

**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.

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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".



KEY WORDS / PHRASES

Church music	Kerkmusiek
Church song	Kerklied
Church singing	Kerksang
Singing	Sang
Bricolage singing	Bricolage sang
Liturgical music	Liturgiese musiek
Liturgical singing	Liturgiese sang
Free song	Vrye lied
Free hymn	Vrye himne
Hymn	Himne
Culture	Kultuur
Western culture	Westerse kultuur
Inculturated singing	Inkulturele sang
Inter-cultural singing	Inter-kulturele sang
Spirituality	Spiritualiteit
Reformed spirituality	Gereformeerde spiritualiteit
Popular spirituality	Populêre spiritualiteit
Bricolage	Bricolage
Contextual song	Kontekstuele lied
Reformed worship	Gereformeerde kerksang
Worship war	Kerksang stryd
Ritual symbol	Rituele simbool

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