

MUSIC, WORSHIP AND MISSION IN THE EMERGING CONTEXT

Psalm 98:1 "O SING TO THE LORD A NEW SONG: FOR HE HAS DONE MARVELLOUS THINGS"

William Shakespeare: "If music be the food of love, play on."

Isaac Hayes: "Life is a song worth singing... why don't you sing it?"

In Africa, we sing when we, work, play, protest,
When we are victorious, happy, and sad
When we are grieve, celebrate
When we are alone (LY) or together

In community gatherings, songs can be sung together in a way that the written or spoken word cannot. Songs can also be danced to. In some contexts, the written word is not accessible to all, whereas songs and music can include most people in any community. There can be room for everyone to either sing or play instruments. Significantly, with a good melody, songs can remain in one's mind, available for instant recall in a way the written or spoken word cannot.

As holders of community knowledge and values, songs can lift the spirits and hold them aloft. The act of singing together, of making music together, can also be transformative. This seems especially so if the process resonates with cultural traditions of community song making and music making which exist in the vast majority of communities. In this way, not only can the song itself act as a musical documentation of the alternative stories of the community, but the community performance of this song can act as a demonstration of a joyful and inclusive tradition.

- The Preface to the English Methodist Hymn Book begins with this assertion: "Methodist was born in song"

Charles Wesley founded the Holy Club and later invited John to assume its leadership. Charles mostly expressed his evangelism in hymn writing, about 7,000 of them. He is renowned as the great Methodist poet and hymn writer. In the English Methodist Hymn Book there are another 250 hymns written by Charles Wesley. They include "Jesus, Lover of my Soul (110) which has been translated into the isiXhosa hymn 229 "Mthandi womphefumlo wam," and "Hark the Herald angels sing" (117), which has been translated into Sesotho Hymn 106 "Mamelang mangeloi".

It is instructive that Charles Wesley went out of his way to listen to popular music of his era, music that was played in shebeens. He would then play that music on his organ, but putting in religious lyrics. That way people would identify with the music, while learning the theology in the words of the songs.

- Christian assemblies have at all times and in all places Read the Scriptures, prayed, preached and sung!
 - The Christian liturgy was born in singing, and it has never ceased to sing. Singing is a fundamental constitute of Christian Worship... it is above words, gestures, signs and symbols.
 - Singing places man before God as a creature existing in time: When Christian communities chant "O come let us adore him," the world understands that we are in the December period in which we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus.
 - Singing links us with our loved ones, (those far away and those who are departed) e.g. when hymn 230 in our Xhosa Methodist Hymn Book is sung, I can almost see and hear my late granny singing, seated in her favourite corner at or four roomed home.
 - When we "make a joyful noise" to the Lord
Many individual voices are fused together.
Same rhythm, pitch" ONE VOICE is heard
This brings a feeling of belonging
- ❖ There is blending expressed in unity and diversity of voices of men and women, young and old, rich and poor, slave and free:

ALL SING ONE SINGLE MELODY-

- All the inequalities of social life are BANISHED!
- Together we make up a single choir in perfect equality of rights! When we sing, EARTH IMITATES HEAVEN!

1. SPONTANEOUS SINGING

- Usually reacting to something, like
 - (a) A lovely morning with a clear blue sky: "Father we thank you for the night..."
 - (b) A fresh breeze and a marvellous panorama stretching as far as the eye can see, of moorland, trees, leather-covered hills: "O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder..."
 - (c) Appreciation of what God has done in history: National Anthems, Mirriam, Hannah, Mary, Elizabeth, Simeon etc.

2. Conventional Singing

- Singing because it is the done thing e.g. SIYAKUDUMISA time & place
- The church has something to sing about
 - A marvellous gospel full of promise for this life and that which is to come.
 - Sins forgiven
 - New life in Christ
 - Eternity with God

DANGER: Our singing may dull our sensitivity to what we are singing about; it may dull our awareness of the wonder of the Gospel.

THE REMEDY IS

3. DISCIPLINED SINGING. This is the special privilege of choirs.

- It involves expression: piano, crescendo, forte, lento, andante, allegro and expression rests upon an appreciation of the meaning of what is being sung.
- It produces excellence: there is no other way: practice, regular practice, dedicated practice and bring to the Church. Emphasize
- Essentially, the Church song is the Church's response to the good news of Christ
- Poor singing = poor appreciation of this gospel
 - = little awareness of what the gospel is all about = the congregation has died on its feet
- If we really appreciate what God in Christ has done for us, our thanks giving should be the very best O sing unto the lord a new song.
 - Remember this
- Music can penetrate into people's hearts and minds where no logic can never enter.

NB: Choir members who come to love their work, get built into them the essence of worship which lasts them a life-time.

DANGERS: Showing off, superior attitude to those who lack the gifts to belong. BE WARY OF PRIDE. Sing, sing, and sing "If others are made glad through your music that is your service and your reward." "O SING UNTO THE LORD".

For the emerging context, it may be helpful to refer to page 60, paragraph 1.2.1 of yearbook 2005.

1.2.1 THE NEED FOR CHANGE

Several **key indicators** have emerged in recent years that are **deeply affecting both society and the Church**. Some of these factors are:

- (a) **The word and society are changing at a faster pace than ever before.** Profound changes have taken place in technology, communication, information, life-style, culture and many other areas.
- (b) **Southern Africa is in a reconstruction and re-building phase** and we are presented with many challenges like poverty, moral decline, unemployment, HIV/AIDS etc. The Church needs to be meaningfully involved in these issues.
- (c) **Many of the “main-line” denominations are declining in membership and effectiveness all over the world.** Striking growth is happening in churches that do not always fit into the old denominational moulds. They are challenging **long-held norms of how to do church** and have sometimes moved outside of traditional models of church, ministry and leadership. We **need to wisely observe and learn.**
- (d) **Musical taste and worship styles** are changing and becoming more “modern”, especially among young people. We need to keep up to date whilst not losing the treasure of our traditions.
- (e) **People are more mobile than ever before.** This has resulted in a “shop-around” mentality. They are prepared to drive to churches where they feel something worthwhile is happening. Denominational loyalty is diminishing.
- (f) **Many people are searching for spirituality in other religions and traditions outside the Christian church.** Such people want to be spiritual but are no longer attracted by the Christian faith. This is commonly referred to as the “New Age” movement. We in fact have better answers and traditions to all these questions, but have not always presented them in attractive ways.

These are some of the things that are forcing us to take a new look at how we can “do church” more effectively in the modern world. We must ask, “What kind of ministry is best suited to meet these new challenges?”

References

1. Denborough D, 2002. Clinical Psychology Issue 17. United Kingdom
2. Blackman F, 2003. John Wesley 300. Barbados, Panagraphix Inc.
3. Methodist Hymn Book
4. MCSA yearbook 2005