

All things bright and beautiful: Liturgy for sustainable living

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Abstract

In this article an investigation is begun endeavouring to understand what role the worship service has to play in promoting sustainable living. Comparisons are drawn from culture and tradition, which sees hymns such as “All things bright and beautiful” to be examples of the people celebrating God’s gracious gift of creation. It is suggested, through describing three perspectives, that liturgy can be a space for encouraging sustainable living. This is possible by (1) identifying that liturgy can be a space against waste, (2) that certain aspects of culture and tradition can combine in a critical-reciprocal manner to create a new entity and (3) by understanding that worship affects belief and thought, which in turn affects how “we” live and/or vice versa.

Keywords

liturgy; worship; belief; sustainable living; waste

Introduction

Refrain:

All things bright and beautiful,

All creatures great and small,

All things wise and wonderful:

The Lord God made them all.

Each little flow’r that opens,

Each little bird that sings,
He made their glowing colours,
He made their tiny wings.

The purple-headed mountains,
The river running by,
The sunset and the morning
That brightens up the sky.

The cold wind in the winter,
The pleasant summer sun,
The ripe fruits in the garden,
He made them every one.

The tall trees in the greenwood,
The meadows where we play,
The rushes by the water,
To gather every day.

He gave us eyes to see them,
And lips that we might tell
How great is God Almighty,
Who has made all things well.

*Cecil F. Alexander 1948*¹

1 [Online]. Available: https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/All_Things_Bright_and_Beautiful/ [Accessed: 06 August 2019].

The words of the hymn above instil – at least for the author of this article – a sense of awe, gratitude and celebration for all that the Lord has made. The issue on hand is that while this traditional hymn, as an example among many other such hymns, is sung in congregations across the world the trail of destruction that has been caused by the human race paints a different picture – one lacking gratitude almost entirely. A theme throughout this article is the aphorism *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*. It is used, here, as a foundation to exhibit why participation in the worship service can elicit a sense of personal responsibility to sustainable living. In this sense, the supposition is that the worship service has several functions (cf. Cilliers 2014) and that worship comes from the continuous and critical-reciprocal interactions between tradition and culture, and ultimately that worship affects belief which affects living (cf. Smit 2004:890).

The notion of *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi* can be understood as: “as we worship, so we believe, so we live”. Thus, in worshipping the Lord and singing the appropriate hymns, one’s beliefs should be influenced and thereby their living should show examples of honouring the creations lived with, in, on and by. A similar sentiment is shared as follows:

We can learn about it from exceptional people of our own culture, and from other cultures less destructive than ours. I am speaking of the life of a man who knows that the world is not given by his fathers, but borrowed from his children; who has undertaken to cherish it and do it no damage, not because he is duty-bound, but because he loves the world and loves his children ...” (Berry 1971:26)

It should be noted from the outset that this article is not concerned with arguments revolving around such concepts as “eco-theology” or “natural theology” (cf. Bell 2013, Buitendag 2009 & 2012, Deane-Drummond 2008, Kroesbergen 2014). Rather, the aim of this article is to understand the role of liturgy, and the worship service, in promoting sustainable living and playing a role in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.² As well as illustrating that the worship service can encourage living sustainably, insofar as eliciting a consciousness (belief) to protect the

2 There are seventeen of these goals, all of which are important however this article is more concerned with goals six, seven, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen (cf. United Nations 2021)

environment (living) through the singing of such hymns (worship) as, to list a few examples only: “All things bright and beautiful”³, “For the beauty of the earth”⁴ and “All creatures of our God and king”⁵. This acknowledges the plausibility of the notion: “as we worship, so we believe, so we live”.

Much has been written on the intersection(s) of culture and tradition (cf. Barnard 2010; Barnard, Cilliers & Wepener 2014; Chupungco 1982 & 1992; Lutheran World Federation 1996 & 1998; Scott, Van Wyk & Wepener 2019; Scott & Wepener 2017; Tisdale 2008; Wepener 2007, 2009 & 2014). In lieu of Berry’s concern above of learning from culture, there ought to be a critical-reciprocal interaction between cult and culture that creates a new entity (cf. Wepener 2009:42) – an environmentally aware church, encouraged and promulgated by liturgy. This is to say that tradition already sings “All things bright and beautiful” (or similar such hymns or songs of praise/worship) while certain cultures are gravely concerned with cleaning the plastic and/or stopping more from entering the oceans, reducing carbon footprints and thinking toward sustainable development or not polluting it in the first place. Thinking similarly to the concept of liturgical inculturation, where A (culture) + B (tradition) = C (a new entity) (cf. Chupungco 1982:81), the growing culture of attempting to sustain the planet, its ecosystems and living organisms from bees to blue whales, should interact in a critical-reciprocal manner with the traditions (not only liturgically) of the church to create a new entity that pledges to do no – further – damage to the planet.

Additionally, there is the notion *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi* which, as indicated above, can be understood as follows: “as we worship, so we believe, so we live”. The premise is that if hymns such as those mentioned above are being sung, so are the words believed and thus the belief lived out. This can be further “believed” by, for example, churches that make use of data projectors to display the lyrics of hymns for the congregation to sing along to, often displaying stunning landscapes including mountains,

3 Cecil F. Alexander 1948 (cf. https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/All_Things_Bright_and_Beautiful/ [Accessed: 06 August 2019]).

4 Follitt S. Pierpoint 1863 (cf. https://hymnary.org/text/for_the_beauty_of_the_earth [Accessed 8 August 2019]).

5 Francis of Assisi, ca 1225, translated by William H. Draper and published, 1919 (cf. https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/All_Creatures_of_Our_God_and_King/ [Accessed 8 August 2019]).

forests, waterfalls, rivers, rainbows and sometimes wildlife as a background. Before delving into the above notions involving liturgy, a literary review will be conducted mainly using four perspectives that Cilliers (2014) offers in his article “Liturgy as space against waste”.

Liturgical functionality

First and foremost, Cilliers (2014:1) notes that liturgy has several functions citing Gerard Lukken, Arnold van Ruler and G. B. Thompson. He then suggests that the functionalities of liturgy listed in the article could be all but a drop in the ocean – “it seems the possibilities are endless” (Cilliers 2014:2). The focus then shifts to a contradiction of “every functional understanding of liturgy” – the non-functional dimension of play, on which the article is focussed upon as *play* creates a space “within which liturgy can function” (Cilliers 2014:3). According to Cilliers (2014:3), this “play” is “never merely for the sake of superficial frivolity” and thus, in play lies the highest function of liturgy – purpose:

In the same sense the liturgy should not only be able to laugh, but also to lament – because life is often inundated by worry and woe; it also groans in the pain of expectation of a better world. A liturgy that expresses all these experiences of disorientation cannot and does not have to avoid the reality of sorrow and suffering, of pollution and poverty, of children playing on dump heaps.

In agreeing with Cilliers, liturgy reveals a space illuminating a “healthy” tension between play and purpose. In his case, a “space where liturgy is against waste”. The concerns shared by Cilliers with regard to the generation of human waste – general or hazardous – are of concern here too (cf. Cilliers 2014:4). However, in using the hymns mentioned above as just a few examples, perhaps the greater concern here is the polluting (and consumption) of fresh water sources and oceans that compromise all forms of life – not only human. Which leads to his second perspective that: “(Protestant) liturgy is, obviously, “against” negative and destructive forces and realities” (Cilliers 2014:6), concluding that such a protest could create a “chaos”. In his third perspective, Cilliers (2014:6-7) describes that liturgy

is not necessarily against “chaos”, as it can be the first steps toward order: “Chaos can become the playground for new creation”.

This is to regard the “chaos” suggested above as a sort of liminal movement, a transition to a new “space”. Thus, before this “new creation” is a reality, there is a transitional phase wherein an anti-structure has been formed, in this case against waste as a destructive force or reality. Usually, these anti-structures or anti-societies are referred to as *communitas* (cf. Barnard 2010:70-71 & Wepener 2014b:27-30). Comparing this “chaos” to liminality is to understand that both begin as a “betwixt and between”, a period of transition (cf. Turner 1978 & 1995:107; Van Gennep 1960). And in this space of “between”, among other aspects, a change in thinking (and hopefully therefore doing) is beckoned. Liminality can be chaos in the sense that it is itself a space that is porous – open to all sides – with the possibility of revelation and transformation; possessing potential; danger and creativity (cf. Cilliers 2010:344 & Wepener 2014(b)).

In the fourth, and final, perspective Cilliers (2014:8-9) promotes the idea of re-purposing by suggesting that: “liturgy as a space against waste views waste as a playground for new creation”. Known as “the three R’s”, the term “reduce, reuse, recycle” has gained momentum as companies, environmental agencies and various public sector departments encourage “against waste”⁶. Cilliers, in suggesting that waste can be a playground for new creation is arguing similarly to the idea of reusing to reduce waste. This can be understood and practised in several ways, one of which is to actualise the idiom “one man’s trash is another man’s treasure”.

Cilliers’ article is helpful in understanding that liturgy can and does have a role to play in encouraging sustainable living and/or being against waste – as is suggested by the title of his article.

In what is described by Cilliers’ article and in the above review the causal interrelationships between worship, belief and life meaning is being illustrated. Namely that as we worship with expression, so we believe with purpose, so we live expressively and purposefully against waste. Below is a perspective mainly on how liturgy can function to promote sustainable

6 As an example, see: https://www.environment.gov.za/sites/default/files/docs/publications/schoolrecycling_programme.pdf [Accessed: 14 August 2019].

living by differently understanding the roles of certain liturgical and theological concepts, the “where” such an idea would function, as a liturgical space of play and purpose being described above.

A different dimension to liturgical inculturation

As already stated above, much has been written on the relationship(s) between culture and (liturgical) tradition. There are many different perspectives, one of which is the concept of liturgical inculturation, which can be defined as: “a continuous process of critical-reciprocal interaction between cult (liturgy) and culture so that a totally new entity comes into being, namely an inculturated liturgy” (Wepener 2009:42). By adding or developing the dimension of environmental awareness to the cultural and traditional components, the process of liturgical inculturation remains the same, the new entity that results from the process is different. In other words, the inculturated liturgy has an environmental element in addition to the usual anthropological or sociological concerns (cf. Scott 2018:185-186; 194-200).

Chupungco (cf. 1982:81 & Wepener 2009:39) describes liturgical inculturation as: A (culture) + B (tradition) = C (a new entity). What should be noted is that, currently (pop-)culture is concerned at some level with the environmental impact of “waste” and sustainable development, which has become a growing trend with protagonists like David Attenborough narrating documentary series such as *Our Planet*⁷. There are also “traditional” hymns, that denote praise, awe, and gratitude for creation – a few such examples have been suggested previously. Thus, if A, a culture of environmental and ecological concern, plus B, traditional hymns such as “All things bright and beautiful”, should equal C – a liturgy that promotes sustainable living. The ingredients for this new entity are already realities, however they need to meet especially if worship is to affect believe and thereafter living with regard to protecting the environment in accordance with the understanding of *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*. Metaphorically speaking, these respective cultural and traditional realities

7 A series produced by the WWF, Netflix and Silverback Films and streamed on Netflix (2019)

can be seen as the opposite ends of a candle that if burnt should eventually meet to create the new entity proposed – if they have not already done so (cf. Chupungco 1992:32).

The point being conveyed here is, to a degree, similar to the notion of “Worship” as described in the Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture (cf. Lutheran World Federation 1996:1 & 1998):

Worship is the heart and pulse of the Christian Church. In worship we celebrate together God’s gracious gifts of creation and salvation and are strengthened to live in response to God’s grace. Worship always involves actions, not merely words. To consider worship is to consider music, art, and architecture, as well as liturgy and preaching.

“Worship”, as stated above, “always involves action”. It is not just the singing of words on a sheet or screen but also actively celebrating, among other aspects, God’s “gifts of creation”. This is similar to Cilliers’ (cf. 2014) description of the liturgical function(s) of play and purpose – and the dynamics between them. To bow one’s head or kneel in prayer is to gesture. To reduce waste that pollutes the environment – to prevent the bright and beautiful from becoming dull and derelict – is to act. Hence, not simply following the latest trend in a consumeristic manner, without a sense of tradition, but acting by worshipping (cf. Cilliers 2014:6). In this sense, “worship” – as the “heart and pulse of the Christian Church” – is the traditional end of the metaphoric candle.

As for the so-called cultural end of the candle, the “green” trend’s impact means new initiatives and ideas are arising constantly as well as the constant traction gained by the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals. Adidas now uses “ocean plastic” to make running shoes and other sports apparel;⁸ The Wild Coast Sun hotel and casino in South Africa boasts a “zero waste to landfill” scheme,⁹ and Woolworths (as an example of a supermarket chain) has an extensive sustainability program¹⁰. Each of these examples’

8 see: <https://www.adidas.co.za/parley> [Accessed: 19 August 2019].

9 See: <https://www.suninternational.com/wild-coast-sun/stories/lifestyle/environmental-sustainability> [Accessed: 19 August 2019].

10 See: https://www.woolworths.co.za/cat/_/N-nmexhj [Accessed 19 August 2019].

intention is not just to play their part but to influence the consumers of their various products to do the same. As an ambiguous example, supermarkets encourage their customers to purchase and use reusable carrier bags, that come at a larger cost and more often than not further promote their own usage over single-use plastic or paper bags. Briefly described, this is the cultural component with regard to this, perhaps, unusual application of liturgical inculturation.

Wepener (2008:318) suggests various questions that can be asked, or investigations that could be undertaken, in order to create “a new entity” – or inculturated liturgy. For the purpose of developing a theory for praxis an example of how these investigations can aid the process shall be provided. Firstly, when speaking of “tradition” generally it is in reference to a combination of past and present – more of the former than the latter. Thus, Wepener (2008:318) writes that: “So in the process of liturgical inculturation and the role of tradition within that process there are a series of questions to ask regarding exactly who or what one looks back to.” This is followed by a number of potential questions that could be asked when critically, and reciprocally, interpreting the role(s) of tradition. For the purpose of this article, one such question will be used as an example: “Which practices or rituals and symbols do you deem as central and important, and should be repeated, and which ones not?” This can be edited to: which practices or rituals and symbols do you deem as central and important to sustainable living and/or serving against waste, that should be repeated? Hence, the examples of hymns given in the introduction and the reference to wallpaper backgrounds that are displayed on data projector screen with the lyrics of such hymns as practices and symbols that are repeated.

The outcome of this investigation should not yet provide direction for an inculturated liturgy since, as Wepener (2008:318) suggests, questions pertaining to the present – with an eye on the future – also need to be asked. He then poses, among other examples, this question: “To what extent is this liturgy a relevant expression regarding the experiences and spiritualities of the celebrating people?” A question or investigation, such as the example provided, involves the culture described above that is concerned with various challenges to the environment. So, to what extent is the liturgy a relevant expression regarding the impact of waste to the natural environment experienced by the celebrating people? And, to what

extent is the liturgy a relevant expression regarding the spiritualities of the celebrating people concerned with living sustainably? These are questions that should be asked when critically accepting and rejecting the cultural components that would lead to an inculturated liturgy.

The questions asked above, that are revised versions initially posed by Wepener (cf. 2008), are examples that could aid this sustainability focused dimension of liturgical inculturation. The previous section was concerned with the functionality of liturgy, this section focussed on a praxis theory that could be adapted for sustainable living. The following section focuses more on the theological concept of *lex orandi*, *lex credendi*, *lex vivendi*. The notion carried throughout this article is that this presents a combination of interpenetrative perspectives rather than three separate perspectives that can be selected between.

As we worship ... so we live and as we live ... so we worship

Within the concept of *lex orandi*, *lex credendi*, *lex vivendi* there are three aspects: worship, belief and life – or worshipping, believing and living to pose them as verbs. Each of these aspects are causally interrelated, in other words each of them can have an effect on the others (cf. Scott 2018:1 & Smit 2004). Consider the following explanation of this presupposition, after which an appropriate example of this is provided which in turn serves as an explanation for this perspective:

[A]s people worship (or pray), so should they believe, think, and talk and as they believe, think and talk, so should they live – [each and every one, together] (cf. Smith 2004:890). In a similar regard: as people live [together and with one another], so should they believe, think, and talk and as they believe, think and talk, so should they pray. Prayer affects belief, which affects [living], while belief affects prayer and [living], furthermore while [living] affects prayer and belief. [Scott 2018:1].

Thus, as the “celebrating people”¹¹ *worship* and sing hymns such as “All things bright and beautiful” (for example), so should they *believe*, think and

11 In reference to Wepener 2008:318 & Lutheran World Federation 1996:1.

talk that all things are bright and beautiful as well as that “The Lord God made them all”,¹² so should they live (actively) to keep, maintain, restore, sustain and preserve that which God made bright and beautiful. Because of the interrelatedness and the “to and fro” between worship, belief and life, another example is: as the “celebrating people” live in a world that is concerned with the natural environment, so should they believe that which God created to be a gracious gift¹³, so should they celebrate God’s gracious gift of creation through worship – including music, art, and architecture.¹⁴

In the examples of *lex orandi*, *lex credendi*, *lex vivendi* given above, what is being shown is that worship affects belief and/or thought, which affects life or living and/or being, while belief and/or thought also affect worship and life, living or being. Furthermore life, living or being affects worship and belief and thought or thinking (cf. Scott 2018:1 & Smit 2004). Therefore, if “we” acknowledge through worship the beauty of God’s creations, so “we” believe and/or think to maintain the beauty, so “we” live sustainably – being conscious of the effects “we” have on the natural environment. Likewise, as “we” live sustainably and preserve whatever beauty “we” can, so “we” believe this beauty is a gracious gift from God, so “in worship we celebrate together God’s gracious gifts of creation” (Lutheran World Federation 1996:1).

The same can be understood using Smit’s aphorism (cf. 2004) of *lex orandi*, *lex credendi*, *lex (con)vivendi* which can be translated to: “as we pray, so we believe, so we live (together)”. In this case, together could mean: (1) as a “celebrating people” preserving God’s gracious gifts of creation, (2) as a “celebrating people” protesting and living together against waste, or (3) as a “celebrating people” living together with all other living species in a symbiotic and mutually sustainable manner.

In terms of liturgical rituals and tangible or consumable elements, due diligence and consideration should be given concerning the role of the eucharist and baptism in encouraging an attitude of sustainability. Worshipers can no longer only be concerned with receiving (and

12 Cecil F. Alexander 1948.

13 As is described in the *Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture*.

14 Lutheran World Federation (1996:1 & 1998): “To consider worship is to consider music, art, and architecture, as well as liturgy and preaching.”

consuming) the sacramental elements of bread and wine, they need also be concerned with protecting the production process – from the sowing of seeds until their receipt of the final product – by ensuring that such processes are fully sustainable in order to keep receiving the Eucharist. Likewise, there should be a concern surrounding water, its consumption, treatment and not polluting the supply – by contemplating being baptised in the local river for example. The latter example briefly describes the interrelated nature of the adage “as we worship (baptise), so we believe (and think), so we live (sustainably or unsustainably)”. In other words: as we baptise, so we believe (and think), so we live sustainably (or unsustainably) which can also be read as: “as we live sustainably (or unsustainably), so we believe (and think), so we baptise in polluted (or unpolluted) bodies of water”.

The position of this article is that worship and its functions, when inculturated, affects the beliefs of the “celebrating people” and in turn cause them to live accordingly. As disclosed previously, the points being made here are interpenetrative and not three separate approaches. In other words, what is being conveyed is that by understanding the function(s) of liturgy – including play and purpose – and when liturgical traditions and culture concerning living sustainably meet, worship (*orandi*) can promote sustainable living (and developing) because of its interrelatedness with belief (*credendi*) and living (*vivendi*).

A celebrating people, for and against

First and foremost, the term above “celebrating people” has been quoted from Wepener (2008:318) and the Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture (Lutheran World Federation 1996:1) and is in reference to those worshipping. Secondly, in the above, it was mentioned that the perspectives described should be seen as interpenetrative rather than separate. In essence, these perspectives are presented as three points of one argument rather than three separate approaches to one concern.

By highlighting Cilliers’ article that suggests liturgy (can be) a space against waste, the point is being made that among the various – and somewhat

limitless¹⁵ – functions of liturgy there is the possibility for a celebrating people to be in protest of waste. There are different perspectives on how and what this space could be, what is of importance here is that this space can exist theologically and not just as an ecological trend (cf. Cilliers 2014:6). One of the reasons for this possible space is because: “(Protestant) liturgy is, obviously, “against” negative and destructive forces and realities” (Cilliers 2014:6). It is also suggested that being “against” waste can take various forms. Cilliers (cf. 2014) makes a few suggestions in this regard, however the focus here is rather that worship encourages people to act no matter what form.

The second point to the argument is to show how such a space can exist. This is done by applying the praxis theory of liturgical inculturation – albeit it with an environmental focus rather than the usual sociological or anthropological concerns. The design of the praxis-theory remains the same; however, the aspects of culture and tradition that would have said critical-reciprocal interactions differ from the norm because of the inclusion of cultural aspects that involve sustainable living. This dimension of liturgical inculturation differs as it is not ideally concerned with the sociological nor anthropological, rather the environmental, biological, and ecological. The result is the same, a new entity that is developed out of burning both ends of the metaphorical candle until the various components of the appropriate cultural and traditional aspects meet, where certain components of both should be critical accepted and/or rejected by the other.

The final point of the argument, although it is a theme that flows throughout, is the idea of *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi* which is used to understand “why” such an idea would function. The “where” such an idea would function, as a liturgical space of play and purpose, and the “how” – through the praxis of Wepener and Chupungco’s theory on liturgical inculturation – have also been described in the previous sections. Understanding the “why” – as in describing the possibility of liturgy creating an influential space where worship affects belief and thought, which in turn affects how “we” live and/or vice versa – is the third interpenetrative (and overarching) part of the argument. Thus, providing a comprehensive idea of where, how and

15 cf. Cilliers 2014:2.

why liturgy can promote sustainable living – theologically and not as just some consumeristic or popular trend – ecological or otherwise.

Thus, by stating that the celebrating people are for and/or against is to assume a space created by liturgy where worshippers are *for* God’s gracious gift of creation through sustainable living, as an example, and in the same vein *against* waste – in protest of it as destructive force. This space, if not already existent, could be created through the critical-reciprocal interactions between the necessary components of culture and liturgical tradition. Furthermore, this space can create other spaces where the celebrating people are not just against waste while in worship but also act on their worship affected beliefs when living, through the understanding of the causal interrelationships between worship, belief and living (or being) – or *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*.

Conclusion

Insofar as culture and tradition are concerned, Grimes (2000:12) refers to rites as “hand-me-downs” or “quilts [that] we continue to patch”. The same can be said of certain hymns that get printed anew in hymn book after hymn book. Berry¹⁶ comments that the earth is not inherited from their fathers but borrowed from their children, the same children that receive the “hand-me-down” (traditional) hymns. Is there a possibility that the liturgy could inspire sustainable living just enough for said children to sing these hymns and in doing so look through the eyes of the people that wrote them? If liturgical inculturation, as an example of praxis-theory, is concerned with *liturgia condenda* then current challenges, one of which involves the environment, should form part of the critical-reciprocal interactions that allow for a “liturgy in the making” (cf. Wepener 2005, 2008).

In conclusion, the notion here is to see liturgy as a space for encouraging sustainable living rather than one in protest of – or “against” – waste. While the notion of “against waste” and “for sustainable living” are ideally the same, in terms of the alterations to one’s lifestyle, the thinking is to

16 As quoted in the introduction, see Berry 1971:26.

not deteriorate the liturgy, the Gospel and the church into “anti-waste” (cf. Cilliers 2014:5). Thus, not making waste the “enemy” by which the church affirms itself and God’s creations because, essentially, this waste and that which it causes were created by mankind. Instead, the approach can be taken to “care for creation”, as is suggested by Joan Huyser-Honig (2017) in a resource article published on the website of the *Calvin Institute of Christian Worship*. As Cilliers (2014:5) writes: “(Protestant) Liturgy should consequently also not be usurped to become a constant campaign against certain realities but should rather be an expression of our new identity in Christ.” Similarly, Huyser-Honig (2017) suggests that: “Caring about God’s good creation includes lamenting whatever harms it and joining God’s mission to make all things new.” This can be done by exploring from around the world – as Huyser-Honig (2017) describes in the article – various themes and hymns, songs, choruses attached to them.

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