate jazz music for the entire service, or just a portion of it. Andy Tescon, a local jazz musician, has arranged nearly one hundred traditional hymns so that the congregation can sing with the wonderful jazz accompaniment provided by his eight piece band. He has also written an Ordinary of the Mass, so we have the Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei in a jazz idiom throughout the communion service. He has also written a Magnificat and Nunc dimittis for Evensong. He has composed many anthems for his jazz band. With his arrangements of hymns and the communion setting, jazz becomes participatory for everyone, and I think that is the key to the successful use of jazz in worship.

Worship should give voice to musical cultures other than our own, not for their own sake, but to support the lectionary and other themes in worship. This music, when done well and authentically, is enjoyed by everyone. At Fourth Presbyterian Church I have incorporated African-American spirituals, South African freedom songs, Caribbean music, Asian music, Native American music, Russian music with great success. Some of the resources I have found helpful are the Earth Songs Publishing company in Oregon and John Bell's music published through GIA which is from the Iona community. Marion Dolan, another Yale graduate, has edited a collection of Caribbean music with Augsburg Fortress. There are many other collections listed in the Hymn Society of America.

Harold Best writes, "And in these later years of my profession, I find myself laughing and whole
again, musically happier than ever, celebrating this vast expanse of sonic creativity, longing with all my heart to be a world musician as a living part of being a world Christian."

I think worship leaders should seek out new forms of music that have spiritual and musical integrity. At Fourth Presbyterian Church we have initiated a Taizé service on the fourth Friday of every month. We have done six of them now, and we are already getting nearly one hundred people every service. It has filled a need in our congregation that our other worship services do not. One of the interesting things I have found as we have started the Taizé service is that it has been remarkably easy. It is almost as if the Holy Spirit has been pulling us through the whole process. Many things at Fourth Presbyterian Church have been difficult to launch, but not the Taizé service.

**Buchanan:** There's a lot to read on the subject of worship, but Marva Dawn's "Keeping God as the Infinite Center of Our Worship," chapter 11 in A Royal "Waste" of Time, is, from my perspective, one of the most thoughtful and helpful. She offers five guidelines, which I pass along with my own editorial observations and amplification.

- **The Tradition**—don't throw it out before understanding it. And don't cling to it without understanding it. Teach people why we start with praise and move to confession, why sermons come before the offering and not after. Part of what it means to be a Protestant is the commitment to continuing reformation, to ongoing response by the church to what's going on around it. Professor Brain Gerrish reminds us that the "inclination to revise theology as a response to what's happening in the world is a part of the theological methodology of both Luther and Calvin." The tradition itself is lively. You don't have to make it relevant. You simply need to be open, imaginative, and responsive to the world and to the Spirit.

- Don't sacrifice substance for style. This does not mean, don't use contemporary music at all. Just don't use trite music and simplistic resources that trivialize God and the whole experience. I love the fact that the Fourth Presbyterian Church Morning Choir can do an elegant Vivaldi "Gloria" and close the service with a Dave Brubeck "Amen."

- Don't confuse evangelism with worship. Marva Dawn is big on this one. Seeker services are not worship, she reminds us. Worship is directed toward God.

- Find good contemporary music. Taizé and Iona are starting points.

- Find a way between antiquarianism and faddishness.

I've been standing up in front of a congregation to lead weekly worship for forty-two years. For the past twenty-five or so of those years, I have asked the congregation to pray with me before the sermon: "Startle us, O God, with your truth, and open our hearts and minds to your word."

One of my mentors was the late Joseph Sittler, a professor of theology at the University of Chicago. Sittler was a good Lutheran, an eloquent writer and preacher and lecturer who thought and taught that the theological starting point for all of us is awe—at the mystery, the unknowingness of God—and consequently our own theological modesty. We should never claim
to know too much, Sittler taught. He lamented that modern life, modern religion, modern churches, seem to be a conspiracy against awe and mystery. In a treasure of a little book he wrote shortly before he died, *Grace Notes and Other Fragments*, he said, "Our congregational life is so deeply sunk in monodimensional and totally secularized culture as largely to have lost ear, eye, and heart for a word or deed that asserts a totally different possibility."

Sittler used to worry that we are far too casual about worship (and this was two decades before megachurches, seeker-services, and praise bands). He was actually irritated by what he thought was "overly friendly" worship, which he termed "chatty spirituality"—this exudes confidence that it is no big deal to call on the name of the Lord, or to presume to come into the divine presence. Sittler used to attend Roman Catholic High Mass, or a Greek Orthodox service, occasionally just to be reminded of the mystery. (This reminds me of something Edith Blumenthal, who teaches at Wheaton College, told me recently—namely, that a lot of Wheaton students, known for conservative evangelicalism, are turning up at the local Greek Orthodox Church for Mass.) Joe Sittler became apoplectic (as do I, and I hope I won't offend any of you) when he visited a church on Sunday morning — usually served by one of his former students—and the minister, instead of calling the congregation into the awesome presence of the most high God of creation, began the liturgy with "Good morning!" as if he were greeting them at the supermarket; if the congregation did not respond energetically enough, he repeated it louder—"Good morning!!!"—as if the worshippers were a gaggle of kindergarteners, not quite awake.

I simply won't do it: I won't respond, no matter how cheerful the leader, with a "Good morning!" I sit in silent protest. I haven't come to see him or her. I've come to meet God, and I'll respond to "The Lord be with you" or some such reminder of why we are all there. But not "Hi, my name's John. What's yours?"

We live in interesting times, do we not? Postmodernism has washed away the world with which most of us are familiar. We have to learn a new vocabulary and a new geography, and now new global politics. September 11, 2001, continues to exert an enormous impact on us and our people. Part of what is in the very air out there is a longing for certainty, for something to hold on to. And in the midst of that, here comes traditional religion with a very serious and very precious proposal—namely a God whose very Godness transcends everything that is happening in the world, yet is somehow deeply present in it; a God whose very Godness is behind all of life, all of existence, but who also loves each of us as if there were only one of us to love; a God who lives in unknowing mystery, but comes as close as human love, a human birth, a very human life.

That's our job: to treasure that, and appropriate it, and create opportunities for our people to experience it and live into what Rudolf Otto eighty years ago called the *mysterium tremendum*. Otto wrote that

> the feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may burst in sudden emptiness out of the depths of the soul...It may become the hushed, trembling, speechless humility of the creature in the presence of whom or what? In the presence of that which is a mystery inexpressible.²

Startle us, O God, with your truth.

**ENDNOTES**


**RECOMMENDED READING**


*John M. Buchanan, a native of Altoona, Pennsylvania, received his B. A. from Franklin & Marshall College and his B. D./M. Div. from the Divinity School of the University of Chicago and the Chicago Theological Seminary. Since 1985, he has served as pastor the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago. Rev. Buchanan is the editor/publisher of The Christian Century magazine and writes a regular column for the publication.*

*He is the author of Being Church, Becoming Community, and Sermons for the City (with Elam Davies). A new book on the church is forthcoming in the Presbyterian Church’s Foundations of Faith series.*

*John W. W. Sherer has been the Organist and Director of Music since 1996 for the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago where 2,500 people hear him each Sunday. This dynamic church*
has a 126-rank Aeolian-Skinner organ, seven choirs, and Tower Brass, a professional octet.

Dr. Sherer is married to The Reverend Kara Wagner Sherer, an Episcopal priest, and has two daughters. He received two bachelor degrees, in organ performance and choral music education, from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. He earned two masters degrees at Yale University, majoring in organ performance and art in religion, and received the Doctor of Musical Arts degree from Juilliard.