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## MUSIC IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

### *Theological Advisory Group*

*Following is an excerpt from the TAG book, "Worship Guide: How to Improve Worship in the Africa Inland Church." The TAG Research Teams have utilized many ways of gleaning information. Members have interviewed individuals, held consultations with a Christian attorney, read books and explored topics through discussion of personal observations, experience and wisdom. They have conducted research with hundreds of people through formalized interviews. In this case we invited the AIC School of Music<sup>ii</sup> to share from their wealth of understanding. The primary source of information obtained by TAG is from people and not from books. Following is the fruit of that research. In order to make these TAG books useful to a wide range of people, the books are not only translated into other languages but English is simplified, as can be seen in this article, so as to be understood more easily by those with limited knowledge of the language. Each topic in this book includes three sections: A.I.C. Belief and Practice, Biblical Teaching, and Practical Suggestions, how to improve a particular aspect of worship. Following is a sample of what has been done.*

### **A.I.C. Belief and Practice**

In order for us to understand the kind of music which people sing in our churches, we need to know the different kinds of Christian music which people sing in Christian circles and in all the Kenyan churches today. The following description of music has been presented by the A.I.C. School of Music.

#### **1. Types (kinds) of Christian Music Used in Kenya Today.**

What are the different kinds of music which people sing and play in Kenya today?

##### **TYPE "A" Music: Home Music**

Every Kenyan community or language group hears and sings differently at home. The kind of music in one's community or language group is different from others. Following are the characteristics of Home Music (Type "A" Music):

- 1) Type "A" music is traditional African music. This includes songs of harvest, songs of traditional wedding ceremonies, work songs, children's songs, songs for games and so on.

- 2) Type "A" music is usually pentatonic (that is, with five tones). The diatonic scale from the West has seven tones - do, re, me, fa, so, la, ti, do. Pentatonic scales lack fa and ti tones.
- 3) Type "A" music is cyclic (goes around and around and around). The tune and the words repeat and repeat, going around and around. You do not know when the song ends. When people begin to stop their singing, then it ends. When drums are used, the one who plays the drum has a way of showing the end, but there is no particular end, for the songs end differently every time. This is different from western hymns which have a beginning and an ending.
- 4) Type "A" music often has a call and response. One person leads while others join in and respond.
- 5) Type "A" music usually has a strong rhythm and movement. The rhythm is so strong that you cannot avoid dancing or moving your feet. The rhythm makes you want to move.
- 6) Type "A" often uses traditional instruments. These are different among different community or language groups.

#### **TYPE 'B' MUSIC: Town Music**

Following are the characteristics of Town Music (Type "B" Music):

- 1) Type "B" music is Pan African. As people live together in town, they learn customs from each other and borrow from one another. Town music is appreciated by anyone from Africa. This came about through church choirs and pop music. In the 1960's the Mwanza Town Choir was the first to make it popular in East Africa through the radio.
- 2) Town Music unites things from African music and western music.
  - There is some pentatonic (five tones) town music, but most is diatonic (seven tones).
  - There is some call and response.
  - Uses African and western musical instruments, especially the guitar. Also the kayambas, mirimba and drums are used.

### **TYPE 'C' MUSIC: Western Music**

What can be said about western music?

- 1) This is foreign to Africa, unless people are brought up with a western background or have learned western hymns in church.
- 2) Western music has minor chords, key changes and complex (complicated) rhythms. The rhythms do not flow, thus making it difficult to use drums.

Most hymns in church have tunes from the West. We sing western hymns because we were brought up in the church, but the hymn tunes are foreign in origin.

In conclusion we note that there can be godly music or ungodly music in either A, B or C Types of Music. No type of music is good or bad in and of itself.

### **2. Types of Music Used in the Churches**

*a. In view of the previous discussion of the different types or kinds of music used in Kenya today, what is the type or kind of music which people usually sing in the A.I.C. churches today?*

Most of the hymns found in our church hymn books, such as *Nyimbo za Sifa, Tenzi za Rohoni* and the hymn books in the mother languages (vernacular), are translations from hymns in the west. Therefore, they are Type C Music, Western Type Music.

But many of the favorite hymns in the church hymn books, though translated from English, are pentatonic (five tones), such as "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," and "Amazing Grace." They lack the "fa" and "ti" notes. A count of some vernacular hymn books revealed about fifty hymns which have been changed and made to fit the traditional African Music scale of five tones. They are sung with a pentatonic scale. Many Christians love to sing these hymns.

*b. Do you ever hear Type "A" or Type "B" music sung in the churches? If so, who usually sings Type "A" or Type "B" music?*

Many choirs and smaller singing groups in A.I.C. churches sing "Type B" music (Town Music) and sometimes even "Type A" music (Traditional African Music). This is quite common. Choir members and special group numbers are often of a different kind of music than the usual singing from hymn books.

*c. Why is it important to sing music that suits all kinds of people in church?*

There is a musical language which provides the right kind of feeling that speaks to people when they are in worship. We can say, "That is not my kind of music" Some kinds of music prevent people from worshipping. Some older people find it very difficult to worship when choruses are sung. While many young people feel that the hymns in the church hymn books, such as "Holy, Holy, Holy," are rather slow, boring and without feeling. But other kinds of music help them in worship. Most people naturally like the kind of music they have grown up with.

The older people in the churches have learned to enjoy the western type of hymns in the hymn books. But the youth prefer "Type B" (Town Music) or "Type A" music. In most of our A.I.C. churches there are different kinds of people who attend the services: Types A, B and C. Therefore, we need to consider the various kinds of music people like or do not like. We need to satisfy their natural musical tastes.

Music can speak to those who sing and those who listen. Music can also prevent people from worshipping as they should. Therefore, we must use music that attracts people. Music in church is often slow and serious. But most African music is vigorous (alive and active) with movement. This is the way Africans speak. At the same time many older Christians feel more comfortable with the Christian traditional "Type C" music from the west. We need to try to sing more songs written with the musical language which all the different groups of people attending the churches like.

Much depends on the song leader. When he leads the singing of hymns from the church hymn book, he should not lead the singing too slowly. A quicker tempo (beat) can help give more life and interest. The song leader should be aware of (sensitive to) all people who attend church. He should give an opportunity to the youth to choose one of their favorites and allow the older members to choose one of their favorites. No one in the church service should be overlooked or ignored.

### **3. Opinions of the A.I.C. Christians**

*a. What kinds of music do A.I.C. Christians prefer?*

Our study revealed some important discoveries. About 94% of the A.I.C. Christians enjoyed singing hymns from the church hymn book, 78% of these

saying they enjoyed hymns "very much" Only 4% did not enjoy singing the hymns at all. The main reason why Christians enjoy singing hymns from the hymn book is that they have a lot of good meaning; they teach the Bible truths of the Gospel.

At the same time we found that the most popular kind of music among A.I.C. Christians is Town Music, like the Mwanza Town Choir or the Mulango Joint Choir. 71% said this was their favorite. But western hymn music comes in second, less favored than Town Music but far more popular than African folk (traditional) tunes. Only 30% said they enjoyed African folk tunes (traditional African Music) with Christian words.

In some A.I.C. circles Christians do not appreciate clapping of hands during Sunday church services. In our study we discovered that 73% approved of clapping the hands when singing in church while 22% did not approve. Thus the large majority (most people) favor hand clapping but a large minority are not happy with this.

*b. What kinds of musical instruments do A.I.C. Christians prefer?*

Nearly 70% of the Christians enjoy the guitar with only 4% feeling that guitars should not be used in Sunday morning service. Thus the guitar is the most popular musical instrument in the A.I.C.

A close second is the drum with 64% enjoying the rhythm of the drum and only 12% of the Christians feeling that drums should not be used in Sunday morning services. Large numbers of people also like tamborines and kayambas with only 3% and 5% of the Christians feeling they should not be used in church.

The least popular musical instrument is the horn with only 17% saying they enjoy the music of horns. A total of 57% of A.I.C. Christians feel that horns should not be used in churches. (However, many people may have not understood that the word, "horn," referred to trumpets and trombones. They have may thought it referred to traditional musical horns made from animals. Therefore, it may be that the question was not well understood.) Pianos and organs are somewhat popular, though less popular than guitars, drums, tamborines and kayambas.

*c. What is the real attitude of A.I.C. Christians toward music in their church?*

These 1,400 A.I.C. Christians were asked, "Which of the following sentences best describe how you feel about the songs which people sing in the

A.I.C. Sunday morning service?" 63% said, "I like them just as they are" while 36% said, "I want a change."

Therefore, we can say from the above that most Christians in the A.I.C. are content with the present practice. But a large minority (36%) would like a change. Although a large number of people enjoy singing hymns, a large number also want to sing choruses and other songs written in Kenya by Kenyans.

Thus change is coming into the churches though drums were not allowed in the past, drums are used these days in many churches. It is true that quite a few people oppose choruses and clapping of hands in church today. But most A.I.C. Christians approve of them.

Hymns are well liked and appreciated. So are choruses. What needs to be done is to have choruses written with Scripture words or solid, Bible content, instead of the shallow (poor) words with little meaning which are so often sung as choruses today.

## **The Bible Teaching on Music**

**1. What book in the Bible shows us that music has been used for worship by God's people since the Old Testament?** The largest book in the Bible, *The Book of Psalms*, was the hymn book for the children of Israel. *The Book of Psalms* contains poetry and hymns written by Moses, David and many others.

**2. What was the singing like in the Old Testament?** God's people in the Old Testament sang to God with great joy, and even danced before the Lord when singing. Usually, they sang antiphonally (singing with call and response) (Exodus 15:1-21). This was also common in African traditional music. God's people the Old Testament were commanded to worship God with voice and musical instruments and with dance (Psalm 136, 118:1-4).

**3. Describe how David organized (arranged) the people to sing and play musical instruments for worship in the temple?** (I Chronicles 15:16-24) These verses explain the organization (arrangement) of the choirs and the orchestra (or band) which was started by David. The total number of people in the temple choir and orchestra (band) was 4,000 people. These singers were divided into 24 divisions and taught by the sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun. Though we know little of the nature of the Hebrew music, we do know that they sang with call and response (antiphonally), either by two choirs (Psalm 13, 20,

38) or by a choir and the congregation (Psalm 136, 118:1-4).

**4. What kinds of musical instruments were used to praise and worship God in the Old Testament?** The chief musical instrument with strings was the harp or perhaps better called, the lyre. The Hebrew harp or lyre was made of cyprus wood with eight or ten strings, either plucked (picked) with the finger or played with a piece of ivory or metal. The harp or lyre is the first musical instrument mentioned in the Bible (Genesis 4:21). David was a master with the harp (I Samuel 16:23). The "psaltery of ten strings" was another form of harp with strings that were plucked (Psalms 33:2; 144:9).

Wind instruments included the pipe (Isaiah 30:29; I Kings 1:40; Matthew 9:23), though the exact nature of the pipe is unknown. (It may have been a kind of reed instrument, like an oboe or it might have been a flute.) The trumpet was used very often. The long horn with a turned-up end became the national trumpet of the Israelites. Some trumpets were made of a ram's horn or of beaten silver.

Percussion instruments included bells (Zechariah 14:20), cymbals (I Corinthians 13:1) and timbrels (Exodus 15:20). The English word, "cymbal," is translated from the Greek word *kymbalon*, from which our word, "Kayamba" is taken. It was a kind of rattle.

**5. What was the singing like in the early Christian church?** The early Christian church used many of the Jewish Psalms and songs of worship taken from the synagogue (James 5:13). In addition they wrote their own songs of praise (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19). Thus the early Christian church used hymns which were sung in the Old Testament but they also wrote their own hymns and Christian songs of worship under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

**6. Is Hebrew music more sacred than other music? Is any kind of music more sacred than another kind?** Music is cultural. That is, music is made (composed) in different ways by different people in different cultures. Music is a means of making a joyful noise in different ways in different cultures. Hebrew music is not sacred nor did God intend everyone to use it and enjoy it. But the gift and love of music is found among all people. Because people are born in different cultures, some people love music with strong rhythm and clear melody (tune), while others prefer music with a sweet, quiet harmony (sung in parts). Some prefer music with five notes in the octave (pentatonic) while others prefer seven notes (diatonic). Musical tastes are different, enabling different cultures to praise God with different styles (kinds) of music. But one kind of music is not better or more holy or sacred than another.

Cultures are always changing. The younger generation learns to enjoy music which is foreign and sounds strange to the older generation in the same culture. The western churches, which gave to the Christian Church in Africa most of the Christian hymns we have in our hymn books today, have now moved on and are singing Bible verse choruses and new hymns, along with some of the older hymns we sing in Africa today.

**7. If the type or kind of music is cultural, what should the Christian do about developing good Christian music?** While the kinds of music are cultural, the words of Christian songs of praise should be truth from the Bible. Some choruses which people sing in churches do not have strong Bible content. For example, one chorus says, "Satan is being chased away on his legs; I sharpen my sword and cut Satan down." Some choruses lack any deep meaning. To sing, "This is the day which the Lord has made," is truth taken from the Bible. But to sing this repeatedly, referring to the minute, the second, the sister, the brother, the mother, the father and the place which the Lord has made, has reduced Christian singing to something less than giving God glory and building up the church with Bible truth. The Christian church needs to develop hymns and choruses that have deep Bible truth and content.

### **Practical Suggestions: How to Help People Worship God Better Through Music**

**1. What is the most important thing your church can do to improve worship through singing?** Train the song leaders.

Song leaders are the key to successful worship through music. Song leaders must help people to worship so that they can come into God's presence. If the song leader does not have a music gift or if he is not a spiritually minded person, he cannot lead the church in worship. Music should not be sad. Church music should not make people go to sleep. Music can become a barrier or hindrance to worship rather than an aid for worship.

*a. What should be the qualifications of a good song leader in church?*  
The most important qualification of the song leader is spiritual (compare Acts 6:1-3). He must be saved and full of the Holy Spirit; he should have a good reputation (name) with those who are not Christians (I Timothy 3:7) and no one should be able to blame him for a serious sin (Titus 1:7). If the Christians know of serious sin in the life of the song leader, he will bring reproach (shame) and blame to the Name of the Lord. People cannot honour him or respect him. Nor can he lead them in real worship if they see someone standing before them with

impure heart and hands.

But a song leader should also have musical gifts. He should be able to read music, know how to lead people in singing, be able to stand and speak in public, giving respect to the worship service. A song leader should not be chosen simply because he is an elder. Elders should use the gifts of all of God's people. And a most important gift in the church is musical.

Another qualification for song leading is training. A song leader with a music gift will greatly improve if he is trained.

One problem faced by the churches is the rule and control of the elders. If the pastor preaches, then it is thought that he will not lead the service nor lead in the singing. Some pastors are neither gifted nor trained in music. But some are and it is a shame to lose their gifts. Sometimes one particular elder with no gift or training in music leads the service and he desires to control it. Or the elders take turns in leading the service with no thought of using only those with music gifts or those trained in music. It may be possible for the pastor to talk with the elders and express his desire to help them. He may be able to teach and coach them. Perhaps he could lead one service a month in order to show how it could be done. But this is difficult if the pastor shepherds many churches.

*b. How can a song leader lead people in worship? What are some suggestions to help a song leader lead in worship?* Song leaders must help people "To worship in spirit and in truth." John 4:23 is the key: "the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."

***In Spirit:*** song leaders must help people realize that they have a spirit and that God is Spirit and that we need to speak with God from our heart. Worship is responding to God. To worship God means that people think of God, talk to God, sing to God and respond to Him with honour and reverence. Song leaders should help the people to think of Jesus and to speak to God through songs. This depends in part on the way the song leader leads the songs.

***In Truth:*** the words of the hymns, Christian songs and choruses should contain Bible truth. Song leaders should choose those songs and choruses which contain Bible truth. Not all choruses really glorify God. We need to help song leaders know that Christian music is a means of worship by helping Christians think Bible truth while singing. Song leaders need to lead the hymns in such a way as to help people in worship.

Often music is used to introduce a change or to pass time. We stand and stretch. But the main purpose for singing should be to worship.

**There are three dimensions (ways) of singing:**

**Upward:** pure worship by looking upward to God in order to praise and adore Him. For example, "Father I adore you."

**Outward:** Looking to the members of the Body of Christ in thinking of them, helping them, encouraging them and serving them by testifying to them. For example, "What A Friend we have in Jesus." We are singing to one another with God in our presence (as if God were the audience). Even as the choir should sing unto God with the people in the church as the audience, listening to them as they sing unto God.

**Inward:** introspection, looking inward to one's soul, thinking of one's own relationship to God. Inward singing directs the thoughts of the person to his own life and leads him to meditate (think) about his relationship with God. For example, "Be still my soul."

There needs to be balance in our singing between the three dimensions (ways) of singing. That is, we should sing songs of each kind. If non-Christians came into our church and heard our singing, would they know that we were in fellowship with God? Would they be attracted by our music? Consider the dedication of Solomon's temple when the temple choir sang and a cloud of glory descended. People can and should be touched by singing in our churches.

*c. How do you know if a song leader has done well?* There are several questions you can ask to check on how well the song leader has done.

- 1) Did he announce the hymn number clearly, loud enough and often enough so that everyone could find the page number?
- 2) Did he know the song well?
- 3) Did he help the people to experience the presence of God before singing by the way he introduced the song? For instance, did he read one verse with feeling and understanding and apply it to the congregation so that people could worship through the singing?
- 4) Did he begin the song well, on the right key? Was the pitch too high or too low? Did he lead the song at the right speed?
- 5) Was he cheerful and did he express the joy of the Lord?
- 6) Did he sing with confidence while leading the congregation in song or did he show off?

d. *Have you ever considered the importance of the pastor or someone else training the song leaders in your church?* The pastor should train the song leaders to choose hymns for worship. If the pastor spoke to the choir leader about his planned future messages, the choir could prepare ahead of time to sing songs related to the messages preached. If the pastor is gifted and trained in music, he should help train the song leaders.

e. *Have you ever considered inviting the A.I.C. School of Music to train your song leaders and choir leaders?* All A.I.C. churches should seek the help of the A.I.C. School of Music to train their song leaders. The A.I.C. School of Music is one of the ministries of the Christian Education Department. Their purpose is to train choir leaders and song leaders in every A.I.C. Region and District. They conduct seminars, workshops and training wherever they are invited.

Singing is one of the most important parts of our worship. Christians love to sing. But they are helped or hindered (stopped) in their worship by those who lead the church in singing. Therefore, it is desirable for every church to have its men and women who have music gifts to be trained by the A.I.C. School of Music to lead congregational singing more effectively and to God's glory.

## **2. How can we introduce Type A and Type B Music in Sunday Services?**

We need to recognize that in the A.I.C. churches today (as in all Kenyan churches) there is a wide range of musical tastes. Some prefer church music of Type C and others prefer Type B, while many others enjoy Type A. It is important to care for the needs of all groups. If we only sing Type C (Western Music) we will alienate (chase away) the young people. If we sing only Type B or Type A, we will make the older people unhappy. Instead, we should try to include in the service other types of music beside what is usually found in our hymn books. We need to find ways of helping our younger people worship God with the musical language which they also appreciate.

*How can we introduce Types A or B music into our A.I.C. worship?*

a. Choirs can introduce Type A and B music (contextualized music).

No one usually opposes the choir when they sing a song written in Kenya by a Kenyan with a Kenyan tune. If the choir sings the same song several Sundays, the congregation will then know it. After the second or third week the choir leader may invite the congregation to join in singing along with the choir.

The same approach may be taken with special singers such as those who sing a solo or small groups of singers. After they sing, they can invite the congregation to join them in singing. Choirs should be encouraged to take some Scripture verse and compose music for this.

b. Approach the people in person who may be upset (offended) by Type A or Type B music being used in Sunday church services and teach them the reasons why it is important to use this music also.

Elders want to preserve the faith of their fathers. It is important to keep good traditions. We should seek ways to preserve the hymns of the faith. Yet the kind of hymns being sung is changing all over the world. Westerners who introduced these hymns to Africa have begun singing choruses and new hymns in western churches. So we need to understand and help the elders - both to preserve what is good from the A.I.C. past and to develop newer hymns written in Africa and for Africans.

c. Conduct teaching seminars for elders and pastors to teach and discuss the different kinds of music. It would be helpful if leaders could discuss some of the things which TAG has found in their study, that people have different preferences (likes and dislikes) in music. There needs to be opportunities of discussing and sharing so that we can all understand one another. There is a lot of legalism in opposing different kinds of music. That is, some Christians oppose the singing of choruses or the clapping of hands simply because they do not like this. They do not have a good reason from the Bible. They oppose these things because of church traditions and not because of Bible teaching.

What about the clapping of hands? Many times older people do not like to sing choruses because youth want to clap when singing them. However, the elders clap hands at meetings, such as Kabarak and at other church conferences. But in Sunday morning church services the clapping of hands is not permitted. Perhaps it would be good to discuss the subject of singing and clapping of hands at meetings with A.I.C. church leaders.

### **3. How can we make singing better so that people will be helped in their worship of God in our churches?**

a. Encourage the Christians with music gifts, trained and good in music, to lead in singing. Leaders of worship and song leaders are the key. These leaders must both have the music gift and be trained

b. Song Leaders should explain briefly the meaning of the song. People

often sing without thinking of what the hymn says or knowing what the hymn means.

c. Song leaders and the leaders of worship need to learn how to lead in transitions (movement) from songs to Scripture to prayer and so on. A worship service should not move mechanically (by habit and without thought) from one thing to another. Those who come for worship should not be led as sheep to do one thing after another because this is the order we follow. Rather, the leader of worship should make smooth transitions (movement) from one act of worship to the other, so that everyone can see how this is an act of worship.

d. Appropriate (suitable) songs should be chosen for the service. These should be chosen with the message in mind. The whole service should center around a certain theme (subject). And the hymns should be chosen one week before the Sunday worship service, not the Sunday morning before the service begins.

e. New songs should be taught to the people, perhaps one new hymn every month. Make it the hymn of the month.

f. If something of the life history of the song writer were known or something of the background of the hymn, it would be helpful.

g. If the pastor is trained and has gifts in music, he should set the example by leading a service, perhaps once each month. If the pastor would talk to the elders, explaining his reason for wanting to do this, perhaps they would give an opportunity to lead the service as an example.

h. It would be helpful to read the Scripture related to the hymn which the people are about to sing.

i. Local (contextualized) music (type A and B) helps the youth to worship. Traditional hymns from the hymn book help the older people to worship. Effort should be made to include different types of music in the service so that all groups would enjoy some of the music and so that all groups would learn to enjoy different types of music.

### **Thought Questions for Further Discussion**

1. Why do people want to sing in church? Discuss the reasons people usually sing in churches on Sunday?
2. Do you believe people really enjoy praising God through song in the

churches? Discuss the reasons they do or do not.

3. Discuss the various practices that hinder people from worshipping God when people sing together in church.

4. What should be done to improve the worship of God through congregational singing in the churches?

5. Do you really believe people worship God when hearing the choir sing? Why do you say so?

6. Discuss the various problems that hinder people from worshipping God though the singing of the choir.

7. What recommendations would you make to improve the choir so that people would enjoy the choir more when they praise God?

### **Suggested Reading for Further Study:**

*Choosing and Using Hymns* by Lionel Drakers. London: A.R. Mowbray, 1985.

*Church Music in a Changing World* by Lionel Drakers. London: Mowbray, 1984.

*Sing God a Simple Song* by Betty Pulkingham. London: Marshall Pickering, 1985.

*Worship in the Early Church* by Ralph Martin. pages 39-52.

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<sup>ii</sup> Mr. John Kitala was the Director of the A.I.C. School of Music which gave a presentation on music to the TAG Research Team on Worship.