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FAITH IN SEARCH OF SOUND: THE INTERACTION BETWEEN RELIGION, CULTURE AND HYMNOLGY¹

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OPSOMMING

Hierdie artikel neem as uitgangspunt die dinamiese relasie tussen kultuur en religie, en daarom ook tussen kultuur en himnologie. Hierdie relasie word beskryf as 'n resiproke en akoestiese vertaalkaarsheid. Drie gevallestudies uit Afrika, naamlik uit Malawi, Zimbabwe en Suid-Afrika word as voorbeelde hiervan voorgehou. In die eerste gevallestudie word die rol van koloniale himnologie in teenstelling met inheemse himnologie verken; in die tweede gevallestudie die Pynskter-beweging se inkleding van begrippe soos heling, hoop en welvaart; en in die derde gevallestudie die soeke na himnologiese identiteit in die wisselwerking tussen Europese en Afrika tradisies. Enkele dimensies van himnologie as fides quaerens sonum (geloof op soek na klank) word ten slotte saamgevat.

INTRODUCTION

In a thesis formulated in 2001 Jürgen Henkys expressed his understanding of the connections between hymnology and culture as follows:

Thus the practical-theological component of hymnology transcends a liturgics of hymnody. This is required by an expressive act which, although it articulates itself as cultic rite (Kultus), cannot avoid its negative or positive relationship to culture (Kultur) as a whole. (Henkys, 2001:214)

In a certain sense my contribution in this article will be precisely about this “negative or positive relationship” between hymnology and culture, as experienced within an African setting. In analysing African cultures (histories), we gain an insight into the forms of hymnology implemented, and vice versa. In the process we discover certain religious trends inherent in certain cultures. This link between religion, culture and hymnology is elucidated further by Henkys: “All epochs in the history of the church, of theology and piety have left their marks on the singing in worship; history can be studied through hymnody” (Henkys, 2001:218). With these emphases, we have touched upon the keywords of our title, namely religion, culture, hymnology and the dynamic relationship between them. I now attend briefly to these key concepts.

Religion and culture: the search for meaning

It is clear that religion cannot be understood apart from its situation within a culture. It is, however, not that easy to describe either religion or culture. Religion is co-determined by the perspective of the religious person and his or her situation within (a specific) culture. Religion could be defined holistically as the acts, rituals and ideas of individuals and societies in which the relationship between the immanent reality and the transcendent reality (or aspects of it) becomes visible through word, image and acts (Hacking, 2005:6). Religion also harbours within itself the dimensions of spirituality and (the search for) meaning. The term “religion” is unfortunately often associated with rigid structures within which religious experiences and rituals are set. Perhaps the term “spirituality” offers a wider lens to evaluate certain (religious) phenomena taking place in culture. Spirituality can also be strongly linked to the search for meaning and the creation of “spaces” within which meaning can be nurtured (Cilliers, 2007:1-19).

Perhaps the link between culture and religion (spirituality) lies exactly in the common search for meaning. The meaning of religion has been traced back to the linguistic roots of *ligature*, which basically means a tying together of significances. In culture and religion we find various attempts to do exactly this (Louw, 2008:49).

Culture could, of course, also be defined in many ways. According to Raiter and Wilson, it is “those ideas, beliefs, feelings, values, and institutions, which are learned, and by which a group of people order their lives and interpret their experiences, and which give them an identity distinct from other groups” (2005:122). Another definition of culture: “Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Sarpong, 2002:40). Webb simply compares culture to the air that we breathe or the water that surrounds a fish: “We live and move about in the culture with which we are closely and invisibly enmeshed” (2001:21).

The word culture comes from the Latin *colo*, which means to nurse (take care of), or to transform the earth through a plough (an instrument) in order to live. Culture therefore refers to the human achievements and endeavours which try to “cultivate” creation and the cosmos into a human space for living through symbols, metaphors, language, instruments (*techné*). Culture is the human attempt to “re-create” creation through spiritual-religious articulation

(transcendence); ethically-driven actions (norms, values, taboos); aesthetic imagination (art, music); technical intervention (technology); dialogical verbalisation (language and speech); and social/political/juridical restructuring into a humane environment (Louw, 2008:153). In short: culture, like religion, forms a space for the creation of meaning, for the tying together of significances.

Music: an expression of life in sound

Culture is the air that we breathe. It profiles life. Life is seldom better expressed than in music. Words alone are not enough. Music is needed – as an intensified form of words; as concentrated meaning. In short: music is one of the most existential expressions of culture and therefore of life in sound. The most intimate moments of life cannot be articulated only in words; they must be expressed – and heard – in sounds. When a mother in Africa sings a lullaby to her infant (*Tula Tu Tula baba, Tula sana Tul'umam 'uzobuya ekuseni*) the words are not the -dominant factor in comforting the child (although the words are not unimportant), but rather the sound of her voice. The words form the vehicle that carries the sounds of soothing; they facilitate the tones of nurturing. The words step back behind the sounds and rather work subconsciously. The oral and acoustic dimensions of the lullaby create intimacy, an intimacy that celebrates and fosters the life embodied in the baby. The meaning of (this) life is acknowledged and created in the expression of the song in sound. The sound ties the significances together, even before words are understood. Indeed: In the beginning was... the Sound.

It is clear that there are fundamental links between singing and life (culture). As a matter of fact, singing is (a mode of) life, an expression of the existential dimension of life. This fundamental link entails, *inter alia*, the following: singing as immediacy of experience; singing as hermeneutics, i.e. as mode of giving meaning; singing as acoustic expression of meaning; singing as language and articulation (verbalisation; verbal expression); singing as symbolisation (giving symbolic meaning to convictions); singing as worship and confession; singing as ritual (liturgical dimension); singing as lament (voicing of suffering); singing as expressing joy and gratitude (mystical unification with the transcendent); singing as spirituality (and therefore shaping of God-images), etc.

Because singing is a spiritual exercise, it relates human beings to the sacramental dimension of life – life being the metaphor and symbol of God's presence within the events of daily life. It is clear that singing is strongly linked to religious experience and expression. In both the Lutheran and Reformed traditions – to name but two – music plays an important part in worship. Luther accepted music as being part of the true church and as an expression of faith itself. Calvin referred to music as “sung prayers” (1960:3/14).

It is quite clear that music is also of paramount importance not only for African spirituality, but in fact for African culture as a whole. Not singing would be equal to not living, as Africans have a song (actually many songs) for every season of life (Mapuranga & Chitando, 2006:72). To sing is to be bodily here; singing is embodied life – and therefore singing also forms a core of African worship. The description offered by Henkys underlines this intrinsic relationship:

Even in an age of perfect reproduction by the mass media of vocal-musical, singing with one's own voice is part of the essence of Christian worship; it is an elevated mode of sensual, somatic-affective and individually controllable participation in the corporate expression of

faith... Hymnology, if it understands the gospel itself as 'klingendes Wort' – sounding Word – interprets, evaluates and promotes the expressive act of singing. (Henkys, 2001:213-214)

In the African context hymnology is corporate expression of faith par excellence. Bodily expression is not strange to African spiritualityⁱⁱ and therefore African worship services. Generally speaking, expression via the bodyⁱⁱⁱ takes place more spontaneously in African worship services than is normally the case in Western liturgies. Africans have an almost natural or instinctive bodily awareness, particularly also in a communal context. In the so-called Independent African Churches, the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa and in some congregations of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, the African culture (spirituality) of bodily and sensory expression is clearly illustrated in the liturgy. Besides the (sometimes lengthy) preaching, music with rhythmical musical instruments, dance^{iv} and bodily movements all form part of the pulsating expression of faith. Prayer is often performed through dance; worshipping takes place with the body.

In Africa hymnology cannot be separated from the ecclesiological dimension of koinonia. It is not so much the ecclesial structures that unite the congregants, but rather the hymns, which act as an echo of the gospel. In fact, the hymns represent a corporate expression of the gospel as sounding Word.

African music is made with more than just the vocal chords. Africans sing with their bodies. It is indeed a sensual, somatic-affective participation in the corporate expression of faith. It represents condensed culture, an intensified event of spirituality (religion), and therefore an acoustic tying together of significances.

Faith seeking sound (*fides quaerens sonum*)

How should we understand this acoustic tying together of significances? In this regard some scholars re-introduced the concept of translatability, which was coined within the African context of Christianity and Muslim dialogue (Hock, 2006:261). Lamin Sanneh originally contrasted the Christian principle of scriptural translation with the Muslim principle of non-translatability, seeing them as two complementary paradigms referring to two specific modes of "missionary" expansion of Christianity and Islam in African contexts (Sanneh, 1989:7).

In a critical relecture of Sanneh's theory of translatability, Klaus Hock states that "as a translated religion, Christianity through history became a force for translation. This had important consequences not just for the church, but for culture generally" (Hock, 2006:263). In this sense, Christianity is seen as "a vernacular translation movement" (Hock, 2006:267). Indeed, "due to the translatability of Christianity, there is a correlation between indigenous cultural revitalization and Christian renewal" (Hock, 2006:266).

Hock opts for a non-essentialistic understanding of religion and culture, and a dynamic relationship between them, a relationship of reciprocal translatability:

However, culture and religion are not clearly definable units. Rather than understanding culture as an essentialistic, static 'something' of immutable substance beyond time and space, we should refer to culture as a social construct and a result of multiple exchanges. Likewise, religion should no longer be understood as a static unit, as something 'given' that can be approached by analyzing its supposed 'substance' or 'essence,' but as a product of a manifold, multidirectional process of exchange and interaction. (Hock, 2006:273)

Translatability could indeed be understood as a vehicle for mutual and reciprocal interaction between religion and culture. It addresses the question: How (positive or negative) does hymnology (being part of religion) translate into culture; and vice versa: How does culture translate into the hymns that are being sung in a specific context?

The notion of translatability, although helpful, has limitations. It has, for instance, been pointed out that the act of translation can never be viewed as “pure” or “natural” in the sense that it is not affected (and even contaminated) by the translator or translators. Personal agendas almost always come into play, calling into question issues such as authenticity, representation, power relations and ethical dilemmas. It is indeed not that easy to step into the shoes of the “other”; not that easy to “pass on” the specific tying together of significances into meaning as done by this “other” (Budick, 1996:6). It seems inevitable that there will always be an “us” and a “them” in any act of cultural translation (Sturge, 2007:56). The process of cultural translation always seem to be value-laden in itself – as will also become clear in the three case studies presented in this article.

Therefore the mere translation of, for instance, Scottish music (words) into African languages does not mean that a true “translation” has taken place. For the latter to happen, the sounds of African life must be captured. Otherwise the “translated” song will simply miss the life, and therefore culture, and therefore spirituality (religion) of the context into which it has been translated. It might be a perfectly translated “*Tula, Tula*”, but it will not comfort Africa’s children. It will not tie together any (African) significances.

What is needed, in my opinion, is an “acoustical translatability” that corresponds with an understanding of faith seeking sound (*fides quaerens sonum*). It is about acoustics as a spiritual (*pneumatological*) expression of life; acoustics as beautification of life; acoustics as the existential expression and articulation of a belief system through sound. The specific rhythms of a culture, in other words sounds grouped together and separated by silences, by acoustic spaces and pauses, must be captured in acoustical translatability. The silences are just as important as the sounds (Cilliers, 2008:24).

It is clear that musicians know about the intrinsic connection between silence and sound (music). Empty bars or parts of bars occur in virtually every musical piece. Rests are an inseparable part of any composition. On a more modest and subtle level, silences mark the transition from one musical sentence to the next by way of caesura.^Y Silence demarcates the beginning and the end of a piece of music:

To focus on the phenomenon of musical silence is analogous to deliberately studying the spaces between trees in a forest: somewhat perverse at first, until one realizes that these spaces contribute to the perceived character of the forest itself, and enable us to speak coherently of ‘dense’ growth or ‘sparse’ vegetation. In other words, silence is not nothing. It is not the null set. Silence is experienced both as meaningful and as adhering to the sound-ing position of the musical object. (Clifton, 1976:163)

Africa has its own rhythms of sounds and silences, its own rhythms of life. Interestingly enough, Western traditions with their ocular and linear approaches are inclined to be more orientated towards music as melody, whilst in African oral cultures it is rather rhythmical and indeed poly-rhythmical structures that create discontinuity in the musical score (Katani, 2008:115). The intention of African rhythm, however, is not to ‘disrupt’ the flow of the music (as the word

'discontinuity' might suggest); it rather means that the emphasis is not necessarily on melodious coherence, but on the impetus for life that rhythm can provide. In African spirituality singing is all about bringing people back to the rhythm of life. Singing expresses and underscores the life-cycle – therefore Africans sing from the cradle to the grave. Music condenses time; it brings those who sing back to the time of their origins, but also gives meaning to the present, as sacred time (Eliade, 1971:151-152).

In an attempt to exemplify what I mean by this, I now briefly attend to three case studies from the African context.

AFRICAN CASE STUDIES^{vi}

Malawi: colonial versus indigenous hymnology

In empirical research done in Malawi it was found that young people were singing predominantly indigenous songs, in contrast to the official hymnbook, the latter consisting mainly of Scottish and English hymns. As a matter of fact – only about 6 songs out of 638 could be called truly indigenous (Katani, 2008:220-221). The official hymnbook is experienced as “static and abstract” (Katani, 2008:221). Perhaps we could say: the failure of the words and melodies of the Scottish and English hymns to tie together Malawian significances underlines the fact that it is not possible to sing the song of the Lord in a foreign land (Psalm 137:4). Every (foreign) land should sing the song of the Lord according to its own rhythms.

An analysis has shown that the songs being sung by the younger generation address issues of importance to contemporary Malawians in a striking manner, and could therefore rightly be called an expression of translated culture. It picks up on the sounds (also the disturbing ones) of Malawian life. One example (translated literally from Chewa) goes like this:

You, death, have confused the knowledge of the whole world –
brothers, lawyers, judges, even doctors.

The way to the graveyard could, in the past, not be seen because it was bushy,
but today the way is like a market, looking at diseases in hospitals like tobacco for auction;
looking at dead bodies in the mortuary, like soap in the shelves.

It is not something, death, there are many epidemics.

Such things, you do not delay, there are many epidemics.

It is needed to start apologizing so that, maybe, He can forgive.

Such things were happening in the time of Pharaoh;

Pharaoh made many children die because of disobedience.

Not listening that God, the Destroyer, was annoyed.

Let us ask Him that the anger should be removed.

This song draws a bleak picture of how death has taken root in Malawi. In the past people would go to the graveyard once in a while. As a result, the path to the grave was impassable because it had become bushy. But today the path is as wide as that going to a market place. A number of metaphors like these are included: looking at sick people in hospitals, like bales of tobacco at the auction floors; looking at dead bodies in the mortuary, like soap in the shelves; death cannot be pointed out physically, but there are many epidemics spreading death. This song originated during the 2001/2002 famine and presumably also has the devastating HIV and

AIDS pandemic in mind.^{vii} The song ends with a prayer, asking for forgiveness from God so that He can eradicate such epidemics. The example of Pharaoh is cited to illustrate the effects of disobedience to God. Perhaps the reference to the many children that die because of disobedience refers to, and enhances, the stigma of HIV and AIDS (Katani, 2008:314).

It is evident that such a song would be highly relevant to contemporary Malawians. It breathes the air that surrounds them. On the other hand, it must also be said that many of these songs fall prey to dubious theological content. They are, for instance, often moralistic in nature, operating with a one-sided eschatology that is implemented as a means of escapism from poverty, suffering from HIV and AIDS, etc. These songs “Cry to God to come quickly and take them to heaven, where there is no funeral, no mourning, so suffering, no immorality, no corruption, and no poverty” (Katani, 2008:223). There are strong Christological and soteriological contents, and striking images of God as Judge, Protector, Refuge and as One siding with the orphans and suffering people (Katani, 2008:223).

These indigenous songs are sung outside the official church worship and are frowned upon by the church leadership. But they are a dramatic illustration of the fact that colonial (Scottish, English) culture and not the Chewa culture, within which the hymns of the hymnbook were supposed to be sung, was translated into the official hymnbook. The Chewa culture, with its imagery, metaphors and burning issues, was rather translated into the indigenous songs. These indigenous songs represent an alternative to the hymnological mistranslation of the official hymnbook. Or, in the words of Katani:

The contrast between the official hymns and traditional music is very clear. The official hymns were written many years ago, and their language and expressions were relevant to Western audiences. The cultural context, the experiences and the circumstances that led to the writing of the hymns are far detached from the Malawian context, history and culture. The rhythms and the tunes are so foreign that the people are not inspired at an emotional level. Here, the people normally sing the words of the official hymns but are not fully involved in what they sing; they mostly ‘parrot’ rather than enjoy the music. In contrast, traditional hymns provide the present reality; deep feelings are freely expressed in a tune and rhythm that has deep roots in the culture. The songs, which have been analysed, reveal that they come from different traditional dances. Therefore the singers are able to dance, shake their bodies, clap their hands and, in this way, show how they encounter God and experience his loving care. (Katani, 2008:227)

Zimbabwe: healing, hope and prosperity

Music has always played a pivotal role in African cultures. The first cry of a baby is seen as his or her first song. “In Africa, there is a song for every season, and songs accompany individuals from the cradle to the grave. Music has also been used as a vehicle for political mobilisation” (Mapuranga & Chitando, 2006:72). The connection between singing and liberation in the African context is well known – one need only think of Jacob Zuma’s now infamous liberation song: Bring me my machine-gun (*Lethu Mshini Wami*).

In Zimbabwe opposing political parties even sing songs during parliamentary sessions, the one group (ZANU-PF) voicing their opinion that Zimbabwe was born through blood and that

only a painful and costly armed struggle made it possible for Zimbabwe to come into being, while the other group (MDC) would counter with a song saying that the ruling party is now decadent and bereft of ideas to return the country to an era of prosperity. The party of Mugabi (ZANU-PF) had no qualms about financing the recording of music that celebrated the seizure of white farms in Zimbabwe (Mapuranga & Chitando, 2006:73).

It is also an interesting fact that there has been an ascendancy of so-called gospel music within the upsurge of the Pentecostal movement in Zimbabwe, which can be directly linked to the decrease in prosperity and wellbeing of the majority of people (Mapuranga & Chitando, 2006:74). The more the people suffer, the more these gospel songs promise liberation. This movement of “religious and hymnological entrepreneurship” is taking place outside, and often diametrically opposed to, the official or mainline churches. Issues like hope, healing and prosperity form key concepts in these movements and songs. In one instance God is proposed as the solution to Zimbabwe’s hyperinflation rate, the highest in the world:

I have seen the country in a troubled state
 People today are asking:
 “The price of bread has gone up today
 How are we going to survive tomorrow?”
 I here have got an answer:
 There is God the Father, He is able.

While MDC youths are chanting slogans claiming “MDC Ndizvo” (MDC is it/ the solution), and ZANU-PF doing much the same, Pentecostal preachers are leading congregations in singing “Jesu Ndizvo” (Jesus is it/ the solution). These are clearly cultural powers in action, expressed in religious and political hymns that promise healing, prosperity and progress (Mapuranga & Chitando, 2006:81). These issues in fact are key concepts in the indigenous worldview.

Perhaps one could indeed say that the Pentecostal movement has “created a new expression of culture” (Mapuranga & Chitando, 2006:88). This is a striking example of culture not only being translated into music, but music also into culture – underlining the notion of reciprocal and acoustical translatability to which we referred earlier. These songs were not only formed through inhaling of the cultural air that surrounds Zimbabweans, but the exhaling (singing) of these songs in turn shaped the culture surrounding Zimbabweans. This represents a form of hymnological translation that extends far beyond the walls of the official churches:

These songs are no longer restricted to performances within the church. Gospel music has invaded popular culture. It is played on radio, television, public transport vehicles and in flea markets. In some instances, politicians have appropriated gospel music to further their own ambitions. (Mapuranga & Chitando, 2006:88)

Of course, the formation of this new culture/theology of prosperity could be analysed and criticised theologically. It is an open question whether these songs can deliver what they promise, and whether they are not simply proposing a religious “quick-fix”. It could be said that the language of these gospel hymns presents God as Magician. The words of the songs create and cultivate certain dubious God-images. But even so, seen from a phenomenological perspective, they offer a fascinating picture of the main and recurrent themes in contemporary, Zimbabwean, Pentecostal culture:

The key words are progress, prosperity, breakthrough, success, achievement, destiny, favour, dominion, blessing, excellence, elevation, promotion, increase, expansion, plenty, open doors, triumph, finances, overflow, abundance, newness, fulfilment, victory, power, possession, comfort, movement, exports, exams, visas, travel. The negative things to leave behind are closed doors, poverty, sickness, setback, hunger, joblessness, disadvantage, misfortune, stagnation, negativities, sadness, limitation, suffering, inadequacy, non-achievement, darkness, blockages, lack, want, slavery, sweat and shame. (Mapuranga & Chitando, 2006:76-77).

South Africa: in search of identity

In this case study I will be referring to the Dutch Reformed Church's hymnals.^{viii} The theological tradition behind these hymnals could perhaps be best described as Calvinistic, with a strong emphasis on the Trinity, the Church Year, the Psalms and the way of salvation. It leans heavily on Western, mainly European hymnological sources, especially those of Germany, England and the Netherlands. The latest edition also contains quite a number of Taizé songs.

Hymns as national anthems?

An interesting introductory question to ask here would be whether the culture of apartheid was reflected in any of these hymnals? Did apartheid translate into Dutch Reformed singing, or vice versa? It is a known fact that the "Voortrekkers" sang many Dutch psalms and hymns during their journeys inland and that this served to foster a sense of spiritual but also ethnic identity. The psalms, expressing the experiences of the Israelite nation, offered political and theological viewpoints that facilitated a useful association between the Afrikaner nation's situation and religious context and that of Israel (Cilliers, 2006:7). In the Afrikaans hymnal of 1943 many of these songs were retained and it could be said that they served as "translations" of the psalms and other hymns into nationalistic anthems, especially with the culmination of Afrikaner politics in 1948, when the National Party came into power. It is important to note that it was the use of these hymns in the setting of the search for identity that changed them into political-nationalistic hymns.

To the credit of the 1976 and 2001 hymnals it must be said that crude, political-nationalistic songs – as is also currently evident in Zimbabwe – were not introduced. But there are some nuanced exceptions. In the hymnal of 1976, for instance, we find a song (of Scottish origin) stating the following:

*O God van Jakob, deur u hand
word steeds u volk gevoed;
U het weleer op see en land
ons vadere behoed. (34:1)*

This hymn is also in the hymnal of 2001 (275:1). During the heyday of apartheid this song was often sung at political gatherings of the National Party, in white schools and at the annual commemoration of the Covenant.^{ix} At first glance – or hearing – the hymn sounds theologically correct, but the political setting corrupts the God-image conveyed, as well as the anthropology. Everyone who sang this song knew who the "volk" was and who was meant by the "our"

in “our fathers”. The little word “our” conveyed, and hid, the ideology of apartheid. Singing this song commemorated God’s nurturing of the fathers of the white people in such a way as to stabilise the white “volk”, under siege because of the ideology of apartheid (Cilliers, 2006:30). The hymn became nationalised. One is again reminded of Henkys’s keen insights:

The hymnbook keeps alive our question about the quality of our hymns but also about the quality of our use of those hymns for it is quite possible to put a hymn of unquestioned quality to bad use. In such a case the hymn conceals (and reveals!) the cultural limitations inherent in the congregational singing. Conversely, a musically and textually mediocre, perhaps even bad, hymn can be used and experienced in a certain situation in such a way that it shatters the criteria of an elitist judgment. (Henkys, 2001:218)

The time of apartheid was also still strongly characterised as a patriarchal society, specifically in the Afrikaner context. No wonder that people – women included – were called upon to sing in the Hymnal of 1976,^X as follows:

*Waak, Christen, staan in die geloof
dat niemand jou die kroon ontroof!
Gedra jou manlik, sterk en moedig –
steeds toegewy aan God se werk –
standvastig, onbeweeglik, sterk... (258:1)*

It is clear: the ideal Afrikaner Christian was supposed to be strong, brave, immovable, manly! In a certain sense it is understandable: that was (and perhaps still is, to some extent) the culture of the day. The hymn simply served as a cultural echo. It picked up on this specific sound of Afrikaner life and identity.

Ecological devaluation?

A second interesting question would be whether traces of the South African (Dutch Reformed) interpretation or translation of the Calvinistic tradition into a specific South African culture can be discerned in the hymnals? It has been noted by some scholars that this interpretation, while being solid in soteriological content, indeed lacks a mature theology of creation (Conradie, 2009:2-4). In a paper on Calvin’s reception in South Africa, for instance, Conradie states:

The relationship between creation and salvation is especially important in the reformed tradition since this is so often distorted, perhaps against the deepest intuitions of reformed theology. In Protestant theology there has been a long-standing tendency to marginalise the theme of creation and to regard it merely as a stage, the ‘theatre of his gory’ (Calvin), on which the drama of God’s salvific interaction with human is being played out. (2009:2)

Perhaps the lack of a mature theology of creation can indeed be attributed to a dominant, and often exclusive, theological focus on ecclesiology in ministerial training; the countering of a natural theology associated with apartheid with a strong contrasting emphasis on Scripture; and a narrow pietistic notion of salvation as personal sanctification (Conradie, 2009:4). As far as the latter is concerned it is well known that the DRC always had a certain pietistic component in its theological make-up, dating back to the times and undeniable influence of the Scottish ministry in South Africa, the most prominent figure being Andrew Murray.

It would be too much of a generalisation to state that a theology of creation has found no place in the Dutch Reformed hymnals. A number of hymns deal explicitly with creation (see, for instance, 2001:Hymns 455-465). As noted earlier, the psalms were also always part of these hymnals, reflecting the Calvinistic tradition. One could even say that the psalms have always salvaged these hymnals, guarding them against becoming full-blown pietistic documents. Because the psalms form part of wisdom literature, those that sing them are aided in taking obedience (the torah) into the rhythms of everyday experiences – also those experiences that call for lament. The psalms spread their wisdom over all of life. If this was not the case, the hymnals could be classified as pietistic generalisations or theological abstractions, indeed as hymnological kitsch. Kitsch can tell us nothing about the real struggles of life; theologically speaking, it domesticates eschatology (Cilliers, 2008:26-28).

Having said all of this, it still is interesting to note that there indeed seems to be at least a tendency to devaluate the role and importance of creation in the hymnals, for instance, as follows:

*God, enkel lig, voor u gesig
is niks op aarde rein nie.
Ons is bevlek, met skuld bedek –
kan nie voor U verskyn nie (238:1).*

Can we truly say that nothing on earth is pure? Does this imply that the earth itself is impure? Another case in point would be the alteration of a hymn that was found in the 1976 hymnal and that boldly confessed:

*Hoe skoon die aarde, dit het min waarde:
ons is gering voor u grootheid, Heer (183:2).*

Does the earth indeed have little value? What has caused its devaluation? Interestingly enough, this ecological devaluation was altered in the 2001 hymnal to the following:

*Mooi is die aarde,
dit het groot waarde,
maar is gering voor u grootheid, Heer. (168:2)*

This later rendition in fact returned to the original meaning of the Münster children's song (1677), stressing that everything on earth in fact is beautiful, with Jesus being the most beautiful of everything and everyone (Cillié, 1982:315).

Not so in a hymn that can be found in both the 1976 and 2001 editions of the hymnbook and that states:

*Buiten U is niks op aarde
enigsens van waarde. (1976:181:1; 2001:495:1)*

Here we have a good example of how Christology and Creation are related in such a way that Creation is usurped by Christology. The result: nothing on earth (and earth itself?) has any value whatsoever. Is this true?

Out of Africa?

A third fact that should be mentioned here is that in the hymnbook of 2001 out of a total of 602 hymns, only 4 have indigenous origins. This would suggest that the Dutch Reformed understanding of hymnology is still strongly influenced by Western sources. Although these sources are of course important, given the history of the Dutch Reformed Church, and normally of an impeccable standard, this does seem a sad state of affairs to me personally and even a failure to truly translate the African culture that we breathe into our hymns. The few that we have give an indication of what could be possible, for instance, the indigenous hymn – melody and lyrics – that represents (translates) a Christmas carol in such a way that it no longer yearns for a “white Christmas” (with snow), but rather basks in South African summer sunlight:

*Welkom, o stille nag van vrede,
 onder die suiderkruis,
 wyl stemme uit die ou verlede
 oor sterre verelde ruis.
 Kersfees kom, kersfees kom –
 gee aan God die eer.
 Skenk ons 'n helder Somer-kersfees
 in hierdie land, o Heer. (358:1)*

Of the four indigenous songs, only one, found at the very end of the book^{xi} and entitled *Thuma Mina*, is truly African in origin in the sense that it is a traditional isiZulu, isiXhosa and Sesotho song. *Thuma Mina* (Send me, Lord, into the world) is a typical procession song, but also a typical collection song. People move around singing it, and each time someone passes the collection plate or bag, the person puts in a small coin, until the meeting leader decides that enough has been obtained. The aim of the collection can be anything from contributions to some family's funeral expenses to raising tea money for social occasions at church. *Thuma Mina* is usually sung unaccompanied. The congregation may beat hymnbooks or other objects close at hand as they do in South Africa to provide an aural foundation and kinaesthetic response. The musical style is derived inter alia from the popular sounds of the South African urban areas. Gentle swaying adds to the kinaesthetic participation by the people and creates a visual sense of communication (Hawn, 2003:123-124). This truly expresses African sounds of life.

CONCLUSION

In my opinion the challenge for the future would be to pursue the notion of hymnology as *fides quaerens sonum* (faith in search of sound). In this way the idea of “reciprocal translatability” could be taken further. Hymnology represents at least three dimensions in a *fides quaerens sonum*, which I can only mention briefly here.

Echo of the gospel

First, the dimension of echo, in other words a hymnology that resonates with the essential sounds of the Christian faith, the sounds of the cross and resurrection as hopeful, the sounding word of the gospel. Hymnology picks up on our longing for hope; it expresses our

sensitivity to something new; it represents our longing for rest and peace, for shalom. In this sense hymnology is indeed charged with symbols of our expectancy, our hope. Music “alone remains the only possible source of the radiance whose task is to demolish and disperse confusion, the barren power of what merely exists, the crude and ever-persistent groping of the blind demiurge, if not the coffin of godforsaken existence itself...” (Bloch, 1985:139). Music, as echo of the gospel, ties significances together with hope.

Echo of life

Second, the dimension of expression in sound as discussed in this paper: echo as the acoustic translation of the life of a particular culture, therefore a hymnological echo of the sounds of life. These sounds of life might include lament because of HIV and AIDS, hunger and poverty, or might express the longing for healing and prosperity. In this regard the critical dimension of cultural translation comes into play: hymnology should not only reflect what culture and religion offer, but should also inform and transform them. True hymnology also creates (new) culture, *inter alia*, because it also has an ear tuned in to the echo of the gospel of hope. It tries to express the core issues pertaining to the meaning of life in such a way that it indeed ties significances together, following the sounds of the gospel.

Translation

Third, the dimension of translation. This entails finding a responsible way of translating African culture into traditional Western hymnology, and vice versa. The challenge is – to use Henky’s metaphor of photography – not only to aim at taking pictures with depth perspective, but also with wide-angle perspective (2001:218). The challenge is to develop such a form of trans-cultural translation that serves as reciprocal hymnological enrichment for all involved. This strives towards the challenging element of a mutual transformation and transcendence that entails more than just translation of words. It is more than just “transfer”. It rather understands translation as an acoustic event that surpasses the letter of grammar.

In keeping with the critical dimension of translatability, this endeavour should therefore guard against a focus on literal translations alone, or the uncritical transportation (transfer) of melodies from one culture to the other (as in the Malawian case study); but also against the creation of hymns that pursue and express certain forms of culture uncritically (as in the Zimbabwean, and partially also South African case studies: cultures of prosperity and apartheid, respectively). It should rather develop a hymnology that strives towards translating the gospel as sounding Word in such a way that it not only meets the sounds of a particular culture, but also reaches out to find those sounds of life across all cultures that resonate with the gospel of Life.

In this critical, triangular meeting of sounds lies true hymnology.

ENDNOTES

- i Paper delivered at the symposium: Das Kirchenlied zwischen Sprache, Musik und Religion. Veranstaltung zu Ehren von Prof. Dr. Jürgen Henkys anlässlich seines 80. Geburtstages. 7-8 November 2009, Berlin.
- ii Professor in Homiletics and Liturgy at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa.
- iii It is no easy task to try and define *African spirituality* as such. As a matter of fact, it is near impossible. It is certainly impossible to do justice to the richness of this concept within the limitations of this article. Actually, one cannot speak of African culture and spirituality in the singular. Africa is a vast continent, incorporating a wide variety of cultures and ethnic groups. Northern Africa differs totally from Southern Africa. The term "Africa" does not denote one homogenous group. One should actually speak of African cultures, spiritualities, worldviews, etc. In this paper I limit myself to some comments on some expressions of "African spirituality".
- iv In African anthropology there is no such thing as a "soul" that is something separate from the body. Body simply is soul, and soul body. Therefore African worship services, with their emphasis on body, can also be essentially described as "soulful". Indeed, "soul" is a primary aesthetic criterion for the way that persons participate (bodily) in worship (McGann, 2002:2-24).
- v This should of course be distinguished from dancing in, for instance, a dance club or at a traditional feast. It is more about a *rhythmic expression of life*, and in this instance also faith (including praying), than just dancing for the sake of dancing. It indicates *bodily gestures* that express the vitality of life and faith.
- vi The *theological analogy* of this would be what Loen (1961:68-78) has called the caesuras in God's revelation to us: between cross and resurrection; Pentecost and eschaton, etc. It marks the dramatic transformations between dispensations, the decisive "leaps" that take time forward, under the governance of God.
- vii As already indicated, Africa is a continent of diversity. These case studies highlight only a few tendencies and do not intend to generalise. All three case studies were undertaken by researchers indigenous to the specific culture in question. The first two studies entailed empirical research through the gathering and analysis of songs mostly not available in written form; the third was done by the author of this article through a literature study of official hymnals.
- viii Gregory Barz has done sterling work in highlighting the connections between cultural experiences, inclusive of catastrophes such as HIV and AIDS, and musical expressions in African contexts. Focusing on specific contexts in which music is integrated into the everyday lives of individuals and communities, he considers the significance of music for people as they negotiate the world around them. See, for instance, his book *Music in East Africa. Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2004).
- ix The hymnals of 1943 and 1976, as well as the current hymnal, published in 2001.
- x A religious festival upheld by a section of the Afrikaner people, celebrating their forefather's victory on the battlefield against all odds against the Zulu people. God was given the honour for this and a covenant made to celebrate this day as a Sabbath. Currently it is a public holiday known as The Day of Reconciliation (16 December).
- xi This has been changed in the edition of 2001.
- xii The translated version is found in hymn no. 533/534.

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