

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The main aim with this study is to examine and define what is considered to be sacred music in Christadelphian worship by comparing Christadelphian ideas about music with the actual practice of music as demonstrated in written historical sources and in contemporary performance practices. Christadelphians have outlined their aims of music in worship and these are strongly held and clearly stated over the years, but the ways these aims have been realised have varied greatly. The Christadelphians are a Christian religious group that have been in existence for about 150 years in Australasia, Europe, America and other areas throughout the world. Their music is made up of mainly hymns, anthems, psalms and contemporary songs. Up to ninety percent of the music used has been sourced from other religions, but the Christadelphians have adapted the pieces to suit their purposes. At various times, fourteen different hymn books have been developed for use in English speaking countries, with some being accepted and some rejected for social and religious reasons. While so many hymn books have been printed, only one remains in circulation at one time, therefore limiting the repertoire of many Christadelphians. This is due to the type of society that the Christadelphian community is, as well as the ideals they value. Since the Christadelphians' first hymn book in 1864, over one thousand different pieces have been published, learnt and used in worship. The musical heritage of the Christadelphians is a rich heritage with hymns originating from many sources.

The Christadelphian community does not have a formal hierarchal structure and this alone sets it apart from many mainstream Christian groups. There are no paid clergy; instead, this society uses Lay administration and exhortation, Lay committees and decisions are made congregationally<sup>1</sup>. The flat structure is based on its ideals, that all must be equal before God and that all must pursue their own Bible study to find the truth. Christadelphians believe that Jesus Christ is their only real leader and that all members are brothers and sisters of Christ. The only way to become a member is to be baptised, after an adult confession of the basic principles of Bible teachings. Christadelphians meet several times a week for different purposes, and music is used at most of these meetings. Individual congregations are known as *ecclesias* as the early Christadelphian movement wished to distance itself from other Christian organisations. Christadelphianism is a term referring to the Christadelphian community, its ideals and values. This term has been used by Brian Wilson in his book *Sects and Society*. However, Christadelphian members opt to use the term Christadelphia to refer to the same definition. Christadelphians are the members of this society.

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, Brian R. *Sects and society: a sociological study of the Elim Tabernacle, Christian Science and Christadelphians*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961, 267.

Only one hymn book is used in most Christadelphian ecclesias worldwide, usually the most recently published hymnal. The only forms of music condoned by most ecclesias for spiritual use are known by Christadelphians as hymns. Christadelphians seem to unknowingly take the view of St Augustine by regarding hymns as “the praise of God by singing”. However, these hymns used can be divided up into various musical forms. These are: chanted Psalms in metric Biblical and Scottish versions; Psalms tunes; hymns of the form associated with the English movement of hymn writing, for example those by Watts, Wesley and the Methodists; anthems associated with the English anthem repertory from Handel to early twentieth century; and recently, various popular styles of music. These items are mostly sung congregationally and accompanied. Out of the three hundred or so hymns, psalms and anthems that are currently sung in the English speaking world, only a small number are originally written by Christadelphians. The original works studied in this thesis will examine both lyrics and music. The terms used for these facets of composition will be hymn texts and their authors, in reference to the words; and hymn tunes and their composers, in reference to the music. Through studying the approaches taken by editors in the publications of hymnals, and the discussion that has arisen as these have been produced, the inconsistencies will be outlined. Most Christadelphian hymn book editors have also been journal editors. Some have worked for the Christadelphian publishing office which was first established by Robert Roberts, who also began *The Christadelphian* magazine and the first *Christadelphian Hymn Book*, both in 1864. Many views on hymn books have been printed by the editors and other members within these subscription-only journals. I have used these and other similar journal publications as primary sources for editorial decisions and community opinions. *The Christadelphian* is circulated worldwide in English and non-English speaking countries. Australia has a similar publication that I have also used<sup>2</sup>.

The thesis will also examine how the published music is used and whether it is accepted by all Christadelphians and whether music can create unity in a community. In the first seven chapters, the history of the various hymnals will be outlined, including issues that arose in the publication of these and how they were used by the community. The eighth chapter will examine views on music that have been published separately to the views contained in the hymn book prefaces and how music is used today in Christadelphianism. The thesis will attempt to follow the history of Christadelphian hymns, including where hymns have been borrowed from, as well as the music and text of Christadelphian origins. This history will be presented in light of the development of Christadelphian society and how certain religious values affect the choice and presentation of their music, including performance practices. The history of the Christadelphian hymn books outlines the basic history of the community,

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<sup>2</sup> Details of journals and their editors can be found in the Periodicals section of the Bibliography.

including disunity and reunions within the worldwide group. Each new hymn book that is published reflects some new value or a variant on a set of standards, dependent on the editor of the time and his interpretation of the general feeling of the community. Some variations in editors' values will be discussed including the acknowledgment of hymn composers and authors, the inclusion of written music in the hymn books and the different styles of Psalms that have been published. Performance practices will be examined and will include a discussion of how the tradition of four-part singing has survived amongst people who cannot read music. Through the examination of hymnal publications, performance practices and Christadelphian commentaries on music, the thesis will finally determine what music fits the ideals of sung worship in Christadelphia.

The debate of secular vs sacred music in religious practices has been argued for many centuries, as the Christian church has borrowed musical styles from the secular tradition many times. This debate has helped churches determine what sacred music is. In recent times, the debate has resurfaced as churches have looked to using "popular" and "folk" music in worship. In defining sacred music, discussion has focussed on which element of music makes music sacred. However, it can be safely said that there is no fundamental feature of music that can be called sacred. For example a particular progression of chords or a type of texture cannot be labelled as being sacred as opposed to being secular. No specific instruments can be called sacred or holy. However, the church tradition has produced styles of music that have a sacred affiliation, such as plainchant, chorale and psalmody. Listeners often associate the sound of a pipe organ with the Western church custom as many churches use this instrument. It is the context that the music is used in, that makes it take on the meaning of being sacred. In a paper titled *Church Music and Secularism*, Lee Olsen wrote:

"There seems to be some confusion in evangelical circles in regard to what is meant by "church music" or "sacred music" or similar terms used to describe the musical literature of the Christian church. These terms have one feature in common, and that is, words and music, and that without text there can be no distinction between sacred and secular music. Music is neither religious nor irreligious. Instrumental music of a sober and devotional character, whether orchestra or organ or piano music, may be described as "churchly", but nothing else"<sup>3</sup>.

The importance Olson places on text, in determining what constitutes sacred music is consistent with Christadelphian use of music. Throughout the history of Christadelphian publications of music, emphasis has been placed on text, with many texts being altered to suit Christadelphian doctrines. However, the problem of music styles and their associations has also been debated amongst Christadelphian circles. Music is a type of communication and its meaning involves more than the meaning of text. But it is added to by the culture in which it

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<sup>3</sup> Olson, Lee. *Church Music and Secularism*. Church Music Perspectives 1. Chicago: National Church Music

exists and this can change from age to age<sup>4</sup>. Most of the music used in Christadelphianism has its origins in other Christian religions and this has been seen by some Christadelphians to be a negative quality. Recently added to these circumstances is the growing use of secular styled music for worship, which is also regularly questioned. When Christadelphianism first began, in the 1850's, appropriate music had to be found to use in this new sect. Musicians looked mainly to their old churches, as most of the new members were converted Christians from other religious communities. A lot of the music would have been new to many of the members, depending on which religion they had come from. Most of this music would have been considered to be secular compared to what was familiar, even if it was church music. The same situation exists today, where the music that has been used by Christadelphians in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is now familiar and any new music that is introduced is as good as secular because it is unfamiliar. However, this new music has the potential to become sacred because of the context it will be used in.

Christadelphians base their doctrines and practices entirely on the Bible but the Bible itself does not offer any solutions as to the aesthetic qualities music should have to be suitable for worship. However, an expression that Christadelphians favour in describing how music is to be used is taken from Paul's letters, found in 1 Corinthians 14 verse 15: "to sing with the spirit and to sing with the understanding". This is a Christadelphian ideal that has been used to justify many editorial decisions and performance practices. Christadelphian composers and authors have been encouraged to pursue their art forms because members would prefer to sing hymns written by those who have the understanding.

Many editors have considered hymns and similar styles of music to be suitable for use in worship because of their association with concert hall music as opposed to the parlour songs and popular music. They see the preferred types of music as having a higher art form and being preferable for presentation in praise to God. Donald Hustad, an authority on music in contemporary worship, made some comments on this problem that also exists in other Christian communities:

"You are going to have real trouble if you take the standard from the world of pure art, because the serious artist, like the serious philosopher, can go astray; he can have sin in his judgment, in his perspective. You must evolve a philosophy of what church music is. You have to draw another separation in your own mind, between church music for what it is, and pure art. Church music has to be approached as a functional instrumental art. It is not free. Great art is free; it must be beyond shackles. The art of worshipping God is not free. It is free only to worship God, and it is free to worship God in spirit and in truth and in its sincerity. It is in bondage. We must therefore approach the art of

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Fellowship, no 4, 10. Olson is not a Christadelphian.

<sup>4</sup> Ellsworth, Donald P. Christian Music in Contemporary Witness: Historical Antecedents and Contemporary Practices. Michigan: Baker Book House, 1979, 165.

church music in terms of its purpose. Its purpose is to communicate and express for every person in the congregation.”<sup>5</sup>

For music to be able to communicate and express for every person in the congregation, it must identify with every person. This is not always possible as every person’s musical tastes differ and what each person considers an appropriate style of music for praise, that they can identify with, varies. This is shown in Christadelphian society, particularly in current trends, where newer forms of music are being introduced. When the first Christadelphian hymnals were compiled, hymns were chosen as the appropriate style of music because many of the new converts had already identified hymn singing as being associated with sacred worship. The new members came from churches such as the Methodists and Wesleyans and brought these traditions of hymn singing with them to Christadelphianism. Since then, these hymns have been added to with similar styled texts and tunes, rather than being replaced with new items. Many members have been singing the same hymns for their whole life.

Some of these people have found that the styles of language and music used for worship have not changed as much as their surrounding cultures have, and they do not relate to the text or music anymore. Others are proud of this seemingly unchanging tradition as it reflects a kind of unaffected strength within Christadelphian society. Many do not like change and cannot identify with newer styles of music, as they have not listened to these popular styles in their leisure time.

Some consider that God must be approached formally, with respect, so they prefer to use a formal kind of language for worship, based on the Authorised Version of the Bible. Others cannot understand this language as they opt for modern Bibles and didn’t enjoy studying Shakespeare at school. All of these varying opinions are reflected in choice of music and text in published Christadelphian hymnals. Usually the most conservative approach has been taken by editors in publishing the hymn books. This is why the material contained within their pages does not entirely reflect what music is being used in individual ecclesias, as many ecclesias choose to use less conservative styles. This thesis will detail the hymn book publications but will also examine other music being used in individual ecclesia, mainly within Sydney, Australia<sup>6</sup>. Sound recordings will be presented for this purpose.

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<sup>5</sup> Hustad, Donald. Music Workshop of Billy Graham School of Evangelism. Lecture, New York City, 16-19 June, 1969. As published in Ellsworth’s book *Christian Music in Contemporary Witness*. 166.

<sup>6</sup> I have access to some Sydney ecclesias that show there is enough variation to demonstrate the different styles of music used.

In resolving what music fits the ideals of appropriate worship, it will be necessary to examine what is meant by *worship* in Christadelphianism. Christadelphians meet several times a week for worship. These meetings have various standards of formality, with the format of the gatherings remaining similar since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The most important and formal assembly that takes place each week is referred to as *the Memorial Meeting*. Here, the congregation read from the Bible, listen to an exhortation given by a brother, and partake of *the emblems*, that is, the bread and the wine. At least four congregational items are sung and some instrumental items are played. This meeting takes place on Sundays at 11am, in most ecclesias throughout the English speaking world. A lecture is held at most ecclesias on Sunday evenings, with the aim of preaching, where at least two congregational items are sung. A Bible class is held on a weeknight either at the ecclesial hall or at a member's home and some ecclesias sing hymns at this gathering. These are the main weekly congregation meetings. Other events and gatherings where music is sung includes Sunday School (weekly); youth group activities (at least monthly); conferences and Bible schools (annually); ecclesial anniversaries and Sunday School prize nights (annually); and any other occasional events. While various styles of music can be sung at most events, restrictions on music are placed for the Memorial Meeting because it is the most formal and most serious of all the gatherings. It is by this practice that I will measure how well the music fits the purpose of worship. The hymn books that have been published have used this criterion also. I will also mention the hymnals used for Sunday School and youth groups as some of these hymns have been published in the main hymn books. Through examining recordings, publications, opinions and practices in worship and music-making, I will draw some conclusions about which music is favoured to be used in worship, according to Christadelphian ideals.