

THEOLOGY OF MUSIC IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP: A CASE STUDY OF TWO HYMNS IN THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

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Introduction

Music constitutes an integral part of human life. According to Gardner (1983) “it is something we get exposed to from childhood through adulthood. From the sounds of lullabies from mothers to whistle of the wind, down to the pattering sounds from raindrops, there is no limit to the ways we connect to music”. Music is one of the most universal ways of human expression and it is present in everyday lives of people of all ages and cultures around the world. Graham (2020) describes music as representing an enjoyable activity in itself, but to him, its influence goes beyond simple amusement. Music brings positive effects to people engaged in it. Recent research in music sciences identified several dimensions of human life (cognitive, psychological, social and emotional) which music has positively affected. This is to conclude that without music, human life is meaningless and empty.

The role of music in Christian worship cannot be underestimated. Throughout the ages, music has played a tremendous role in Christian worship. This position is corroborated by Kebor (2006) when she opines music blends the sermon and prayers making the worship a wonderful celebration of God’s self-giving in which Christians energetically declare the worthiness of God. Music can be seen as a gift of God and a part of the created order. “The morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). The birds of the air all sang praises of God. Music is therefore an expression of nature and the acknowledgement of the omnipotence of God. The great protestant theologian Karl Barth points out that singing is not an option for the people of God, it is one of the essential ministries of the church. In this sense, music is one of the most powerful spiritual tools that shape

O. A. Harmona & K. S. Henmaugo: *Theology of Music in Christian Worship: A Case...* the imaginative faculty of the people. Through hymns and songs of praises, people are made to see life and God in a different light.

The focus of this paper is to examine the theology of Music in Christian worship; using some selected hymns in the Anglican Communion as case study. This is meant to justify the germane role of music in the spiritual development of Christians.

Concept of Music

There are controversies surrounding a univocal definition of music by scholars. This is because scholars in the field of music view music from different perspectives. However, we shall attempt some definitions of music available to us. The Webster Dictionary defines 'music as the science or art of ordering tones or sounds in succession, in combination, and in temporal relationships to produce a composition having unity and continuity". The Concise Oxford dictionary defines music as "the art of combining vocal or instrumental sounds to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion". Blakeley (2003) sees music as a collection of coordinated sound or sounds". It is the process of putting sounds and tones in order, often combining them to create a unified composition.

Philip Tagg (2002) views music as "that form of interhuman communication in which humanly organized, non-verbal sound is perceived as vehiculating primarily affective (emotional) and/or gestural (corporeal) patterns of cognition. He went further to posit that musical communication can take place between;

- An individual and himself/herself
- Two individuals
- An individual and a group
- A group and an individual
- Individuals within the same group
- Members of one group and those of another

From the definitions above, it suffices to say that not all sounds are music, music entails organized sounds that brings out unity, melody and harmony. This simply means that any sound that is arranged in a haphazard and incoherent way or manner is regarded as a bundle of nonsense or noise (Aibuede, Uba, Okeke,

O. A. Harmona & K. S. Henmaugo: *Theology of Music in Christian Worship: A Case...* (2015). Using the words of Charlie Parker cited by (Chuck, 2015) “music is a world within itself. It is a language we all understand”.

Origin of Music

The origin of music remains highly contentious. Most cultures have their own mythical origins concerning the invention of music, generally rooted in their respective mythological, religious or philosophical beliefs. However, what is certain is that music cut across all cultures, it is therefore a cultural universal. According to Tonality Music International (TMI) (2021) the origin of music could be traced to the production of speech, human communication, work rhythms, play rhythms, clapping, mimics, singing, human sound, roaring, of waves or oceans, blacksmith, harmer and environmental sounds. People in the early times made use of drums and sticks as instruments of music. Music was used then for community functions such as religious ceremonies and social gatherings among ancient civilizations like the Egyptians, Greeks and the Romans. In ancient Egypt as far back as 4,000 B.C., music existed as far back as prehistoric era. It forms part of the Egyptian life, and musicians occupied a variety of positions in the Egyptian society. Music was used in the temples, palaces, farms, battlefields and the tomb. The Egyptian gods Hathor and Bes were associated with dance, fertility and childbirth. All major categories of musical instruments (percussion, wind, string were represented in pharaonic Egypt.

In ancient Greek, music was associated with Mathematics and philosophy. Pythagoras the Mathematician developed the octave scale. In 350 BCE Aristotle wrote on music theory scientifically. Beethius in 521 BCE brought the Greek system of notation to Western Europe. Music was an essential pattern of life in Ancient Greece. It was an important feature of religious festivals, marriage, funeral rites, and banquet gatherings. Our knowledge of ancient Greek music comes from fragments of musical scores, literary references and the remains of musical instruments. Archaeological records have helped to illuminate the existence of music in ancient Greece. In Athens, during the second half of the 5th century B.C the Odeion (roofed concert hall) was erected to show the importance of music in Athenian culture (Collete, 2001). In the Roman world, music was part of the Roman culture from the earliest times. It was used at funerals and other social gatherings. The Romans enjoyed musical concerts, solo performances, and theatrical productions that were, for the most part versions of Greek or native Italian genres (Encyclopedia.com,

O. A. Harmona & K. S. Henmaugo: *Theology of Music in Christian Worship: A Case...* (2020). A rich and diverse musical climate existed in Rome during the imperial period. Talented actors, instrumentalists, singers and dancers poured into the city from all corners of the empire to entertain the Emperors.

Music in the Bible

There are varieties of references to the use of music in the Bible. Herbert Lockyer (2004) asserts that “music, both vocal and instrumental was well cultivated among the Hebrews, the New Testament Christians, and the Christian Church through the centuries”. Theodore Burgh (2006) also comments;

If we were able to step into the biblical period, we would find a culture filled with music ... where people used music in their daily lives. Such music was capable of expressing a great variety of moods and feelings Every shade and quality of sentiment are found in the wealth of songs and psalms and in the diverse melodies of the people.

This suffices to say that music is a part of people’s lives in biblical times. Worship with instruments in the Old Testament starts in Genesis 4:21 with Jubal who played the harp and flute. The Old Testament also mentions tambourines and dancing in Exodus 15:1 as the Israelites celebrate their victory at the Red Sea. In Numbers 21:17 at Beer, when God gave the Israelites water, the people sang songs of praises to God. Joshua also used instruments of music to bring down the walls of Jericho (Joshua 6:4). Deborah and Barak celebrated their victory over the Canaanites with songs of Joy in Judges 5: 1-3.

In the days of David and Solomon, at the height of Temple worship, varieties of musical instruments were used in worship. They had choirs, ram horn (shafar), cymbals, tambourines, stringed instruments, percussions and so on. At the time of King David, music as part of worship was rich and sometimes extravagant. There were 4,000 levites appointed to praise God with instruments (1 Chronicles 23:5) and 288 trained singers to praise God with their voices (1 Chronicles 25:7). We can say emphatically that David was the one who introduced music as a systematic art among the Hebrews. He set aside the sons of Asaph, and Heman to prophesy with harps, psalteries and cymbals (1 Chronicles 25: 1-3).

The book of Psalms can be seen as the embodiment of music in the Old Testament. They are compilations of sacred songs and sacred poems that are

O. A. Harmona & K. S. Henmaugo: *Theology of Music in Christian Worship: A Case...* meant to be sung in worship. The Hebrew word for Psalms in Tehillim which literary means “songs of praise” is made up of 150 poems divided into five sections according to subject matter. They range in mood and expression of faith from joyous celebration to solemn hymn and bitter protest. Psalm 150 for example serves as a doxology, meant to thank God for His goodness upon His people.

Unlike the Old Testament, the New Testament says little about music. By the time of the New Testament, synagogues had become the most common centre of worship. This meant that professional temple musicians were not present. After the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., Jews no longer use instruments in the synagogues. However, there are few references to music in the New Testament. At Jesus birth, heavenly singing takes place in Luke 2: 13, 14, “and suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of heavenly host praising God”. In Matthew 9:23, flute players were part of the mourning tumult at Jairus daughter’s funeral. Also, in the story of the prodigal son, there was singing and dancing after the return of the prodigal son. Music is also connected with the Passover meal Jesus had with his disciples. At the end of the meal, Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn to celebrate the meal.

The book of Acts does not allude to congregational singing during the period it covers. Paul and Silas were praying and singing in the prison when God opened the jail with an earthquake (Acts 16:25). In the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, he spoke to the Church to sing with the spirit and with the mind. He projected that the meeting of Christians should include a hymn or Psalm (1 Cor. 14:26). Also in Ephesians, Paul admonished the Church to be filled with the spirit in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19).

There are allusions to music in the book of Revelation. The four living creature and twenty four elders each holding a harp and falling before the lamb, they sang a new song declaring the lamb to be worthy to open the seals of the scroll (Rev. 5: 8-10). It is important to mention that trumpet is frequently mentioned in the New Testament as a symbol for announcing the events of the end times, whether the rapture (1 Cor. 15:52; Thessalonians 4:16); Jesus second coming (Matthew 24:31) or the seven trumpets of tribulation judgement (Rev. 8;2, 6, 13). According to Jack (2008) “although musical instruments are not specifically mentioned as being played

O. A. Harmona & K. S. Henmaugo: *Theology of Music in Christian Worship: A Case...* in a worship setting in the New Testament, neither are they forbidden. In fact, the absence of instruments is identified with great destruction (Rev. 18:22). Singing does take precedence in the New Testament as it is a convenient and effective way to teach and remember the truths relating to Jesus coming, crucifixion, resurrection and return”.

Concept of Hymn

The term hymn is derived from the Greek word hymnos meaning festive songs or ode in praise of gods or heroes. According to Frang (2003) “a hymn is a type of song, usually religious and devotional specifically written for the purpose of adoration or prayer to a deity or deities, or to a prominent figure”. Hymnody (the singing or composition of hymns) has evolved and changed over the centuries and has been affected by new thinking and developing religious beliefs; throughout the history of the church, whenever there has been renewal, revival or restoration, new songs of worship appeared (Simon Lole, 2020). Hymns are valuable aid to worship because they help worshippers to focus their attention on the goodness and glory of God. Technically, a hymn is a stanzaic, metrical poem meant to be sung by the congregation.

During the middle ages, hymnology developed in the form of Gregorian chant or ‘plain song’. It was sung in Latin and most often by monastic choirs. In the 16th century, Christian congregations were given much greater access to hymns as a result of the invention of the printing press and the influential German theologian, Martin Luther, who encouraged people to sing together in congregations. In England, the non-conformist minister Isaac Watts (1674-1748) began a transformation of congregational singing. Watts believes strongly that hymns should express the religious feelings of the people; he therefore became a prolific writer and composer of hymns.

In the same period, another significant movement affected church hymns; the Methodist movement, led by John Wesley. Wesley and his brother Charles used simple rhythms and sing-able melodies to promote congregational worship. They wrote many of the most well-known hymns that are still very popular today. The 20th and 21st centuries have witnessed an explosion of new hymns. Old texts have been

O. A. Harmona & K. S. Henmaugo: *Theology of Music in Christian Worship: A Case...* renewed by new tunes that are used all over the Christian churches in the world today.

Concept of Christian Worship

Christians worship is both an attitude and action of granting God the adoration, reverences and homage that He is due. Worship is also a way to express love for God. It is the expression of God's holiness, goodness and power. Christian worship is the act of attributing God for all that He is: Holy, Pure, Just, All-powerful, loving and sovereign. Christian worship involves praising God in Music and speech, readings from scripture, prayers of various sorts, sermons and various holy ceremonies. Christian worship are in various types which include:

- Liturgical Worship: This involves worshipping that is carried out in a public setting, generally during a church service that follows a set structure.
- Non- Liturgical Worship: This type of worship is informal, with less structured. For example, sermon can be the main part of the service
- Informal Worship: This focuses on the adoration of God and is not always carried out in a church.
- Private Worship: This is informal and often takes place at home. It can be Liturgical and follow a set of pattern of praying, Bible reading and ritual.

The Anglican Communion in Nigeria

The Anglican Church formerly known as the Church Missionary Society was a product of the evangelical movement that started in Europe in the 19th century. European missionaries from different denominations including the Church Missionary Society (CMS) landed in West Africa with the intention of starting a genuine evangelism after the abolition of slave trade. The rebirth of Christianity in Nigeria was made possible with the arrival of Christian freed slaves in Nigeria. While in Sierra-Leone, the freed slaves had embraced Christianity; and deemed it fit to evangelize Nigeria.

Among the first Anglican missionaries that set foot in Nigeria were Rev. Henry Townsend, Rev. Ajayi Crowther (who later became the first African Bishop of the Anglican Church) and Rev. Charles Andrew Golmer. Badagry was the landing point for these missionaries in 1842. The activities of the pioneer missionaries specifically

O. A. Harmona & K. S. Henmaugo: *Theology of Music in Christian Worship: A Case...* paved the way for the creation of the Yoruba Mission as they sowed the seed of Anglicanism properly (Benjamin, 2015). From Badagry, the Anglican Church (C.M.S.) was firmly established in several important towns, such as Abeokuta (1846), Lagos (1851), Ibadan (1853) and Oyo (1856). By 1857, the Anglican Church was fully engaged and the Diocese on the Niger was established in 1864. Of immense importance was the role of Samuel Ajayi Crowther. The church was renamed 'The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)' in 1979. Today, the Anglican Church has spread across the country.

Theological Roles/Functions of Hymns in the Anglican Communion.

Hymns play a prominent role in Christian worship especially in the Anglican Communion. They are meant to glorify God and to worship His holiness. The hymns also serve as prayers and expression of faith. Some Hymns build unity among the saints as well as build a community of saints. By singing of hymns, believers invite the saints into their midst. Some Christians also believe that hymns are portable sermons that articulate, exegete and pronounce biblical truths. They shape the way we view God, Man and Christ. For the purpose of this paper, we shall be looking at two selected hymns.

a. “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”

This hymn was originally written by Joseph M. Scriven in 1855, as a poem. He was born in Ireland in 1819. He was educated in Trinity College Dublin where he received a degree and became a teacher. When he was about to get married, the day before his wedding, his future wife drowned. Because of the grief of losing his wife to be, Joseph moved to Canada to start over. There he met and fell in love again with Eliza Rice, and planned to get married. Again, Eliza became sick and died from her illness, then Joseph was twenty-five years old.

From these unfortunate incidences, Joseph took a vow of poverty and began to help the poor. Then, evil struck again. His mother became ill but he did not have the fund to take care of his mother or to go to visit her in Ireland. He therefore penned the words of this poem for her as a form of comfort and encouragement.

*“What a friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and griefs to bear
What a priviledge to carry*

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Everything to God in prayer
Oh, what peace we often forfeit!
Oh, what needless pain we bear.
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer”.

The theological message of this hymn is aptly expressed by Paul Westermeyer when he says;

It has been a source of comfort for many who have sung it, the repeated line “Take it to the Lord in Prayer’ relates to comfort, and forfeiting peace or suffering pain. “All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer” suggest our capacity to save ourselves by the work of our prayer (Westermeyer, 2010, P. 606).

The words of the hymns is a reminder that though life is full of pains and challenges, we have someone with us that is a dearest friend than any human could ever be, sustaining us and remaining close to us in our adversity.

b. “It is well with my Soul”

The hymn was originally written by Horatio Spafford and composed by Philip Bliss in 1873. Horatio Stafford was a Presbyterian layman, a successful lawyer and real estate investor in Chicago. When the great Chicago fire happened in 1871, he lost his investment, even before the incident, his four-year old son died from scarlet fever. The family was under stress and grief. He decided to send his wife and four daughters to England for a vacation with the hope to join them later. The ship his family was travelling on was involved in a terrible collusion while crossing the Atlantic Ocean on November 22, 1873 and sank. All his four daughters died, the wife Anna survived and sent him a telegram that began with the phrase ‘saved alone. What shall I do.”

After receiving the telegram, Horatio Spafford immediately sail for England. During the sail, the captain pointed to the location where the collision occurred, Spafford, thought about his four daughters, and was comforted by the hope he had. While returning home, he penned a poem expressing his feelings. One of his friends

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Philip Bliss, a vocalist and a song writer was so moved by his poem and composed music for it; calling it "It is Well With My Soul".

*"When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
when sorrows like sea billows roll,
whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say
it is well, it is well, with my soul.*

Chorus:

It is well

With my soul

It is well, it is well with my soul".

Commenting on the hymn, Berding (2020) opines that despite the circumstances surrounding our lives, the objective truth about Christ should be upheld. The truth is that Christ shed his blood for us when we were helpless and that Christ is our hope in times of distress. Schlesman (2021) says about the hymn; "It is well" brings me hope in the midst of heartache, its themes travel into the deep, hurting places of the human soul and remind us that God is with us always."

The above hymns are used all over Christian Churches in the world today and they take prominent places in the Anglican liturgy. They are sources of inspiration and comfort for Christians in distress.

Conclusion

This paper examines the concept and meaning of music and the origin and importance of music to human life. It also looks at the place of music in biblical era most especially among the ancient Jews and its significance in Temple worship. It also investigates the importance of hymns as a valuable aid to Christian worship. A brief history of the Anglican Communion was considered and the theological role of hymns in the Church was also examined. Two hymns were selected from the Anglican hymn book "What a friend we have in Jesus and "it is well with my soul". It is however concluded that the message of these hymns remain a source of hope for Christians till date.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proffered;

- i. Contemporary Christians should place hymns at the centre of their worship because they are sources of inspiration. This is obvious in the hymn “what a friend we have in Jesus”.
- ii. Christians should mediate on the wordings of hymns not only the musical aspect (rhythms, melodies etc.) because they are sources of hope and trust in God especially in the face and adversities.
- iii. Hymns should be encouraged in Christian worship than before. This will serve as comfort for Christians in the midst of hardship and distress. In times like this where subsidy removal has brought untold hardship on Nigerians.
- iv. The theology of music must be understood for Christians to have a deeper relationship with God. This is so because the hymns are portable sermons that have a lot of theological messages embedded in them
- v. Christians should demonstrate the sovereignty of God through the singing of inspirational hymns. This can be done by the use of hymns that manifest the majesty of God.

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