

Chapter 8: Christadelphian Views on Music and Praise

Christadelphians have been concerned with how music is expressed and how music is used for worship. These opinions have not only appeared in accordance with the production of Christadelphian hymn books. Various articles have surfaced over the years as to how the believer should appropriately praise God, as well as debating about what music is suitable for worship. It has already been shown that many hymn texts needed to be altered to be in accordance with Christadelphian doctrines. However, even the published hymn books have been challenged and questioned by many in the form of letters, journal articles and books. Christadelphian writers' views on music will now be discussed and compared with practises of Sydney ecclesias, as summarised in the survey found in Appendix E.

The music of Christadelphia has largely been based on publications that originate from Birmingham, England. Yet, in Sydney alone, some ecclesias do not follow the same traditions as the English tradition stated in Robert Roberts' *A Guide to the Formation and Conduct of Christadelphian Ecclesias*¹⁸⁶. While the hymn books published in England have been useful in helping establish some form of unification between Christadelphian ecclesias in the English speaking world, other ecclesias have decided to act autonomously in regards to the type of music they use for worship. The heritage of Christadelphian music has largely been based on hymns, psalms and anthems, as shown in chapters one to seven. Some members of Christadelphia are dissatisfied with using these forms of music to express themselves in worship. Different Sydney ecclesias were surveyed to determine the various sources of music used in their worship and which music suits their congregations. These ecclesias were from Baringa (at Padstow), Castle Hill, Chatswood, Doonside, Hurstville, Lakemba, Shaftesbury Rd (at Burwood), Sutherland and West Ryde. One musician was surveyed from each ecclesia, giving their personal opinions on questions concerning music within worship. Ecclesial musicians were chosen over any other Christadelphian members for the survey, as it is the musicians who tend to choose the music for worship in Sydney, and have therefore thought about musical matters prior to the survey, and have a fair understanding of the congregations they provide music for¹⁸⁷.

The music used in Christadelphian circles reflect the groups' origins and the type of people they have become. Their music and the way it is presented demonstrates important issues

¹⁸⁶ Roberts, Robert. *A guide to the formation and conduct of Christadelphian ecclesias*. Fourth edition. The Christadelphian: Birmingham, 1971. See also Appendix E, question 6.

¹⁸⁷ Appendix E, question 5.

amongst the community. It has already been shown that traditional hymn texts were changed to suit fundamental Christadelphian doctrines and that the hymn books themselves were presented in different ways so that no glory could be given to anyone except for God. These problems also arise in the presentation of the music in worship. The main ideals for music in worship, are that it should represent the entire congregation, and that the music should be accessible to the whole congregation.

Most Sydney Christadelphian ecclesias hold at least four different gatherings per week. These consist of:

- Sunday morning Memorial Meeting (11 am)
- Sunday School (mostly held prior to the meeting)
- Gospel Witness lecture or a lecture of some sort on a Bible theme (Sunday evenings)
- Bible class (a weeknight)

Extra activities that are held and that are variable include:

- Dorcas Class (for women)
- Youth group activities and classes
- Committee meetings
- Bible Schools

Music is not used in all of the above activities¹⁸⁸. The most important activity, as well as the one that attracts most of the Christadelphian members, is the Sunday morning Memorial Meeting. At the majority of ecclesias, this begins at 11am. The starting time is basically the same in all English speaking countries, so visitors from other ecclesias know when to arrive. The idea that all ecclesias follow a similar pattern in organisation is important to most Christadelphians because it promotes a sense of a wider community of believers who do similar things at a similar time. Having the same hymn book in English speaking countries is another way of encouraging a sense of unity.

The survey that was undertaken showed that all ecclesias questioned in Sydney used the 1964 *Christadelphian Hymn Book*¹⁸⁹. However, the extent to which this was used, as well as the people who used it, varied. At Sutherland ecclesia, the 1964 version of the hymn book had only been recently introduced within the past couple of years¹⁹⁰. It is widely known that some ecclesias in Sydney still use the 1932 version, as these ecclesias consider it the better

¹⁸⁸ Appendix E, question 11.

¹⁸⁹ Appendix E, question 2.

¹⁹⁰ Appendix E, question 15.

alternative, but these ecclesias were not included in the survey¹⁹¹. The introduction of the 1964 hymn book to Sutherland ecclesia, as with some other ecclesias, resulted in a few members leaving, due to their disagreement with this ecclesial decision. At the other extreme, members also left Hurstville ecclesia for different reasons including the music, among other facets of worship, not being modern enough in style. Those members now meet at Baringa ecclesia, where the 1964 *Christadelphian Hymn Book* is rarely used and the *Praise the Lord* book is preferred¹⁹². The Baringa congregation chose to use *Praise the Lord* as the texts are in the modern vernacular and the modern styled music relates to the members, allowing them to express and strengthen their faith, while enjoying worshipping¹⁹³. Music needs to identify with all members of a congregation for it to be effective in worship. This permeates into the styles of text and music used, and each ecclesia needs to decide for itself what is appropriate for their congregation.

Christadelphians base their beliefs entirely on the Bible and look to it for guidance for such things as the conduct of gatherings. However, the Bible makes no clear cut prescriptions as to what is acceptable music for worship. Many Christadelphian writers refer to Colossians 3 verse 16, where the phrase “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” originates. For many, this is the description of the only styles of music that are appropriate for worship, and being unaware of music history, think that the psalms, hymns and spiritual songs mentioned in the first century are the same in style as the ones that appear in Christadelphian publications. They are of the opinion that the only types of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs allowed are those found in the *Christadelphian Hymn Book*. James B. Norris showed this in his book *The First Century Ecclesia*, where in reference to the Colossians quote and the 1932 *Christadelphian Hymn Book*, he says:

“Psalm means chiefly one of the Old Testament psalms, which were written for musical accompaniment, or some similar expression of prayer or meditation, set to music. . . A hymn was an expression of praise to God . . . As for spiritual songs, “spiritual” being used to distinguish them from songs of war, harvest, love and other secular songs . . . in addition to their being used at solemn worship, they were sung on less formal occasions . . . If we turn to our modern hymn-book . . . we shall find that the first 36 hymns and several anthems are typical Psalms, hymns 37-82 are typical hymns – though some are spiritual songs . . . whilst from hymn 83 to the end we have chiefly spiritual songs . . .”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ I was unable to survey these ecclesias as I did not have access to them. However, audio example 2 demonstrates

that two different hymn books are currently used in Sydney.

¹⁹² Appendix E, questions 4 and 19.

¹⁹³ Appendix E, question 15.

¹⁹⁴ Norris, James B. *The First Century Ecclesia: a study in the earliest Christian organization and development*. The Christadelphian: Birmingham, 1951, 124.

While it is possible to apply the term “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” to the material contained within the *Christadelphian Hymn Book*, there are many other styles of worship-music which do not appear in the hymn book that would fall into one of these categories.

Some of the newer forms of music, such as popular music, which can be classified as spiritual songs, are being trialed in Christadelphian worship as shown in Audio example 18¹⁹⁵. Many members feel that any musical styles that do not appear in the *Christadelphian Hymn Book* should be avoided, especially for use at the Memorial Meeting. This is due to popular music’s associations with unsuitable behaviour. Robin A. Foster notes that:

“The “noise” which Beethoven composed was outrageous to some people in *his* audiences, so if we happen to like Beethoven’s music now, we can’t condemn “pop” music simply because it sounds outrageous to us. But much of the “pop scene” can be condemned, because from start to finish it is erotic and permissive, in its dress, in its words, and in its performance.”¹⁹⁶

Irrespective of the text, if the music detracts from the worship, drawing the worshippers’ minds to think of other inappropriate matters, then the music has lost its effectiveness. The instruments associated with popular music are also shunned in many ecclesias, leaving the preferred accompaniment instrument to be either a piano or organ. Even amplification of instruments, though it may be necessary for a large congregation, is seen as a “tragedy” as it is linked with popular music¹⁹⁷. Nothing, including the way music is presented, should detract from the main focus of worship.

These attitudes can be compared with the experiments taking place in Sydney Christadelphian ecclesias’ accompaniment instruments. Baringa ecclesia uses a modern styled band to accompany the congregation. The instruments include a drumkit and bongos, electric and acoustic guitars, keyboards, a clarinet and a flute. Music plays an important role at Baringa and the types of songs used are a reason that many people have transferred their membership from other ecclesias to Baringa. People cannot sing ‘with the spirit and with the understanding’ if they do not relate to the music, whether it be due to the music’s style, whether traditional or popular.

The idea of ‘singing with the understanding’ is an issue that is contended amongst Christadelphians. Many hold the opinion that the words are the most important factor in a

¹⁹⁵ Audio example 18: *People get free*. Recorded at the 42nd Australian Christadelphian Conference, Sydney, April 2000. Sung by “Day by Day” ensemble, accompanied by band. Conductor: Jeremy Powell. Words and music by Russell Fragar.

¹⁹⁶ Foster, Robin A. *Scripture and music*. *The Christadelphian*. Vol 111, No 1321, July 1974, 304.

¹⁹⁷ Nicholls, A. *The Evangelical revival*. *The Christadelphian*. Vol 118, No 1410, December 1981, 445.

hymn and that they should appropriately express correct Christadelphian teachings rather than display any emotional sentimentality. James B. Norris agrees with this attitude and demonstrates how the *Christadelphian Hymn Book* has an advantage over other hymn compilations because it “sets forth Scripture truths rather than expresses personal feelings”¹⁹⁸. Norris states that while the *Christadelphian Hymn Book* contains some subjective hymns that are about personal experiences, people will tire of singing these styled hymns and will opt for objective hymns. The example Norris gives of the subjective hymn that will fall out of favour with Christadelphian congregations is France R. Havergal’s “Take my life and let it be”. However, in Sydney ecclesias, this hymn remains popular, almost fifty years after Norris’ prediction. Roy Standeven, a Christadelphian composer of hymns and childrens’ songs, outlines this argument in his article *With gladsome mind: a singing church*:

“Our community, though it is the Church of the Living God, is nevertheless affected by cycles of ideas and pressures . . . On the one hand there is a great fear of emotion, personal witness and inner experience, whilst on the other, some are frustrated by what seems to them to be critical cold intellectualism gone too far.”¹⁹⁹

Harry Whittaker is a well known Christadelphian commentator and has written over 35 books that have been published. On the topic of suitable texts, he gives the example of Paul the Apostle’s words where Paul says that psalms, hymns and spiritual songs are for “teaching and admonishing ourselves”²⁰⁰. Therefore the text is important for believers to educate themselves scripturally. This opinion is also shared by Sunday School hymn book compilers who include hymns in their hymnals that help children to remember biblical stories and lessons. The opposing viewpoint to this is that music is to be used for praise, therefore changing the motive for singing, and looking beyond the individual and the individual’s behaviour. Another function that Christadelphians use music text for is as a form of prayer. John Parkin, a member from Hull ecclesia in England, states that:

“The words of most hymns are a prayer. They come first; music is subservient”²⁰¹

Music as prayer can also be heard in Audio example 19, where the congregation are asked by Neil Creighton to close the evening together, by singing a prayer, where a prayer would usually be spoken²⁰². In the ecclesias surveyed, music used in worship was seen to do all of these things and more. Not only did the music have the purpose of expressing personal prayers and communal worship, as well as giving biblical instruction, but also were thought to have the

¹⁹⁸ Norris, J. B. 124.

¹⁹⁹ Standeven, Roy. *With gladsome mind: a singing church* (7). *The Australian Christadelphian Shield*. Volume number unknown. June, 1981, 23.

²⁰⁰ Whittaker, H. *Holy, holy, holy*. *Reformation*. Staffordshire: Biblia, 1985, 111. He quotes Colossians 3 v 16.

²⁰¹ Parkin, John. *Organ voluntaries*. *The Christadelphian*. No 1504, Vol 126, October 1989, 390.

²⁰² Audio example 19. *Refresh my heart*. Introduced by Neil Creighton. Recorded at 42nd Australian Christadelphian Conference, Sydney, April 2000. Sung by congregation, accompanied by band. Words and music by Geoff Bullock.

purposes of preaching, improving community relationships and most of all, making worship enjoyable²⁰³.

Some members do not realise that most of the hymns published are not by those from the Christadelphian fellowship, as until 1964, pieces were not acknowledged in authorship or composition. This is why research into Christadelphian-composed hymns has only recently begun to be pursued, as many members wish to distinguish hymns from other sources with the hymns of Christadelphian origins. The ideal that was instilled by John Thomas and Robert Roberts, and that is still used today, is the purposeful disassociation from mainstream Christian churches. Some feel that compilers of Christadelphian hymnals have had to look elsewhere for hymns reflects negatively on the community. They consider that many more hymns should have been able to be written by Christadelphians, regardless of the quality. Whittaker notes that:

“From time to time the grumble is heard that such and such hymns ought not to find a place in our devotions at all because they are churchy. This is a short-sighted criticism, for it fails to take account of the fact that from the very earliest days, when Robert Roberts first compiled a Christadelphian Hymnary [sic], this has been that case. We have *always* had to fall back on orthodox hymn-writers for at least ninety per cent of our devotions”²⁰⁴.

In the preparation for the 2000 *Christadelphian Hymn Book*, the committee has looked at this issue and said:

“It is clear that some brethren and sisters feel unhappy at the inclusion of the words of any hymn written by persons who do not share “the hope of Israel” with us. We can understand that. Yet with occasionally some small change in the words, copyright permitting, these hymns often express acceptably the praise and thanks we wish to extend ..”²⁰⁵

Although the Christadelphian community have had to use other churches’ hymns for their own worship, these hymns now are part of their community. Some have been altered and adapted for communal use and because of this, this music now belongs to these people. Even the unaltered hymns from other religions are still sung every week in Christadelphian congregations. The fact that these unchanged hymns are suitable means that these too are a part of Christadelphia’s musical heritage, regardless of their background. Allan Bundesen, a member from Brisbane, states that:

²⁰³ Appendix E, question 16.

²⁰⁴ Whittaker, 111. Actually, Christadelphians rely on outside sources for 88.3% of their texts, and 87.25% of their compositions as shown in Appendices B and C.

²⁰⁵ Long, R., Owen, M., & Pritchard, T. *Revisions to the hymn book*. The Christadelphian. Vol 134, April 1997, 136.

“There is no shortage of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, and the very best of them are the words of Scripture set to music. Of course we need to be discerning and reject some; but take care, brethren, how hasty we are to reject hymns and songs for what might be quite petty reasons. Some of our best loved hymn tunes are the cast-offs of an earlier age of worldly revellers. Our use of them has made them sacred.”²⁰⁶

In Sydney ecclesias, music is taken from a wide range of sources for use in the Memorial Meeting²⁰⁷. Some of these sources include publications from other Christian denominations, such as *Church of England Hymnbook and Songbook*, *Complete Mission Praise*, *Songs of Fellowship* and Integrity Music publications, such as Graham Kendrick’s songs. Doonside ecclesia stated that they had to change some of the texts to bring them into line with Christadelphian doctrine²⁰⁸.

Up until recently, most texts presented in Christadelphian publications have avoided repetitions of words, as this was seen to be inappropriate for worship. Alfred Nicholls, one of *The Christadelphian* editors, states that:

“Vain repetitions, which are contrary to all Divine principle (Exod. 20: 7; Matt. 6: 5-7), should be avoided, and great care should be taken even with the constant repetition of the name of the Lord, of Jesus or of ‘Alleluia’. Such repetitions are rare in Scripture, and always have some special significance . . .”²⁰⁹

However, in the newest publications, such as *Praise the Lord*, many repetitious pieces are included. These pieces can have a purpose, for example, the Taize pieces that are used for meditation, before or after a Memorial Meeting²¹⁰. The need for ecclesias to have a meditation period prior to meetings has led to the inclusion of repetitive material, making this type of music acceptable where it once was avoided. The meditation section of the Memorial Meeting is held at the beginning of the meeting and can either consist of a prepared group item or voluntaries. Its purpose is to settle the congregation and to help focus their minds for the meeting. It is an opportunity where non-members can participate by playing or singing the music²¹¹. Sometimes this can also detract from the meditation as many members see these prepared groups as performing²¹². They have difficulties with the concept of music being used for service versus music used for entertainment and this is a constant debate that many churches face. Some Christadelphians have the viewpoint that if any music used for

²⁰⁶ Bundesen, Allan. *Making melody*. The Australian Christadelphian Shield. Ed. A. C. Dangerfield. September 1986, 16.

²⁰⁷ Appendix E, question 3.

²⁰⁸ Appendix E, question 15.

²⁰⁹ Nicholls, Alfred. *Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*. The evangelical revival: a modern challenge to Biblical truth. The Christadelphian: Birmingham, 1983, 97.

²¹⁰ Audio example 15. *Stay with me*. Recorded at 42nd Australian Christadelphian Conference, Sydney, April 2000. Ensemble, choir and congregation. Conductor: June Errington. Composer and author: Jacques Berthier.

²¹¹ See Appendix E, questions 10 and 17.

²¹² Appendix E, question 15.

voluntaries is played from other sources than the hymn book, then the musician is trying to perform and display artistry, therefore turning the Memorial Meeting into a concert and detracting from the focus of the worship²¹³. This is often an opinion taken by those who are not interested in music and who do not see music as being important, but rather, decorative to the worship process. The arguments of music for performance vs music for worship filter into the presentation of the music at the Memorial Meeting. If people stand on a platform to present the music, then it can be regarded that the people are performing to an audience, the congregation and not worshipping God. The use of soloists, conductors and even choirs are sometimes avoided due to this attitude²¹⁴.

It is also seen by many non-musical people that musicians who pursue training are those who are trying to gain glory for themselves within the Memorial Meeting setting as well as being attracted to the perceived celebrity status of a musician. Whittaker states in his book for Christadelphian young people in the form of a letters to a fictitious Jenny:

“I have noted more than once what a sweet voice you are blessed with. So, of course my counsel is that you find a good tutor who will enable you to make the very best of it. Now don’t misunderstand me. If you decide to do as I say, you must make sure that your motive is right. If there were any danger of your singing reaching such a high standard that you faced the allure of being a public performer, then I would say: your voice is good enough as it is; be content to use it well in every aspect of our worship and see that you aspire after your motive! Sing as well as you know how to the glory of Jesus, but not, of Jenny.”²¹⁵

This is in spite of the prevailing opinion that everyone, including musicians, must give their best in worship. Alfred Nicholls, after studying biblical examples of trained and skilled musicians at the tabernacle and temple, arrives at the conclusion that music in worship is regarded as an offering and it must represent the best a person can do²¹⁶. This affects the choice of words, the style of music and the way it is presented. In regards to this opinion, Standeven concludes:

“There is nothing wrong in performing for the greatest audience in the world – God himself who searches the heart for motives.”²¹⁷

²¹³ Parkin, John. *Organ Voluntaries*. The Christadelphian. Vol 126, No 1504, October 1989, 390.

²¹⁴ Appendix E, question 14.

²¹⁵ Whittaker, Harry. Further letters to George and Jenny, from Tychicus. Muriel Whittaker: Wigan, UK. First impression December 1995, 77.

²¹⁶ Nicholls, Alfred. The evangelical revival: a modern challenge to Biblical truth. The Christadelphian: Birmingham, 1983.

²¹⁷ Standeven, Roy. *With gladsome mind: the call to music*. The Australian Christadelphian Shield. April 1981, 21.

The way congregations sing are also affected by these attitudes. In the past, part-singing was encouraged as it was seen that the congregation would then be giving their best in worship.

Whittaker notes that:

“In earlier generations part singing was the thing in most ecclesias (does anyone remember the old hymnary [sic] with tonic solfa and standard notation printed side by side?). Today’s impaired standards . . . have sent part singing into decline, even in the north of England, but there are still plenty of ecclesias where the quality of the praise . . . is worthy of its theme.”²¹⁸

Nicholls also encourages singing in parts as it improves the standard of worship, from a technical and devotional standpoint²¹⁹.

Although Christadelphians are one large community, many different ideals exist within this community. Each ecclesia strives to present worship that represents who they are and what they feel. These aims affect the types of music they choose as well as how they use music in worship. Various different styles of music and text suit various congregations, ranging from traditional formal texts and hymns, to the use of modern language and popular styles of music. Appropriate compilations of music are chosen by each congregation so that members may identify with the music. Individual ecclesias make decisions concerning what instruments should accompany their singing, how group items should be presented, and when it is suitable for certain music styles to be played. All of these alternatives further enrich the musical heritage of the Christadelphians and present suitable means of communication for individuals and communities in worship.

²¹⁸ Whittaker, Harry. *Reformation: a book for Christadelphians*. Biblia: -Staffordshire, date unknown, 113.

²¹⁹ Nicholls, A. *The Evangelical Revival*. *The Christadelphian*. Vol 118, No 1410, December 1981, 444.