Traditional Anglican Music in a Mission Setting

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The crisis in the American Christian Church is reflected in progressive membership losses. There is little consensus about countermeasures that could reverse the current trend. Planting new missions, however, at least offers hope for slowing the retreat.

The current rate of church plants does not keep up with population growth. For example, new missions in all American Christian denominations for the period 2000 – 2005 were estimated to average 4,009 annually. Church closings over the same period, however, were 3,707, leaving a net gain of only 303 churches per year. The average annual net gain for the prior decade (1990-2000) was 460. Population growth alone would require a net gain of 3,205 churches per year in the United States, approximately 10-fold the present rate[1].

Maximizing growth prospects for new missions seems imperative. These prospects depend, at least in part, on the liturgical and musical styles chosen by the initial mission core group. However, choices that maximize growth opportunities are not well defined; correlations between church growth and worship style are merely speculative. The majority of Anglican church plants, particularly through the *Anglican Mission in the Americas (AMiA)*, utilize "*contemporary*" liturgies and music. Only a small minority of Anglican missions seeks to grow using a traditional worship format. In this paper, we review the ongoing debate of "*traditional*" versus "*contemporary*" liturgy and music, and report how we have developed a high-quality traditional music program at a cost suitable to small missions.

The liturgical "*gold standard*" for conservative Anglican groups, such as the *AMiA*, is often the *1662 Book of Common Prayer* (*1662 BCP*). In practice, though, very few *AMiA* missions or churches use the 1662, or the closely related 1928 *BCP*. Liturgical practice tends to guide choices in music styles, however. For example, traditional liturgies promote hymnody, organ music, and formal sacred music, whereas contemporary liturgies call for "*lively music*"[2], often labeled "*contemporary Christian music (CCM)*". Generally speaking, traditional music is

technically more demanding than *CCM,* both for musicians who lead congregational music, and the people in the pews. New church plants often choose *CCM* because the style is familiar and does not require an extended period of learning new music. Volunteer guitarists and praise team leaders may also be readily available to accompany and lead singing. In contrast, traditional music programs (organists, organs, sheet music, and choir masters, for instance) are often out of reach financially for small congregations.

At the root of decisions over liturgical and musical-styles is the controversy over music's role in divine worship. Since Medieval times, church music has been described as the "*handmaiden of theology*"[3]: a means of expressing divine truth, but not an end in itself. Sacred music is a servant in worship, rather than a "*queen*" attracting attention to herself. Music should stay in the background, even when its charms promise to bring in visitors and increase membership. Church music, at its best, supports and facilitates meeting God in the liturgy.

Music should function to separate *sacred* time from the *profane,*[4] just as the sanctuary sets apart holy space from utilitarian use. The sacredness of church music goes to the heart of its function. Music is an art form that exists in time, just as the Lord's Day and its activities are time set apart from the ordinary workweek. The goal of clergy and musicians in selecting "*sacred music*" should be the invocation of the Sacred, the Holiness of God – never entertainment for the people, or "*mobilization to the cause*", or waking up sleepy congregants. Every element of the worship service should point toward the transcendent, yet immanent God, who reveals himself in sacred time. Illuminated candles, the beauty of the liturgy and Sanctuary, exposition of Scripture, and music, bless the people in their Communion with God.[4]

Traditional sacred music accomplishes this goal through lofty poetry set to music by some of the greatest composers. Theologically rich hymnody can be a powerful tool to unite God's people, heart, mind, and soul, in edifying worship. There is nothing comparable in the secular experience.

When *CCM* replaces traditional Anglican music, gaps appear in the worship service. All too often, the quality of *CCM* falls short of the theological and artistic depth of the Anglican church music repertoire. Critics have characterized *CCM* as "*derivative, second or third-rate music, a pale imitation of last year's popular hits*", music that communicates not so much the praise of God, as "*laziness and lack of imagination*"[5]. Moreover, highly amplified and repetitive *CCM*

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choruses are perceived as an assault on the senses by many, causing division, and acting as unintended barriers to worship. The divisive results are potentially serious. Recognizing the possible negative effects of *CCM*, some churches have chosen silence over music of any kind.

Words projected on screens without printed music leaves singers guessing at syncopations and unpredictable rests. *CCM*, derived from mass-media entertainment, becomes the equivalent of a "*sing-along*", where audiences can "*tune in*", move in rhythm (hand clapping, rocking, swaying), listen silently, or just "*be there*".[5] Everyone does "*what is right in their own eyes*"[6]; the unifying power of music is lost.

Other critics of *CCM* have analyzed the "*me-centeredness*" of many lyrics, endless repetition that has pagan, rather than Christian roots[7], the "*Jesus-my-buddy*" ethos, and the entertainment ethic adopted from secular media. *CCM* is all too often *"performed"* by *"star"* personalities, prominently placed on "*stage*", supported by video screens, microphones, and dramatic gestures that draw attention to themselves, distracting the people from the Cross and the Word.

Traditional worship has its shortcomings too: "*shaky amateur choirs, repetitive anthems, and musically numb organists*"[5] singing or playing hymns that are unrelated to Scripture texts are equally distracting. Church music is, and remains at the center of "*worship wars*"[8]. Clergy and musicians constantly need to re-evaluate use and abuse of church music, knowing that God demands high standards of worship.[9] Trivial, self-serving, badly performed music, even if it is traditional, is bound to disappoint and divide the faithful. Anglicans have a rich and beautiful musical heritage, focused squarely on the Gospel of Christ. It requires work and commitment to teach and maintain; however, it is well worth the investment of time and effort.

The problem of music in the new mission church is compounded by the lack of specific church music training for clergy. Often the only music background ministers have is playing the guitar for recreation in high school or college. This background serves as a strong bias toward *CCM* and away from traditional hymnody. If pastors are not adequately trained to fulfill their responsibility for competently overseeing church music, Canon 24[10] fails as a mechanism for quality control and theological direction in the church.

The late J. Vernon McGee is credited with the observation that if church music is very good, the theology is probably bad. Many Anglicans share this experience. However, bad music does not necessarily imply good theology. Faulkner[5] suggested that much of the conflict over music

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derives from confusion over worship *versus* evangelism. "*Worship has become evangelism and traditional liturgical music, specifically composed to serve the Rite and to express and convey a sense of worship, awe, and wonder, has been displaced by evangelistic music that can only shout its billboard messages of propaganda*."[11] Sacred music is not intended to attract "*consumers*" through commercial advertising methods. Even when the "*message*" of a "*Praise Song*" is good, the jingle-like music is often ill suited. Quoting Faulkner again: "*it is one thing to sing the text, 'God is an awesome God', but quite another to set it to music that cooperates in communicating that sense of awe*".[5] Compare this with the hymn "*Let all mortal flesh keep silent*", sung to the tune *Picardy,* which powerfully communicates transcendent awe and fear of God. The extra effort required to learn traditional hymnody is a good investment for any congregation.

What are the possibilities for traditional church music in a mission setting, when financial resources are minimal, but expectations are high? Volunteers are always first choice, regardless of musical training, instruments on hand, or familiarity with sacred music. But without trained volunteers, small churches often move to replace the missing organ/organist, or other instruments, with recorded music, either from audiotapes (outdated technology), or from CDs. The need for recorded accompaniment in the church has grown to such an extent that some denominations are now marketing their entire hymnal prerecorded for organ[12]. Specialized commercial firms also began to offer subscription services to provide music throughout the church year. One such service is the *Virtual Organist*[13] for Lutheran churches with MIDI-capable organs that plays traditional hymns and service music when an organist is not available. Similarly, there are various commercial products, recorded on CD, of "*Praise chorus*" sing-alongs, marketed to churches using *CCM*.[14]

Pre-recorded products offers little choice in tempo, pitch, and the number of sung verses. Commonly, one verse is recorded and replayed, as needed, with identical volume, registration, tempo, and harmonization. The results feel mechanical and stale. Costs are highly variable, depending on the package and needs of the congregation. To our knowledge, none of these current commercial products are specifically designed for Anglican church plants.

Over the last several years we have developed our own solution for musical needs in the church. Central to our approach is the music editor program, *Sibelius[15]*, which we use to harmonize organ accompaniments for service music and traditional hymns. Files prepared in *Sibelius* can be "*exported*" as MIDI files and stored in an appropriate subdirectory on a laptop

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computer for use in specific worship services. A volunteer "*music master*", assigned for that service, then plays back the music files through programs, such as *RealPlayer* or *WindowsMediaPlayer*. The mechanics for this music system can be taught in less than 30 minutes to volunteers, even to those with no specific music background. Their task is mainly to initiate the music at the right time in the worship service and to control the music volume.

Sibelius is a sophisticated program for the creation of finely nuanced music that does not turn out "*mechanical*" results. Tempi can be individually set for each verse of a hymn; even slight hesitations can be inserted that support the meaning of specific words in the lyrics. Each verse can be designed with its own character, thus imitating the work of highly skilled accompanists. We used this technique for several years, aware of the inherent limitations with MIDI music files. The problem with general MIDI sound is the layering of all the notes of an instrument onto a single sound sample, which is then translated to the correct pitch. For organ music this prevents the organist from selecting different registrations (ranks of pipes) to match the needs of the music. General MIDI sounds include various organ types ("*drawbar organ*", "*rock organ*", "*reed organ*", etc.), but each organ sample is based on fixed registers. For church use, music files require the flexibility of real organs, with sound samples for each organ rank.

We found an organ program in 2007 that fully met our need. Music files constructed through *Sibelius* were playable with sound samples corresponding to individual organ pipes. This program is entitled "*Hauptwerk*"[16] is now in its 3rd generation release and can produce the sound of some of the finest pipe organs across the world. Pipe organ sound samples corresponding to all pipes (including transient sounds produced by the opening and closing of valves) are stored in a computer's memory. When specific organ pipes are activated, either through playing a MIDI keyboard, or through *Sibelius*[17], the software generates the resulting frequency profile and sends it to the sound card for audio amplification, or for recording the music as a file.

The virtual organ, through *Hauptwerk*, projects an organ console onto the computer screen and allows the operator to change registration of the organ stops, at will, throughout the course of a hymn, or similar music. As with a real organ console, the organist can use preset thumb pistons and use pedals (crescendo and volume pedals) to modulate the organ sound. Organists can even customize the voicing of individual organ pipes or select an instrument from an increasing inventory of fully recorded organs in Europe or America. With *Hauptwerk*, an organist thus has full control over all aspects of the music: number of verses, harmonization,

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registration, tempi, rests between and within verses, and slowing at verse endings (*ritardando).* With two software programs, a laptop computer, and a sound amplification system we can meet all the musical needs for worship services[18]. A new volunteer music ministry has developed around this method and enlisted music enthusiasts with interest in high-quality church music without the requirement to play the organ, or similar instrument. In our experience, the best of Anglican sacred music is truly the "*handmaiden of theology*", without demanding a major sacrifice of limited resources in the work of the mission.

Traditional Anglican music in the worship services of *All Saints Anglican Church* in Traverse City has clothed our mission proclamation of the Gospel in the "*beauty of holiness*"[19]. We believe that every new mission, in the *AMiA* and elsewhere, would benefit by carefully re-examining theological issues that impact their choice of church music in the light of new, low-cost options that God has provided through digital technology. Even *Generation X* may be drawn to traditional churches when they "*come to see that all genuine ministry and mission flow from and surround holy, God-centered, corporate worship.*"[20]

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[1] Olson, DT. The American Church in Crisis. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2008. p. 118-120.

[2] Schwarz, CA. Natural Church Development. A guide to 8 essential qualities of healthy churches. ChurchSmart Resources, St Charles, IL, 2000. p. 29.

[3] White, SJ. Foundations of Christian Worship. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2006. p. 45.

[4] Seigel, L. "*Traditional and contemporary music for worship: a new paradigm.*" The American Organist, Jan. 2007. p. 93-95

[5] Faulkner, Q. "*Straight talk about traditional versus contemporary music*". The American Organist, June 2006, p. 79-81.

[6] Deut. 12:8; Prov. 21:2.

[7] Wheaton, J. Crisis in Christian Music. Hearthstone Publishing, Oklahoma City, OK, 2000. p. 76.

[8] Music, DW. "*America's (previous) worship wars*". The American Organist, March 2007. p. 52-56.

[9] Leviticus 10:1-2.

[10] The Hymnal 1940, p. ii.

[11] Leaver, RA. "Liturgical music as Anamnesis" in Liturgy and Music: Lifetime Learning. The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 1998. p. 403.

[12] The Lutheran Hymnal Pocket Organist. 2005. www.sdgaudio.com

[13] The Virtual Organist. http://churchmusicsolutions.com/

[14] http://www.worshipmusic.com/ http://www.maranathamusic.com

[15] http://www.sibelius.com/home/index_flash.html The company provides trials versions of the program with tutorials for its use.

[16] Crumhorn Labs, England, permits the downloading of trial versions of the program. *http://www.crumhorn-labs.com/index.shtml*

[17] When *Sibelius* is used with *Hauptwerk*, the programs need to be linked *via* the freeware buffer, *MIDI yoke*.

[18] Recorded output from *Hauptwerk* is saved as WAV files, directly playable on audio CD players. In practice, we "*fine-tune*" WAV files (reverberation, high- or low-frequency amplification, volume modulation of specific verses, insertion or deletion of verses) with a freeware sound editor, *Audacity,* and export the end result as MP3 files, to be played on iPod or laptop computers in the church.

[19] Psalm 96:9.

[20] Toon, P. "How to grow a traditional church". The Prayer Book Society, 2005.