The free song (hymn) as a means of expression of the spirituality of the local congregation with specific focus on the situation of the Dutch Reformed Church in South-Africa

by

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Dedicated to Dad

Oh Lord, my God,
when I'm in awesome wonder
consider all the works
Thy hands hath made.
I see the stars,
I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power throughout
the universe displayed;
Then sings my soul,
my Saviour God, to Thee,
How great thou art,
how great thou art!

Stuart Hine (1949)

All the glory to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He gave us a reason to sing and to celebrate. All the songs in the world are not enough to sing His praises (Is 40:16).

I'm coming back to the heart of worship
and it's all about You,
It's all about You, Jesus.
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it
when it's all about You,
It's all about You, Jesus.

Matt Redman (1997)

May this study contribute to the praises of His name with more instruments and more songs within a multitude of cultures, subcultures and spiritualities.

My sincere appreciation to the following people and institutions who contributed in some way to this study:

- Prof. Cas Vos (promotor) and Prof. Hennie Pieterse (co-promotor), who assisted me in describing, defining and evaluating the song.
My wife Tersia, who shares the dream with me. Thank you for having faith in me, and the privilege of worshiping God together the way we do. Your song is my inspiration.

My kids, Corniël, Emile and Esther, who continuously sing the song with us and remind me that there is more than one way of singing the song.

My father who dreamed of this day long before I shared the dream – he is already singing a new song.

My mother, who played the piano so that we could praise God with Halleluja-songs and free songs. Thank you for teaching me the other half of spirituality.

My father and mother in law who encouraged me to continue the song; thank you for all your encouragement and hospitality.

My congregation (Suiderkruis Gemeente, Potchefstroom), who joined me on the journey to the discovery of a song that could express the unique culture and spirituality that God has entrusted to us.

The worship team of Suiderkruis Gemeente who provides the symphony for the song. With you I have discovered that song is more than text and melody.

My colleague and the church council of Suiderkruis Gemeente, who gave me and still give me the opportunity to discover and sing a new song.

My friends who share my song. Thank you for your friendship and encouragement; thank you for not only sharing our lives but also our song.

The late Dr. Attie van der Colf who wrote many of the songs that changed my life. Thank you for writing free songs that children could sing.

I also dedicate this study to all the composers, musicians, harmonists, liturgists, organists, cantors and worship teams who honestly want to sing a new song unto the Lord (Ps. 33:3, 144:9). We look forward to the day that we will all sing and enjoy that new song (Rev. 5:9, 14:3).

Soli Deo Gloria!
ABSTRACT

The presence of at least two prominent streams of church music within the DRC is evident – this is also true of most other Protestant and Reformed churches. There is tension between the ‘old music’ and the ‘new music’; traditional church music and contemporary church music; the official repertoire of church music and the utilized repertoire of songs. Liturgical singing often includes various free songs (songs outside the official hymnal). Songs from various traditions are cut and pasted or copied and merged into liturgy through a process of bricolage. Within bricolage liturgy there is a growing tendency towards bricolage liturgical singing.

A brief overview of the history of church music illustrates the complexities regarding church music. The official song of the temple was often complimented by the ecstatic song of individuals. The more formal and official song of the church often stood in contrast to the song and music that were played and sung in houses and elsewhere. Christian believers in different eras expressed themselves in different forms and genres of music.

The Bible does not support a blueprint for church music. There is no Biblical church music, mainly because no ‘melodies’ could be preserved (cf. Mowinckel 2004:9). The latter is further complicated by the culture-bound nature of Biblical music and songs. The Biblical data mostly provides snapshots of instances where God’s people utilized music and singing in their interaction with the Almighty and covenantal God. Certain principles and guidelines for church music could be drawn from these, although the danger of fundamentalism, relativism and subjectivism remains.

A study of liturgy illustrates the important role of music and singing within the dialogue of the liturgy. Recent studies emphasize that church music could function as a ritual symbol within a specific cultural or sub-cultural community. As such church music is closely related to the culture (or sub-culture) of a given community and can never be evaluated apart from that culture. Within a postmodern culture, church music will be greatly influenced and coloured by the values and attitudes of postmodernism. The latter have major implications for musical styles, genres, repertoires and the sanctification of church music. Within postmodernism the borders between sacred and secular are not so clear, neither between sacred (liturgical) music and secular music. Within Western culture and postmodernism there is a growing need for an inculturated and an inter-culturated song, expressing the smaller narrative(s) of the local congregation in idioms, language, metaphors and styles true to the local culture.
Church music is closely related to the spirituality of the local congregation. The dominant type of spirituality will necessarily have a sound influence on the musical genres, accompaniments, styles and repertoire of the local congregation. The growing phenomenon of popular spirituality has definite implications for church music. At least three circles of spiritualities must find expression in the song of the local congregation, namely an ecumenical spirituality, a denominational spirituality and a congregational spirituality. Where the official song (*Liedboek van die Kerk*) gives expression to the denominational or Reformed spirituality as well as the meta-narrative, the free song often gives expression to the congregational spirituality as well as the smaller narrative. It is argued that the freely chosen song is an important means of expressing the spirituality of the local congregation (culture). In this sense, it does not threaten the official church song but compliments it. These two could stand in a positive and creative tension.

Regarding liturgical singing, the DRC is presently moving from a *societas* through a phase of *communitas* to a new *societas*. It is impossible to predict the outcome of this process. As Burger (1995:31) indicates, a communitas-phase releases a lot of new energy that could be of great value to the church. Church music, as folk music and cultural music, will have to be faithful to the culture and spirituality of God’s people living in the twenty first century within a given context. The age-old tradition must continue hand in hand with a new song. Vos (2009:5) summarizes accurately: “However, each generation of believers must interpret the ancient sources and traditions of the Church anew, within the demands of their time, without being unfaithful to the traditions in which a definitive liturgy exists”.
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Translation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Church music</td>
<td>Kerkmusiek</td>
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<td>Church song</td>
<td>Kerklied</td>
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<td>Church singing</td>
<td>Kerksang</td>
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<tr>
<td>Singing</td>
<td>Sang</td>
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<td>Bricolage singing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liturgical music</td>
<td>Liturgiese musiek</td>
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<td>Free song</td>
<td>Vrye lied</td>
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<td>Free hymn</td>
<td>Vrye himne</td>
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<td>Hymn</td>
<td>Himne</td>
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<td>Kultuur</td>
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<td>Westerse kultuur</td>
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<td>Inkulturele sang</td>
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<td>Inter-cultural singing</td>
<td>Inter-kulturele sang</td>
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<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>Spiritualiteit</td>
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<td>Reformed spirituality</td>
<td>Gereformeerde spiritualiteit</td>
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<td>Popular spirituality</td>
<td>Populêre spiritualiteit</td>
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<td>Bricolage</td>
<td>Bricolage</td>
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<td>Contextual song</td>
<td>Kontekstuele lied</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reformed worship</td>
<td>Gereformeerde kerksang</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worship war</td>
<td>Kerksang stryd</td>
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<td>Ritual symbol</td>
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