

Inclusive Songs from the Heart of the Gospel

Jann Aldredge-Clanton, with McKenzie Brown and Larry E. Schultz. Fort Worth: Eakin Press, 2022. ISBN 978-1-68179-236-1. 168 pages, 74 songs. \$17.95.

Inclusive Songs from the Heart of the Gospel is a new offering from ordained minister, adjunct professor, prolific writer and lyricist, Jann Aldredge-Clanton, PhD, with contributions of words and music by McKenzie Brown and Larry E. Schultz. Aldredge-Clanton has taken her lifelong experience and education on the sanctity of “all genders, all races, and all creation,” (15) and penned an expansive collection of powerful songs celebrating divine feminine imagery, positive imagery of creative darkness, and a reimagined atonement theology.

Aldredge-Clanton grew up in a Southern Baptist church singing, in her words, the “bloody” hymns about Jesus, which she admits gave her nightmares as a child. In this innovative collection, she reuses many beloved gospel tunes, preserving the positive connotations of singing in community while offering new texts that speak to the loving, wise, generous characteristics of God. She explores many divine female names and images, as well as moving beyond traditional masculine pronouns to the use of “they/them,” making this songbook useful in a wide variety of settings where people are discovering the inclusivity of the gospel. Her explanation of the need for feminine words for God is brilliant:

Genderless names and images of the Divine are not enough to deconstruct patriarchy and bring healing. Genderless language continues to allow socialized patterns of male dominance to shape values and actions. If all genders were valued and treated as equals, and if people perceived Deity to be female as well as male, nonbinary, and more, then genderless language could work. But

all genders are not treated as equals, and this gender inequality has its foundation in prevalent exclusively male images of Deity. Just as the Black Lives Matter movement has taught us that, though all lives matter, we need to name that Black lives matter because they have not mattered enough in our culture, so we need to name females in the divine image, though all genders are in the divine image, because the Female Divine has not been named and valued. Justice and equity come from naming that which has been unnamed, demeaned, devalued, and oppressed. (11)

A thorough set of indexes is available in the back of the book, greatly simplifying choosing among the many fresh selections. There is a detailed topical index; an index of scripture references; an index of composers, authors, and sources; separate alphabetical and metrical indexes of tunes; and finally, an index of song titles. All of these provide specific guidance and make this a very user-friendly songbook.

In a world in which some aspects of church life seem to be narrowing, *Inclusive Songs from the Heart of the Gospel* is a welcome breath of fresh air, offering new ways of thinking about the Divine and new ways of interpreting the sung gospel as good news for all people.

Lindy Thompson is a poet and lyricist who lives in Franklin, Tennessee, with her family. She is a layperson at Christ United Methodist Church where she volunteers with youth. Her work can be found at lindythompson.com.

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