



# Acceptance of contemporary songs in the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe liturgy: Ruwa section, Goromonzi

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## Abstract

The study examined the use of songs from outside the worship liturgy of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe (MCZ) in the Ruwa Section, Goromonzi Circuit. The circuit had six congregations with mixed views on the above-referred songs. A debate on the choice of worship songs was identified as a problem that needed research. The researchers looked at the spirituality of songs and their bearing on the MCZ music tradition. The researchers adopted a qualitative research paradigm. Data was collected through interviews, focus group discussions, a self-administered questionnaire and participant observation over four months. A sample of 120 informants was drawn from the youth, choristers, the elderly, and church leaders using stratified random and simple random sampling techniques. Findings show that not all songs drew congregants into spirituality. Regardless of spirituality in Christian contemporary worship songs, some MCZ members did not embrace the songs as they were from outside their canon. The research observed that some youths and middle aged MCZ members embraced worship songs that reflected their cultural musical styles. However, some of the songs regardless of the Christian text, lacked spirituality. The researchers recommend that the MCZ consider canonising some of the contemporary worship songs based on spirituality.

## Introduction

The study was prompted by trends observed in the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe (MCZ), specifically the Goromonzi Circuit, where contemporary songs (not part of the set liturgy) are observed in worship. The researchers explored songs sung in the MCZ and how congregants embraced non-MCZ songs and hymns in the worship services. The researchers interrogated the congregants' ideas on the espousal of the alluded songs. They also analysed the views to generate ideas, and suggestions to proffer a way forward considering the problem under study. The paper also delved into the pillars of Methodism and the foundation of the MCZ liturgy, the authority of the hymnbook, and the Wesleyan guidelines for praise and worship, regarding the songs from outside the MCZ liturgy. The above details were set to guide the focus on the problem under research. Lastly, the paper draws some discussion points and makes conclusive remarks with recommendations. Some observations indicate that some songs from other churches are sung in the MCZ services, and that created controversy among members. Non-MCZ songs were viewed as an act that breached the



church's liturgy and the set modus of practice of conducting services in the backdrop of the choice of songs within the services. Whereas others viewed the inclusion of non-MCZ songs as a problem others accepted them without questioning.

### **Contextual Setting**

Charles and John Wesley were proponents of Methodism but later parted ways. Charles founded the United Methodist Church; John pioneered British Methodism, which later came to Africa and Zimbabwe. The Methodist Church in Zimbabwe follows the doctrinal statutes of the British Methodism. John and Charles Wesley are believed to have written their hymns under the inspiration of the biblical teachings under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Leaver, 1990; McElwain, 2009, Chilcote, 2017). John Wesley is credited for writing seven directions for singing, which became the doctrine for singing. This study drew from the directions discussed in the following paragraphs.

Direction 1, according to Clarke (2009), John Wesley intended congregants to learn the hymns first before they could learn any other songs. Thereafter, Methodists were at liberty to learn as many as they liked. It implies that congregants were to spend considerable time on hymns before taking songs alien to Methodism. This helped to ward off the infiltration of secular songs. However, a look reveals that this did not prevent using spiritual songs outside the hymnbook.

In Clarke's (2009:196) direction, two reads, "Sing them exactly as they are printed here, without altering or mending them at all; and if you have learned to sing them otherwise, unlearn it as soon as you can." The direction forges uniformity to the songs across MCZ congregations; it controls the manner of singing the hymns and promotes a common repertoire. Furthermore, it aimed at promoting musical literacy and deterring members from changing the hymns in a way that precludes less skilled singers' participation.

The provisions of direction three cited in (Clarke, 2009, p. 196) are, "Sing all. See that you join the congregation as frequently as you can. Let not slight degrees of weakness or weariness hinder you. If it is a cross to you, take it up and you will find a blessing". This regulation is concerned with collective singing, emphasising individual effort. John Wesley, cited by Rumsey (1996 p. 2) says, "If you want to have singing in the church, then it should only be in unison for there is but ONE God, ONE belief, ONE song". The aim here was to focus on participation when singing the songs completely. This consolidates the MCZ tradition of hymns as an effectual model of worship for members. Singing hymns gives hope by connecting the people with the realm of God.

Direction four in Clarke (2009 p. 196) says John Wesley exhorted, "Sing lustily and with good courage. Beware of singing as if you were half dead or half asleep but lift your voice with strength. Be no more afraid of your voice now, nor more ashamed of its being heard, than when you sing the songs of Satan". This order addressed the music performance directions and the type of music to be sung in church. Believers were discouraged from singing half-heartedly and absent-mindedly. Wesley used hymns to separate sacred from secular music. He urged congregants to put the energy they once exerted on secular melodies onto hymns to express their faith in God.

The fifth direction regulation cited in Clarke (2009 p. 196) is presented as, "Sing modestly. Do not bawl, to be heard above or distinct from the rest of the congregation, that you may not destroy the harmony; but strive to unite your voices together, to make one clear melodious sound". Harmony reinforces the principle of equal participation by all in the congregation. The point also warns congregants to desist from musical ability and emotive enthusiasm overriding the central function of corporate praise, prayer and belief.



In the sixth direction congregants are to sing in time and to strictly adhere to the set tempo. According to this direction, singers are not supposed to sing faster than others or drag behind; rather they are to follow the leading voices at the same pace. Clarke (2009 p. 197) says John Wesley viewed the tendency to be lackadaisical in songs as naturally stealing on all lazy ones; hence laziness was to be ridden of the people and sing all tunes just as quick as required. This regulation provides musical advice to singers and instrumentalists as it fosters unity of purpose in congregants. In this order, directors guide the whole congregational singing with the responsibility to adopt suitable tempi to enable the participation of all members.

Clarke (2009 p. 197) says the seventh direction by John Wesley is thus: Above all sing spiritually. Have an eye on God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing him more than yourself or any other creature. In this order, congregants are to attend strictly to the sense of what they sing and see that the sound does not carry away their hearts. They should offer themselves to God continually so that their singing is approved by the Lord, who rewards people when he is revealed in the clouds of heaven. This final direction is explicitly pivoted on spiritual matters. Music in a theological context transcends sound and seeks to fulfil the practical purpose of propagating divine messages.

Given the above directions for singing, the researchers hold that song text in the context of the bible is forms part of the theological construction of worship. The Bible was held to mean that the MCZ worship was to be based on biblical statutes; hence activities of the church were to be informed and complimented with the bible. Rumsey (1996) states that the early Methodist congregants studied the scriptures religiously. The above stance meant that the Methodist hymnbook wielded importance like the bible. Whereas the bible was viewed as the supreme authority of God in written form, the Methodist hymnbook was the word of God in song (Rumsey, 1996). Young (1995 p. 4) describes it as “sung theology; hymns were sung by various peoples of different levels within the Wesleyan church, all coming to a singular theological ideology”. The above authors allude to the valuable connection between the MCZ congregants and the hymnals. The authors view hymnals and singing to express biblical text in worship without discriminating according to social class. African music allows all people to participate in singing freely. Such an opportunity was availed through the hymns and other songs since they covered in-depth themes and messages from the bible. Mtemasango (2016) informs that Methodist missionaries held that African traditional music should not be allowed in church services, a notion maintained till today. No member of the MCZ is allowed to sing songs from the secular world or participate in activities that have no link with Christianity (Mtemasango, 2016). The authors noted that it was not practical to eliminate the African congregants' musical culture. The songs sung reflected qualities of Shona music, with percussion instruments, cyclic, fast tempo and dance. The song text remained biblical as originally upheld by the Wesleys, who also adapted text folk tunes.

The authors further note that Charles Wesley, who undisputedly composed most of the Methodist hymn book songs, derived some of his compositions from folk songs which were secular and superimposed some inspiring biblical texts to compose hymnals (Cusic, 1990). The pioneers of Methodism gleaned from folk music, and the authors see no problem with composing songs around traditional tunes. In the same way, the researchers hold that African traditional tunes can find their way into the MCZ liturgy if their text is sufficiently biblical. In the song *Ndinoramba ndichinamata* - I continue praying the text links with the bible too. Drawing from the above directions for singing the study finds sufficient guidelines for songs whether hymnals or contemporary songs hence and the need to explore how the MCZ members embraced the different songs that were sung in the selected MCZ congregations.



### **Theoretical Basis**

The divine theory is premised on the idea that a spiritual power (deity) can sweep in and through human lives in the realm of divinity, traversing the spirit world and bearing messages of solace or inspiration (Foley, 2015). The theory extends the notion that music is derived from the muses, which are types of angels that can inspire any musical production (Endong, 2016). As such, whenever a singer performs, he/she is envisioned as being inspired by some supernatural power (deity) and not performing from the personal musical endowment. In this view, there is a need to exercise discernment because some Christians have fallen prey to pleasing myths perpetuated by certain godless philosophies of our times (Robin, 2015). Some of the spiritual powers can lead Christians astray hence the need to be cautious in dealing with matters of beliefs.

The inspiration theory is advanced by Bauder (2015) holding that all religious communication, especially the bible and music are inspired by God. Endong (2016) supports the same view on this inspiration as inherent in music. This theory has various explanations, but the researchers focus on the second and third parts of the theory which holds that Christian communication is inspired by music. In this view, Bauder (2015) contends that Christian music is deemed spiritual if it teaches morality, ethics, or salvation; however, if it bears secular themes, it is considered unspiritual. This is the basis for dismissing music deemed profane, or that does not agree with Christian beliefs. Endong (2016) considers that the limited scope of inspiration by the second part of the above theory has caused many to feel that a musical composition's lyrical content (text) depicts spirituality more than the accompanying musical instruments. On the same pretext, Lidell (n.d p. 3) records that the “congregants would learn the music in the services, and the hymns would be sung without accompaniment and there was never any need for organ or choral music because everything was stripped to the foundational theological beliefs”. John and Charles Wesley relied on the biblical text as they found song texts more inspiring to spiritual singing than the sound of musical instruments. The Wesley brothers were concerned with the meaning of the songs to inspire worship.

The third part of the inspiration theory views Christian communication as totally inspired by God, but with some parts more inspiring than others (Endong, 2016). In line with this view, Paul clearly distinguished between songs used in Church, noting that some are hymns, psalms and spiritual. His epistle, 1 Colossians 3:16, says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God”. This means that not all songs sung in the church have the same spiritual bearing, and Paul demonstrates that some songs edify congregants more than others. Endong (2016) submits that music that directly conveys the passages of the bible is considered more inspiring than those revealing the spiritual reflections of religious teachers.

### **Research Methodology**

The authors deployed a qualitative methodology, engaged participants in the MCZ church services, and interacted with congregants (Bechhofer & Lindsay, 2000; Walliman, 2011). This approach allowed the researchers to get to the key issues that informed the study. Qualitative research is effective when dealing with people in their contexts (Mandillah, et al., 2022). It allows in-depth details and thick descriptions of events to be transcribed later (Shank, 2006). Since the research involved humans, qualitative research was ideal. Six MCZ congregations were included in the study. With gender balance, participants aged 18 to above 65 were selected. The sample included choristers (old, young, female, and male), elderly, youth, lay leaders and church leaders. Stratified random and simple random techniques were used to select at least 20 congregants from each congregation. One hundred twenty participants from the Ruwa section of the MCZ Goromonzi Circuit were sampled. The above sampling techniques enabled the researchers to include the pertinent participants in the study (Lune



& Berg, 2017). The sample size was adequate to engage in a meaningful exploration of the research problem (Kothari, 2004; Kumar, 2011). The researchers secured signed informed consent, pledged to respect participants and kept their identities anonymous.

The researchers used an unstructured interview, focus group discussions, observation and questionnaire to collect data (Creswell, 2014). The researchers conducted interviews after church services at the convenience of the respondents on agreed times for all sessions adaptable to different age groups (Lune and Berg, 2017). The interview allowed the researchers to probe the participants for clarity and solicit more details about the problem (Harkness & Super, 2016). The focus group discussions (FGDs) enabled free contribution to the study by members (Bechhofer and Lindsay, 2000). The researchers managed deliberations by asking specific questions for all to respond (Arthur & Nazroo, 2003). The questionnaire enabled the researchers to involve many respondents simultaneously (Creswell, 2014). It helped capture various congregant views (Harkness & Super, 2016). Through participant observation, the researchers went through proceedings noting events and interacting with congregants. Video cameras were not allowed; hence the researchers resorted to taking notes (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011).

### **Music and Spirituality**

Lidell (n.d. p. 8) submits that “John Wesley accepted the presence of organs in the churches, but famously believed that the best use for them was for them to remain silent”. In essence, he wanted the focus to be on the singing of the text and believed that instrumental music was not meant for the spiritual life hence the reduced loudness. Similarly, Robin (2015) considers that the organisation of instrumental music is far from morally and spiritually neutral. In that regard, music, as in sound, evokes certain emotions that may not relate to the text's focus. It is vital to note that despite having a clear position from John Wesley regarding the use of instruments, Methodist missionaries did not allow the use of African instruments like *hwamanda* (animal horn) and *ngoma* (drum) in the order of worship. However, the African instruments alluded to are part of the MCZ, played loudly with great emotion and physical emphasis, a trait of Africans engaged in musical activity. In Christianity, music is considered spiritual if it can directly stir up communion with God (Endong, 2016). Ajiri (2013 p. 1) submits that “music is a timeless genre which pays special tribute to God and contains powerful messages of worship and praises that reach to the very depths of audiences spirits, touching every aspect of their beings”. In the study context, music, as in text and sound, play a critical role in worship. In the Bible, music was used as communication with God. David used music to soothe Saul from the power of an evil spirit, as quoted in the book of 1 Samuel 16:23, “Whenever the spirit from God came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him”. Robin (2015) reveals that music can affect the ordering of the soul in ways conducive to human flourishing. There is a need to differentiate simple Christian music, which represents emotional or economic experience, from spiritual music divinely inspired to enable communion of God with his people.

### **Worship Songs**

Horn (1979) views worship as an act of humbling oneself, reverence, honour, devotion, and adoration that marks the relationship of created beings to their Creator (God), especially in His presence. Webber (1982) mentions that worship refers to the exclusive communion between God, the Almighty and His people. Kibor (2006 p. 1) states, "In this meeting, the presence of God is felt, and a response is given in praise and thanksgiving". Tönsing et al. (2015) view worship songs as including hymns, choruses, repetitive chants, gospel songs, contemporary worship songs and anything else sung in a worship context. Worship services allow congregants to meet to pray, sing and celebrate the Holy Communion. Calitz (2017) says songs should bring a further dimension of the words to add grace and meaning.



Kibor (2006) points out that music is one effective way to teach biblical truth because the word set to music forever penetrates the mind and heart. She submits that “[e]ven for those without faith in Christ, music can be an evangelistic tool to reach them, especially when we consider the vitality of scripturally composed and contemporary songs” (Kibor, 2006, p. 133). Kibor (2006) holds that in an African context, the music in worship services does not necessarily matter much; music with traditional rhythms and frequent changes of keys can be sung.

Tönsing et al. (2015) discovered that worship songs affect a person's cognitive and emotive elements. The cognitive value of a song comes from the lyrics, whereas the emotive value comes mainly from the tune (music), but the text can also contain emotive words and exclamations (Tönsing et al., 2015). It is reasonable to think that worship songs should be based on the capacity to evoke one of the two elements within the context of spirituality. As such, there is a need to carefully select worship songs and come up with those that avail true worship in the hearts of congregants. Though instrumental accompaniment was discouraged in the early doctrines of Methodism, it forms part of the worship songs. Kibor (2006) posits that whatever the type of song is used, the essence should prepare people’s hearts for real worship. African or Western instruments can be used to prepare people to worship. Instrumental music can be played soft as background music during silent moments, during offertory time and other occasions for meditation in the service (Kibor, 2006).

### **Music Outside Christian Liturgy**

Robin (2015) outlines two distinctive worlds, Christianity, and paganism. It is construed that activities that align with Christian doctrinal truths are sacred, whereas conflicting actions fall under paganism (Endong, 2016). Music can be categorised under either of the worlds alluded to. Durkheim (2008) says Christianity and paganism cannot coexist; hence congregants cannot pledge allegiance to the two equally well. Endong (2016:122) points out that “early Christian attitudes towards gospel music were mostly conservative, rigorous, relatively extremist and purposely spiritual”. Christian music was regarded as the principal original means of worship. Christians only looked up to singing music within the liturgy; hence anything from outside was not accepted. Based on the above conception, musical types like dancehall, hard rock, jazz, rap, reggae, and rock and roll would be considered alien and hostile to the Christian faith (Endong, 2016).

In the above view, Lidell (n.d) opines that the cosmopolitan style of Methodist hymnody comprised the various secular song traditions of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. However, the above point speaks to doctrinal issues that informed the musicianship of Charles and John Wesley as visionaries whose work brought Methodism to the present day. Clarke (2009) submits that some of the later sacred hymns were adapted from contemporary art music, both vocal and instrumental, reflecting the cultural background and musical tastes of the Wesleys during their time. One wonders why some songs are deemed pagan, yet the Wesleys successfully built their liturgy on music outside the church. An example by Clarke (2009) points at *Love Divine; All Loves Excelling* a hymnal that adapts a secular melody. Clarke (2009:206) says, “The text of the song was influenced by Dryden’s poem “Fairest Isle” and was set to an adaptation of Purcell’s tune and lyrics from the opera King Arthur (1691)”. The researchers argue that musical skills acquired in secular education among church members can still be useful to worship. The Methodist missionaries regarded anything outside the hymnbook as secular and associated with paganism (Gondongwe, 2011). They did not consider that the Shona and other ethnic groups had known God before the arrival of missionaries; different songs and musical instruments were used in praise and worship rituals (Gondongwe, 2011). They perhaps needed to give them the new belief system without denying the musical traditions the Africans already had before the missionaries’ arrival.



### **Contemporary Worship Music**

Doucette (2008) asserts that worship songs are never static and never quite the same from one generation to another. Historically the worship had hymns, chants, and psalms (Doucette, 2008). With changes in lifestyles and tastes in music, new styles of music like hard rock, rap, Afro-jazz, and dancehall have become part of the worship services in Africa (Endong, 2016). There has been some debate even among Western churches regarding using contemporary songs in praise and worship. Senior congregants used to worship through traditional hymns and gospel songs preferred to follow their tradition of old hymn singing. While such a choice is their prerogative, resistance to change can keep them away from the core issues of church worship. Some churches involve their youths in many activities and continue to guide them as they engage in the church's work. Likewise, the researchers see the need to involve the youths, especially to take part with interest rather than coercion.

The youths prefer to attend church services where contemporary music is played with live worship bands. Studies on church growth show that several congregations shifted from traditional worship to a more contemporary music style and experienced a quick growth in numbers as young people got attracted to their style (Olasvicky II, 2007). However, some theologians and critics still argue that contemporary Christian music lacks biblical truths. This is debatable since song text can be put to the biblical test. However, this process requires people who understand the truth about the essence of worship; hence, judgment should be based on the text's integrity and how it aligns with biblical principles. The Bible does not dictate types of music; it just refers to singing, making melody in the heart, and some instruments (Psalms 150:1). It is rational not to dismiss contemporary worship songs by face value; instead, they should give an in-depth analysis.

### **Discussion**

The study shows that the doctrine on music and worship by Charles and John Wesley is active in present-day MCZ services. Believers of the MCZ could sing songs to laud Christ freely, even if they were not written in the hymnbook. As Africans, they could extemporise the text from the Bible and yet not written in the hymnals. Some congregants mentioned that such a thing reflected the African traits of the believers to express and pour their hearts into God freely. Some of the spontaneous behaviours included ululation and clapping hands.

The elderly informants accepted these expressions of the heart, especially following the texts of each song. The authors attest to the above as they observed people engrossed in singing and worship. The song *Narini narini tinaye*, - Forever we are with God, is a sign of hope in God for everything. They sang and danced with the energy to an atmosphere of cheer, ululation, and merriment. Musical instrumental accompaniment of keyboard, African drumming, and hosho (shakers) indicated that congregants accepted the song. At some services, congregants were ecstatic with joy in the above song as the implication of the song defied the power of physical death. The assurance of being with God forever instils peace of mind and to forward to life after death. Singing such a song and others was an expression of confidence in the power of God and ownership of the music. Exhibition of such sentiments symbolised African exuberance in singing.

The hymnbook is a matter held with importance in the MCZ liturgy. However, from an African perspective, young and old congregants showed that songs are usually committed to memory and sung when the occasion demands. The hymnbook is kept as a record of the songs for the African believers. It was amazing to note that their singing was from their memory and understanding in their minds. The congregants prided over such a trait, as uttered by one congregant, *Tinoimba nemusoro chero himu iripo*, to mean we sing from memory even if the hymnbook is there. *Ranaka zuva iro rajesu wakandishamba* - It is a good day to reckon when Jesus washed away my sins. The song was a hymn also sung with congregants showing meaning to the text within a fast tempo. People immersed



themselves in the meaning of the text with commensurate body movement noted within a solemn mood. The authors looked that song as cementing the essence of Christianity which enables people to belong one family. Through singing in different parts of the above song there was harmony, unity singleness of purpose to the services. The researchers viewed that as a merit to see many congregants who remembered the song texts and tunes in the canon of the MCZ hymnbook without reading. The MCZ church services were marked with vibrant songs and vigorous dances. The youths submitted that, *Isu tinotamba nekudzana zvakanyanya kudzimbo dzese dzatinoimba* which means they danced and moved to all the songs they sang.

In the African sense, such vibrancy depicts how musical the people are and their endeavour to depict allegiance to divinity as part of their natural exuberance (Blacking, 2000). The authors concur with the above view; hence, as emic researchers, they attest to the dominant African congregations' primary tendency to give singing some enthusiasm and excitement. Depending on the theme, congregants usually got excited at whatever they did; hence some of the services were characterised by spontaneous cheer, ululation, and dance, also observed in the study. The hymn *Jerusarema* was punctuated with playing hosho drumming, clapping, dancing, blowing the horns, cheering, and the excitement to reach the spiritual holy city of Jerusalem at the end of life. The song text *Jerusarema musha wangu vapostori vakafira Kristu vari pamwe naye, ndichaenda kana ndapedza basa* - Jerusalem is my home, the apostles who died for Christ are there, I will go after I finish my part on earth. The song was somewhat accepted as a declaration of hope in God that believers looked forward to enjoying in the heavenly city ready-made for them. The song's cyclic call response and harmony with African and Western musical instruments presented a hybrid of musical cultures for all to participate. The congregants extemporised new texts prompted by their engagement in the service and joy of life in Christ.

Most young congregants said hymnals were acceptable; however, they were too mechanic as they remained the same and did not allow congregants to express their allegiance to God differently. Quoting their words, they said, *Pamahimu unongoramba uchiimba zvakanana mazuva ose saka zvinopedzisira zvakubhwa*, they meant that, in hymns, repetition of singing the same songs becomes boring. They argued that humans should express themselves freely and spontaneously with or without hymns. The adherence to the hymnbook was viewed as a routine that bound people to traditions which made congregants follow without attaching meaning to the text. This view indicates that young people interacted with new trends in other churches and liked interesting experiences. They argued that feelings could not be prescribed to all believers; hence the bible should guide congregants to relate to God. Based on Rumsey's (1996) and Young's (1995) views, the current young generation still upholds the bible's authority and topical issues through Christian songs outside the MCZ hymns. Regardless of the above views, it was important to note that youths embraced the notion that hymns should not be exclusive songs.

In the selected congregations of the MCZ, the youth were vibrant and embraced both hymnals and contemporary songs in their worship. The song *Tichashingirira ndiripamuchinjiko dzamara ndawana zororo* - I will persevere onto the cross until I find peace. With the struggles in life the song was sung to exhort members to keep their hope in Christ. The lead singers sang passionately, exhorting congregants to look up to God. The song was also followed with *Kudenga kwakanaka*-Heaven is Beautiful; all these were contemporary songs whose thrust was Christian and biblical. They fitted well in the order of worship. The text implies that the service to God gave congregants an ideal time to worship God; even though congregants were from diverse social backgrounds, God embraced them all. In most cases, the contemporary songs were accompanied by electronic instruments, Western drums, African drums, *hosho*, and vigorous dancing. Listening to the songs sung exhibited signs of



accepting them. The behaviour of the congregants suggested that the songs were welcome. The leaders who were elderly allowed the youths some freedom based on their being energetic and needing dynamic services. One leader said, “You cannot keep the youth idle in church; they will become a challenge”. The stance to accommodate youths is to instill a sense of responsibility and order in the church. Regardless of the above view, the elders were not interested in the songs from outside the MCZ and how they were sung. A group of elders mentioned, “We need to keep our traditions as Methodists undiluted; hence no songs from outside the church”. Contrarily most of the youth and a few elders tolerated songs from outside the hymnbook, and they did not mind the songs being part of the liturgy. These are diverse views among congregants. Some leaders informed that in the past, it was not permissible to sing songs not inscribed in the hymnbook. As time passed, gradually, some tolerance crept into the church, and some of the songs were not part of the Methodist tradition. Some elders expressed worries that Wesleyan Methodism was getting diluted, which was not supposed to be true. They said, *ChiHwisiri chaakuparara*. They meant that the Wesleyan Methodism was declining. The fact that the current believers wielded power to decide on what to be done in church and as the (elderly) were a minority in numbers meant that they could not avert the situation. Furthermore, they also viewed songs outside the MCZ canon to keep the new and youthful believers in the fold. Even though they supported keeping the youthful believers within the MCZ, that was viewed as a compromise of standards. An elderly woman said, *Vapwere vanoda zvekufara saka tikavarambidza vanoenda kunze saka regai vafare vari muno muchechi*. She meant that the youth like to be happy, and if denied freedom, they will leave the church; hence it is better to keep them happy in the church. The researchers appreciate the elders’ concerns about beliefs, especially that (beliefs) transcend logic; hence many youths tend to shun religion (Pew Research Center, 2018; van Ditmarsch, Halpern, van der Hoek, and Kooi, 2015). Whereas it can be sensible to keep certain traditions, it is also critical to adjust to the current trends to remain relevant and acceptable to social and technological demands among church members, a view articulated by (Fox, 2010; Cheek, 2016 and Pillay, 2017).

The authors noted that most songs outside the MCZ liturgy sung in the services were dynamic with electronic musical instrumental accompaniment, dance and movement. The missionaries did not allow the use of African musical instruments, and according to the study, they also did not permit dance and movement in the services. The African traditional musical instruments were resisted; however, this is a key attribute of the current MCZ and a sign of Africanism in the local Zimbabwean congregants, especially after independence in 1980. A similar trend of resisting songs outside the MCZ liturgy also occurs with worship songs. Depending on who was leading, hymns and songs alien to the liturgy were sung in the worship services. Regardless of the above, future generations might consider the MCZ liturgy to include some songs that touch the hearts of believers. Such a move can be taken in two views; firstly, to accommodate what is practised by the people and secondly, to update the hymnbook. Despite the point alluded to, the inclusion of songs into the MCZ hymnbook is guided by biblical principles of devotion, praise, and worship to God since the bible is regarded as the authority. That view supports the focus of the founders of Methodism, whose hymns were based on devotion, love and allegiance to God. The participants said that although they shared sentiments about songs from outside the MCZ, it was improper to openly disagree as members on religious matters.

Hymns were deeply engrained in theology that Methodists became emotionally attached to, and congregants would sing them in their homes at devotions, in services, and even on the streets (Cracknell & White, 2005). This reached a point where people knew the hymns more than the bible. Mtemasango (2016) suggests that the doctrinal belief that views the bible as the supreme rule of faith and practice is still held in the MCZ. The above implies that the missionaries who brought Methodist liturgy to Africa did not dilute the biblical statutes engrained in hymnals; hence the hymnbook still



carries importance. Though the hymns are sung in Shona and Ndebele, they form lyrical theology. Likewise, the scriptures from the bible govern the conduct of members of the MCZ, a premise on which most of the elders stood. The researchers appreciate how the congregants embrace the teachings handed down to them by the Methodist missionaries whom they also believed as God sent. Hence it is difficult for them to change. The authors also understand that change is not easy in churches where the young generation of believers are prone to new ways of doing things instead of those that ardently hold onto old practices. Issues of belief in God are complex, and they need concerted efforts of persuasion, not coercion; even though they coexisted, the old and young generations of informants strongly held their divergent beliefs on songs alien to the MCZ liturgy.

The researchers observed that all congregations sang some songs based on music outside the MCZ; however, the texts befitted the order of worship services. One song, *Narini narini tinaye, gomera uripo narini* - Forever and ever we are with Him (God), remain steadfast forever was a favourite. This song and others were sung, but they were outside the hymnbook. Several short songs were sung together with the above-mentioned as a medley in the MCZ congregations. The songs included *Mwari wakanana* God is Good, *Tinoramba tichinamata* - We will continue to Worship, and *Mwari wakanaka veduwe* - God is Good, my fellows. The congregants exhibited joy in the singing of these songs. The spirit in singing was not different in both hymnals and contemporaries. The authors wondered whether there were contestations on including songs from outside the MCZ hymnbook. The matter of acceptance of contemporary songs was treated with mixed reactions. The elders were more conservative than the youth. The atmosphere became ecstatic, with some crying tears of joy at the singing. The youth participated in the free expression of body movement and instrumental playing. The call-response form of the medley of songs enabled the congregants to converse with other congregants and, more importantly, God.

Looking at the song texts, the researchers think the songs were acceptable. Volland (1995) researched the development of the American Methodist Hymnal with attention to the compositions and found that the folk tunes in sacred harmony were used with a pleasant sound. Charles Wesley was willing to go beyond the Christian faith for music whose novelty could enrich the liturgy and devotion (Vogt, 2005). The researchers view Charles and John Wesley as role models in writing such songs under the guidance of the biblical text. Most participants viewed the art of composing songs as a special gift not endowed to many believers hence their cautionary approach to songs alien to the MCZ. They further argued that the origin of music was critical because certain music was pagan and profane hence using them corrupted the worship of God. An elderly man said, *Hatizive kuti nziyo idzo idzodzo dzakabvepi saka zvinonetsa*, - he meant that they did not know the origin of those songs, so that was a problem.

To accredit new songs into the hymnbook may be controversial as congregants believed in the originality of the MCZ hymnbook, which needed no dilution. A sticking issue was the espousal of non-MCZ songs and not necessarily canonising them. The impact of using non-MCZ songs was an experience of the current generation; keeping them exclusively as oral can lead to their fading off. If John and Charles Wesley had solely relied on oral songs, there could not have been the current MCZ hymnbook. There could have been diverse versions of hymns.

John and Charles Wesley made a basis for preserving the musical traditions of the Methodist movement through the hymnbook. Further, the researchers think it is noble for the current believers to compose and canonise new songs into a songbook. Some new songs tended to behave like popular songs whose acceptance faded with time; hence there was no need to worry about them. The above view is what most elderly respondents held to be the key difference between MCZ hymnals and songs outside their canon. Most respondents argued that hymns had passed the test of time and would retain their impact. It is interesting to observe what would become of non-MCZ songs if published in a book;



perhaps they would also stand the test of time like the hymns. The facts about the above argument are unknown because the non-MCZ songs had not been printed; hence one cannot dismiss or accept the above argument. The issue of songs outside the MCZ hymnbook will continue to be at stake as long as people get inspired to compose new songs which never get published as part of the MCZ canon.

Some researchers note that some rules by the Methodist missionaries were restrictive about using songs from outside the church. The authors think the white missionaries could have had a low perception of African singing traditions, hence their dismissal of certain folk tunes from the secular world without consideration (Turino, 2000). Their view contradicted the Wesley brothers, who borrowed folk music to build the hymns. The context of African music included ritual ceremonies engrained in African indigenous religious beliefs which were not Christian. Based on the above reason, missionaries were not confident that the African believers would use their music in the Christian context.

The traditional drums and other musical instruments regarded as profane have made inroads into the MCZ, with most people accepting the same instruments once looked down upon. The above trend has not taken away the dignity and content of the usual liturgy. Perhaps the difference with today's MCZ is that it comprises the local African congregants. The whole thing can be viewed as a revolution from the missionaries' initial objectives on African congregations. What is seen today is a move towards decolonisation of the church's musical practice. Musical instruments played in the church are largely culture-based and contextual; what is deemed biblical reflects the bible and the will of God. The Bible is embraced as a universal authority to believers regardless of language and ethnicity. Christians express themselves in any language, a reason why the bible is in many different languages. Songs sung in the hymnals were translated from English to Shona to enable congregants to sing with understanding. This is another reason missionaries established schools to ensure congregants were literate to use the hymnbooks.

It was noted that music blended and unified the sermon and prayers, making the worship a wonderful celebration of God's self-giving in which Christians energetically declare the worthiness of God (Kibor, 2006). The people expressed themselves to God personally by engaging in the above activities; however, it was difficult to judge whether congregants did that heartedly, with an understanding of what they were doing or that all was lip service. Participation in songs during church services was with vibrancy, for example, the contemporary songs *Every day you are faithful oh Lord* and *Anosimudza marombe kubva muguruva* - He lifts the poor from the low levels of life. Congregants confidently participated in the promises embedded in the song, with God taking their spiritual and social welfare. The mood of congregants was blissful, with cheerful voices and vigorous involvement of the elderly and the youths. The youth went to the podium to dance and sing as the congregants cheered. The authors think that such a thing indicated ownership of music-making. A few elders kept their composure; perhaps because of age, they could not exert much energy, which can be understood.

Tönsing et al. (2015) observed that in some Christian denominations, people differ on the songs that should constitute the worship service. In the services studied, the responsibility of selecting songs for worship was done by the congregants themselves or song leaders. However, it was noted that the choices of songs were based on the hymnbook and set themes. To establish songs, Tönsing et al. (2015) point out that worship songs should appeal to the hearts of congregants to open up their inner being to hear the word of God. Similarly, Long (2001) echoes that the music played or sung in the church can attract people or demotivate them from coming to services. He further says, "we get our theology far more often from the hymns we sing than from the sermons we hear" (Long, 2001, p. 54). Worship songs are not ordinary regardless of being part of the liturgy. The general view by respondents was



that MCZ hymns appealed to the inner person and instilled good relationships between God and Christians in the community.

It was noted that worship hymns in the MCZ were instructed through reading and memorising texts. In the process, others also learnt through imitating, especially the illiterate and newcomers. The authors observed such a situation taking place in the services. In the above view, congregants expressed that through texts, they could connect with God more than the other songs accompanied by instrumental music. The elderly congregants held that the exaltation of God through words was pivotal in worship rather than showcasing musical talent alone. The above matter prompted conservative MCZ members to resist songs alien to the hymnbook. They aimed to keep the traditional MCZ songs intact. They argued that the context of selecting music for the worship service should be subjected to the scrutiny of the textual content and rhythms in a musical composition. This view is also echoed by Endong (2016). Some songs discussed earlier tend to divide MCZ members as some embrace them while others abhor them. Acceptability of music is based on many factors; however, one of them is the appeal of song text more than the musical instruments. The young generation preferred fast-beat music with instrumental accompaniment, while the elderly preferred laid-back music. The authors see the above as a difference that needs to be explored.

All the congregants concurred that traditional musical instruments were a cultural identity, a part of their daily lives that instilled a sense of fulfilment. However, they differed on electronic instruments; the leaders and elderly members thought that the electroacoustic instruments were always too loud; hence they defrauded congregants of genuine worship. The authors think the above disparity signifies the gap between the senior citizens and the youth. The alluded gap is difficult to close as it is a recurring cycle within an unending debate between the old and young. The old are conservative, while the young are liberal in embracing non-MCZ songs in worship.

### **Conclusions**

The paper presented a discourse on embracing songs in the MCZ liturgy. The forerunners of Methodism, Wesley brothers John and Charles, set the standard for songs in their liturgy. Some doctrinal pillars include the supreme authority of biblical scripture, salvation by grace through faith in Christ, and the priesthood of all believers. Church music is sacredly endowed with the power to communicate with God. The music contains powerful messages of worship and praises that appeal to the cognitive and emotive aspects of members of the MCZ. Indeed, music can be closely aligned with spirituality based on the characteristics of the two worlds of sacred and secular music. As such, Christians must be careful about the type of music in praise and worship services. The MCZ canon of songs has stood the test of time; however, infiltrating songs from outside the hymnbook is a growing trend that divides the musical preferences of the old and young generations among congregants.

The MCZ faces a situation that may be common in some congregations where people are divided on songs from outside the church liturgy. This challenge can only be resolved if deliberate efforts are undertaken to create an agreed position. Whereas the youth were liberal, the elderly congregants were conservative. The researchers note that change is challenging to embrace, especially when it appears radical. It is difficult for church members to suddenly be drawn into worship services with strange songs without prior education.

Protestantism fulcrums on the sentiments of marginalised members with unfulfilled needs by the church. Similarly, the MCZ leaders face issues that can prompt some members to dissent and exit the church for fulfilment. John and Charles Wesley broke ranks with the Anglican church in pursuance of what they regarded as a noble cause; hence the MCZ may need to look closely into the issue of worship



songs and devise a solution. Regardless of the above raised issues, attempting to resolve such matters requires a gradual process to proffer a lasting solution.



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