

The worship wars, narrowly drawn

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

July 9, 2013

I like Keith Getty's "In Christ Alone." I think [the PCUSA hymnal committee probably made the right call on the whole "wrath of God was satisfied" business](#), but still: it's a good song for congregational use, accessible but with some theological meat.

It's a little bizarre, however, to present "In Christ Alone" and Getty's other songs as one side of a two-sided debate over church music, [as NPR does here](#). Yes, "In Christ Alone" is not a praise chorus but a hymn, in the formal sense of a sacred [strophic](#) song. And it's more substantive and less repetitive than a lot of praise choruses, which in my view doesn't make it *better* but does provide some needed balance if praise choruses are the only other option.

Of course, they aren't. There may be white evangelical churches that aren't interested in going any more "traditional" than a strophic, substantive song in a pop style. But the article doesn't say white or evangelical. Instead, it approaches the whole subject as if praise-band-dominated worship is not only the norm but the only. And this is NPR, not some megachurch insider publication.

A while back when I wrote [a cover story on church music](#), my starting point was the idea—hardly original to me—that "traditional vs. contemporary" is simplistic to the point of being almost useless. But this is even worse. It's still a reductive binary, but it's also hopelessly narrow: pop-style evangelical praise choruses vs. pop-style evangelical hymns. In reality, "Our God" and "In Christ Alone" are different in some ways and similar in others. Like a Taize chant and a Marty Haugen song. Or a spiritual and a Doris Akers song. Or "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" and "Blessed Assurance."

But since Christians don't *sing* any of those songs, it's just Keith Getty against the praise-chorus horde. Sure, if you say so.