Evaluation of Hymn Singing in the Baptist Churches of Lagos East and Central Conferences in Nigeria between 2015-2025

By

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Abstract

Hymn singing has long been a fundamental aspect of worship in Baptist churches, serving as a tool for spiritual edification, doctrinal teaching, and communal expression of faith. This study evaluates hymn singing in the Baptist churches of Lagos East and Central Conferences in Nigeria between 2015 and 2025. The research examines the role of hymns in worship, their impact on congregational engagement, and the extent to which they have been retained or modified in response to contemporary worship trends. This study makes use of two theories. The first theoretical framework is the Transformative Theory of Femi Adedeji, and the second is the Theory of Continuity and Change by Robert J. Gordon. Using qualitative research methods, including surveys, interviews, and participant observation, the study assesses the frequency, relevance, and perception of hymn singing among church members and leaders. Books, journal articles, and theological texts on hymn singing in Baptist churches were reviewed to provide data for the study. Findings reveal the evolving dynamics of hymn usage, highlighting shifts influenced by generational preferences, cultural adaptations, and the rise of contemporary gospel music. The study concludes that while hymn singing remains a vital part of Baptist worship, there is a need for a balanced approach that preserves its theological depth while embracing innovative musical expressions. This evaluation provides insights into sustaining hymnody within Baptist worship traditions amidst changing musical landscapes**. The study provides practical recommendations for revitalizing hymn singing in these Baptist Churches, based on its findings. These recommendations will benefit church leadership and music ministry teams seeking to engage their congregations more deeply in worship through music.**

Keywords: Hymn, Baptist, Singing, Traditional, Contemporary. (271 words)

Introduction

Singing, the act of producing musical sounds with the voice, plays a vital role in various cultural and religious practices. It involves the use of vocal cords, breath control, and articulation to create melodies and harmonies. According to Adedeji (2014) in religious contexts, particularly within Christianity, singing is often performed in groups during worship services, with or without instrumental accompaniment. A hymn is a type of song specifically composed for religious or spiritual purposes. Ajewole (2012) remarks that the term "hymn" originates from the Greek word "hymnos," meaning "a song of praise." Hymns are integral to Christian worship, serving to praise, worship, or give thanks to a deity, express religious beliefs, or reflect on spiritual themes. Eniolawu (2021) notes that they can be sung with or without instrumental accompaniment and are found in many religious traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam.

Hymn singing has long been a fundamental aspect of Christian worship, especially within the Baptist tradition (Fasipe, 2020). It serves as a vehicle for theological teaching, spiritual edification, and communal expression of faith. In the context of congregational worship, hymns are not only a means of praising God but also play a role in unifying the congregation, reinforcing doctrinal beliefs, and fostering a sense of spiritual community. Nekoma (2020) remarks that in Nigeria, the Baptist Church has a rich history, with its roots tracing back to the arrival of missionaries in the 19th century. As the missionaries evangelize, they introduce the Bible and the Baptist Hymnal. So when the Baptist members are going to church, they go with their Bibles and their Yoruba Baptist Hymnals (Fasipe, 2020). Over the years, hymn singing has been a vital part of worship services within the Baptist Church, contributing to the spiritual life of congregants and reflecting their theological beliefs. The Lagos East and Central Conferences, being significant regions within the Nigerian Baptist Convention, have their unique worship traditions, including the use of hymns. Despite its importance, there is limited research on the effectiveness and challenges of hymn singing in these specific congregations.

However, as the dynamics of worship evolve, especially with the influence of contemporary Christian music. According to Sujatha (2024), there is a need to

evaluate the current state of hymn singing within these congregations. This evaluation aims to understand how hymns are being used, their impact on worshippers, and how they align with the broader goals of worship in these Baptist communities.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study is an Evaluation of Hymn Singing in the Baptist Churches of Lagos East and Central Conferences in Nigeria between 2015-2025

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Explore the historical development of hymn singing in congregational worship within the Baptist Church in Nigeria
2. Examine the challenges affecting hymn singing in selected Baptist Churches between 2015 and 2025, and propose effective solutions
3. Document (through tonic-solfa and staff notation) transcribe, translate, and analyze selected traditional hymns and contemporary worship songs, using music software applications, for posterity.

Research Design

The research design for this study is a descriptive survey design that combines both qualitative and quantitative methods. This mixed-methods approach is appropriate for evaluating hymn singing practices, attitudes, participation, and transformations within the Baptist Churches of Lagos East and Central Conferences over the ten years from 2015 to 2025. A qualitative approach was used to explore the spiritual, cultural, and theological significance of hymn singing through interviews, focus group discussions, and observation of worship services. A quantitative approach was used to obtain measurable data on hymn usage, frequency, participation levels, and trends across different churches and demographics through questionnaires and statistical analysis.

The population comprises all Baptist Churches under the Lagos East and Central Conferences of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, including:

- Pastors and music ministers
- Choir members and church organists
- Worshippers/congregants
- Church music committee leaders

- Hymnal editors (where applicable)

A combination of purposive and stratified random sampling techniques was used. Purposive sampling was used to select churches with active music ministries or historical significance in hymn use. Stratified sampling was used to ensure representation across age groups, genders, and church sizes in both conferences. Approximately 15 churches (7 from Lagos East and 8 from Lagos Central), with at least 10–15 participants per church, totaling 150–200 respondents. Structured and semi-structured questionnaires were used to gather quantitative data on hymn usage, frequency, preferences, and changes over time. Interview guides were used for pastors, music directors, and long-standing members to gather insights on doctrinal and worship implications of hymn singing. Focus group discussion guides were used with choir members to discuss performance practices and the congregational response.

The observation checklist was used to record the use, placement, and participation in hymns during live worship services. The instruments were vetted by experts in church music, liturgical studies, and research methodology to ensure content validity. A pilot study was used to conducted in two churches not included in the main study to test reliability and clarity of instruments. Internal consistency of questionnaire responses was tested using Cronbach's alpha. Primary data was collected directly through administered questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Secondary data was collected through church bulletins, hymnals, annual reports, and archival materials from 2015 to 2025.

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages, frequencies, mean scores) and inferential statistics (ANOVA, chi-square tests) to determine the significance of trends and differences between regions or demographics. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically using content analysis to extract patterns, beliefs, and values associated with hymn singing practices. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed. Data were used solely for academic purposes, following institutional ethical guidelines and the Nigerian Baptist Convention's protocol.

Discussion and Findings

4.1. Objective 1: To Explore the Historical Development of Hymn Singing in Congregational Worship within the Baptist Church in Nigeria

The historical development of hymn singing in congregational worship within the Baptist Church in Nigeria is deeply rooted in both indigenous and Western influences. The Baptist denomination, introduced to Nigeria in the mid-19th century by missionaries from the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) of the United States, emphasized hymn singing as a core aspect of worship. Hymn singing in Nigerian Baptist churches began with the arrival of the first Baptist missionaries, such as Thomas Jefferson Bowen, in 1850. These missionaries introduced Western hymnody, primarily drawn from American and British Baptist traditions. Early hymnals used were translations of English hymns, reflecting themes of salvation, grace, and Christian living.
As Baptist congregations grew, there was a need to translate hymns into indigenous languages, particularly Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa, to enhance congregational participation. By the early 20th century, Nigerian Baptist leaders worked on adapting hymns to local musical styles, incorporating indigenous melodies and rhythmic structures while retaining the doctrinal essence of traditional hymns. The Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC), established in 1914, played a pivotal role in hymn development by compiling hymnals suited to the Nigerian context. The introduction of the Baptist Hymnal further solidified structured hymn singing in worship services. Baptist theological institutions, such as the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary (NBTS), also contributed by training church leaders in music and hymnody.

From the late 20th century to the present, contemporary worship songs, influenced by Pentecostal and evangelical movements, have gained popularity in Nigerian Baptist churches. This shift has led to a blending of traditional hymns with modern gospel music, creating a diverse worship experience. However, some concerns have emerged regarding the dilution of traditional hymn singing in favor of contemporary praise and worship styles. Between 2015 and 2025, the role of hymn singing in Baptist congregational worship has continued to evolve, with digital technology playing a crucial role in the dissemination of hymns. Churches now utilize projectors, digital

hymnals, and online worship resources to enhance congregational singing. Efforts are also being made to preserve traditional hymns through music education and archival documentation.

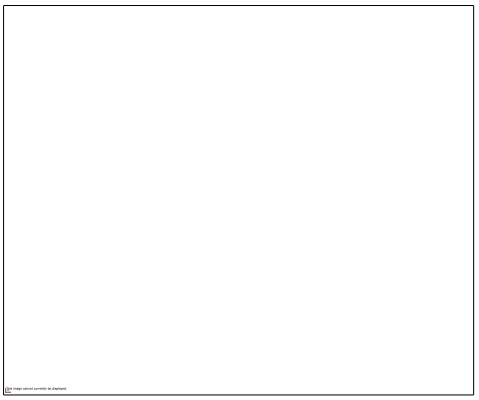


Plate 1: An interview with Rev. Dr. Samuel Oyewole of the Ijero Baptist Church, Lagos Central Baptist Conference.
Source: Researcher

Rev. Dr. Samuel Oyewole emphasized that hymns are an integral part of the Baptist liturgy. He incorporates two hymns per service, in addition to praise sessions. He further stressed that hymns are timeless and spiritually inspired, and their messages are divinely revealed to the composers. Only spiritually relevant contemporary songs should be included in church worship. Hymn singing remains a significant aspect of Baptist worship in Nigeria, balancing historical traditions with contemporary expressions. The ongoing challenge is maintaining this balance while ensuring that hymns continue to serve their theological, spiritual, and cultural purposes in congregational worship.

4.2. Objective 2: To Examine the Challenges Affecting Hymn Singing in Selected Baptist Churches Between 2015 and 2025, and Propose Effective Solutions

Hymn singing has been a fundamental aspect of worship in Baptist churches in Nigeria. However, between 2015 and 2025, several challenges have affected its practice. These challenges range from cultural shifts to technological

influences and changing worship preferences. Below is an examination of these challenges and potential solutions to address them.

(a) Overview of the Challenges

Many Baptist churches have embraced contemporary praise and worship songs, often influenced by Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. This shift has led to a decline in the use of traditional hymns during congregational worship. Younger generations are more inclined towards modern gospel music, which they find more engaging and emotionally expressive. Many church choirs and congregants lack formal training in hymn singing, music notation, and harmony, making it difficult to perform hymns effectively. The decline of music literacy in churches has led to a preference for simpler, repetitive contemporary songs rather than structured hymns.

The rise of digital worship, including online services and streaming, has changed how music is presented. Some churches rely on pre-recorded songs, reducing the emphasis on live congregational hymn singing. The absence of physical hymnals in many churches, due to reliance on projected lyrics, has weakened the tradition of using hymn books. Many young church members find hymns outdated and less engaging compared to contemporary worship music. The formal and structured nature of hymns is often perceived as rigid compared to the dynamic and free-flowing style of modern gospel music. Some churches lack skilled instrumentalists who can effectively accompany hymn singing, leading to uninspiring or poorly rendered hymns. The improper use of modern instruments can also distort the traditional essence of hymns.

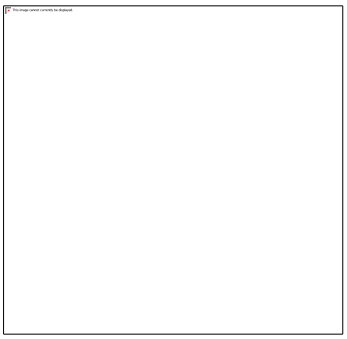


Plate 2: An interview with Rev. Dr. Akin Oyewopo
Araromi Baptist Church, Molony,
Lagos Central Baptist Conference.
Source: Researcher

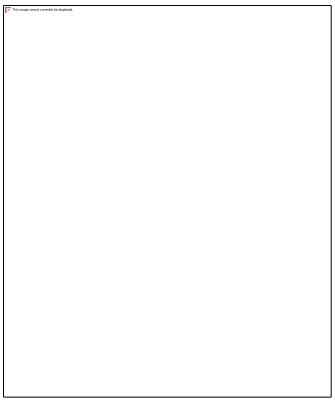


Plate 3: An interview with Rev Mrs Bisi Oyewopo:
Araromi Baptist Church, Molony,
Lagos Central Baptist Conference.
Source: Researcher

In the selected church, according to the response, we used four (4) hymns before but now we have reduced it to two (2) hymns. Some hymns remain in English without adequate translations into local languages, making them difficult for non-English speakers to fully engage with. Efforts to translate hymns have sometimes resulted in the loss of meaning or difficulty in matching lyrics to original melodies. They stated that in the past, the church used to sing two hymns per service and also held dedicated hymn services that attracted large congregations. However, currently, only one hymn is included in each service, and the hymn service has been discontinued. Meanwhile, contemporary songs are increasingly being incorporated into worship.

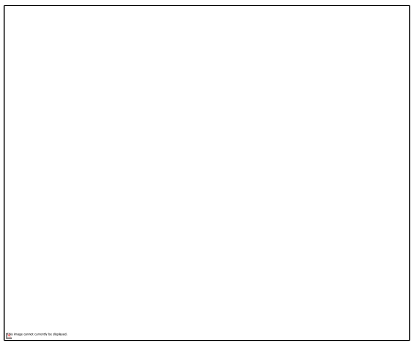


Plate 14: Interview with the Youth Pastor of Shepherdhill Baptist Church, Obanikoro of Lagos East Baptist Conference. Source: Researcher
Source: Researcher

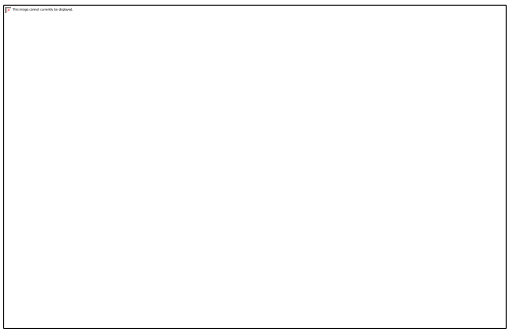


Plate 15: Interview with the Deacons in First Baptist Church, Lagos. Hymn Singing in Churches of Lagos East Baptist Conference.

(b) Challenges of Hymn Singing in Contemporary Baptist Worship

Lack of knowledge of the tunes of many of the hymns. Many church members, including pastors, are not familiar with hymn singing from childhood and hence do not know the tunes of the hymns. Even today, many do not use the opportunity of family devotions and other church meetings to sing hymns. This is also absent in our mission schools. Church members no longer have personal copies of hymnals; hence, singing hymns is limited to when hymnals are available, if at all, and they know how to sing the hymns. Many members lack a deep understanding of some of the words we sing in hymns, e.g., BH 3: "All Creatures of Our God and King" by St. Francis of Assisi. In stanza 1, lines 4-5, "Thou burning sun with golden beam, Thou silver moon with softer gleam." Stanza 1, line 1, Dear Mother Earth, who day by day." If this is the case, singing such will not appeal to them.

Instrumental accompaniments these days compete with the message that hymns carry, such that what we do mostly when singing such familiar hymns is dancing rather than meditating on the message of the song. Examples are BH 349: I am Thine, O Lord; BH 357: "Take My Life"- a hymn of consecration; BH 415: "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus." Singing of choruses to the detriment of the use of hymns in worship is now rampant. This is possibly because choruses seem easier to learn and use. This is apart from its liveliness and

appeal to dance. Opportunities to learn new hymns are not always provided for in churches anymore. Even some of the hymns earlier learned are no longer used because of choruses. Examples are BH 2: "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling; BH 11: "We Praise Thee, O God, Our Redeemer"; BH 54: "God of Our Fathers, Whose Almighty Hand," BH 427: "The Master Hath Come." The question is how many of us still use these in our order of worship? Or when last did you use any of these? Related to 6 above is that some pastors, as the major worship leaders, do not know the tunes of many of the hymns, due to obvious reasons. The church therefore resorts to occasional use of hymns or they repeat the same hymns regularly or do not use them at all.

Also, some pastors do not give hymn singing the importance it deserves, so they do not provide hymn singing training for their choristers, or conduct hymn festivals or a service of hymns. Singing of the hymns that we know wrongly does not make hymn singing good enough in worship. BH 491: "Now Thank We All our God"; BH 107: "The Strife is O'er, The Battle Done" etc. The challenge of no parallel hymnal in the denomination. Many known English hymns that we love to sing do not have the Yoruba or local language translations and vice versa. This makes hymn singing in combined services or public worship a challenge. Where the translations are available, there is again the challenge of no one-to-one correspondence of the stanzas in terms of numbering and message. Examples include BH 357/YBH 273: "Take My Life" of 4 stanzas /"Gba Aye Mi Oluwa" of 6 stanzas. BH 299: "Sweet Peace, The Gift of God's Love" of 3 stanzas/YBH 631 "Alaafia, Ebun Ife T'Olorun" of 4 stanzas.

Examples that are not in the translations, either way, are BH152: Crown Him With Many Crowns, BH 94: At the Cross, YBH 480: Odun Miran ti Koja, YBH 37: "Ose Ose Rere", YBH 257: "Olorun Mi Bojuwo Mi," BH 305: "Take the Name of Jesus With You," BH 355: "Have Thine Own Way Lord," Bh 354: "Thou My Everlasting Portion," BH 6: "Praise to the Lord, The Almighty," BH 213: "Though Your Sins Be as Scarlet," BH 216: "I Am Resolved," YBH 188: "Olugbala Gbohun Mi," etc.

Some hymns in the English and the Yoruba hymnals, for example, do not have the same number of stanzas, e.g., BH 20: (4 stanzas)/YBH 8: (6 stanzas). Because only a few hymns are not known by worship planners, those known are overused, thereby leading to boredom in hymn singing. Poor hymn-leading and conducting skills are other problems in worship today. The absence of good organists and music ministers to play correctly and lead hymns meaningfully is another challenge. Illiteracy on the part of choir leaders makes them unlearned in the rudiments of music. A lack of understanding of the message of the hymns we sing affects our interest in singing. Cutting down on stanzas to be sung to gain time during worship is another one.

(c) Proposed Solutions

Church leadership should create a structured worship plan that integrates both traditional hymns and contemporary songs. Special hymn sessions or blended worship services can ensure that hymns remain a core part of worship. Organizing hymn workshops and choir training sessions can improve hymn singing and musical literacy among congregants. Baptist theological institutions and seminaries should emphasize hymnody as part of ministerial and music training. Churches should digitize hymnals and develop mobile apps or online platforms where members can access hymn lyrics, audio, and sheet music. Incorporating high-quality hymn renditions in virtual worship services can sustain interest in hymn singing.

Arranging hymns with modern instrumentation while maintaining their melodic and lyrical integrity can appeal to younger congregants. Encouraging youth choirs and contemporary gospel musicians to perform hymns in a way that resonates with modern listeners. Investing in skilled organists, pianists, and choir directors who understand hymn accompaniment can improve the quality of hymn singing. Training musicians in traditional and modern approaches to hymn performance. Expanding the translation of hymns into indigenous languages while preserving their original meaning and musical structure. Encouraging the composition of indigenous hymns that align with Baptist worship traditions.

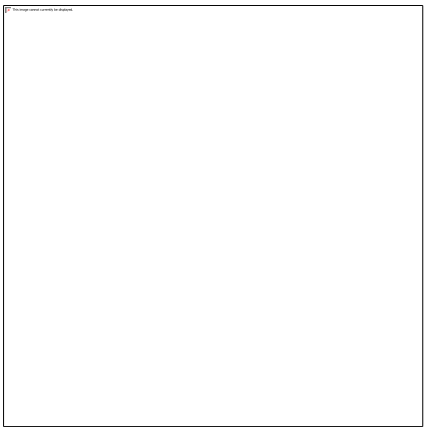


Plate 4: An Interview with
Rev. Dr. Mrs Omomola
New Heritage Baptist Church, Lagos East Baptist Conference
Source: Researcher

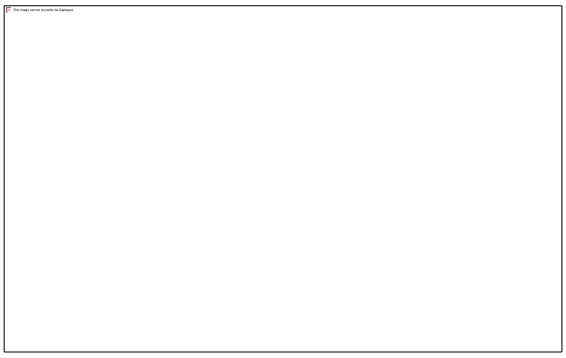
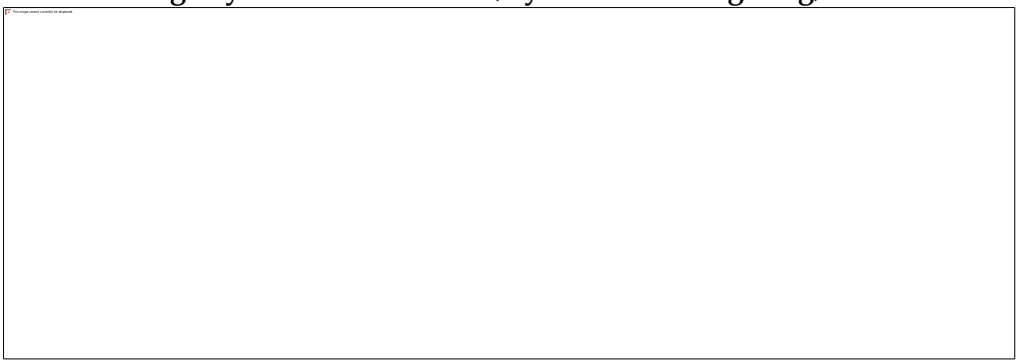


Plate 5: An Interview with
Deaconess Adebimpe Akinsola
First Baptist Church, Ikorodu: Lagos East Baptist conference.
Source: Researcher

She believes that hymns are divinely inspired, and despite being written centuries ago, their messages remain fresh, valid, inspiring, and relevant today. She encouraged churches to dedicate more time to hymn singing, though she is not entirely opposed to contemporary music and choruses. However, she noted that not all contemporary songs are suitable for the church or individuals, as many lack lasting impact. Additionally, she emphasized that hymn singing provides inspiration, strength, comfort, and deliverance, sharing her personal testimony as a living witness to its transformative power. While hymn singing in Baptist churches has faced challenges between 2015 and 2025, strategic efforts in education, technology, and worship planning can revitalize its role in congregational worship. By maintaining a balance between tradition and modernity, Baptist churches can ensure that hymns continue to serve their spiritual and doctrinal purpose while remaining relevant to all generations.

4.3. Objective 3: To Document (Through Tonic-Solfa and Staff Notation) Transcribe, Translate, and Analyze Selected Traditional Hymns and Contemporary Worship Songs, for Posterity.

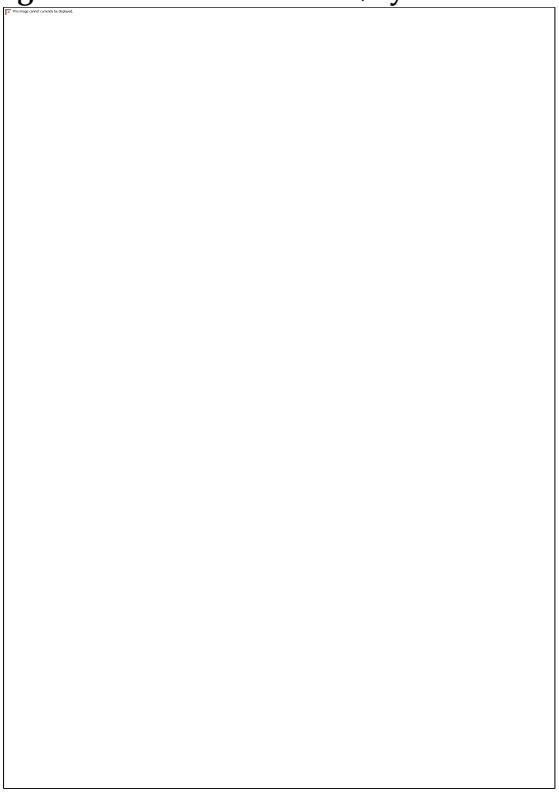
Hymn 1: O Magnify the Lord with Me (Hymn of Thanksgiving)



Structural Analysis

Title: O Magnify the Lord with Me (Hymn of Thanksgiving)
Composer: Unknown
Time Signature: 4/4
Home Note: Common Time
Form: Antiphonal
Scale: Diatonic
Texture: Polyphonic
Melodic Expression: Conjunct Motion
Rhythm: Quadruple Time
Performance Force: Voice and Instruments
Measures: 14 bars
Textual Analysis: It is the hymn of Thanksgiving

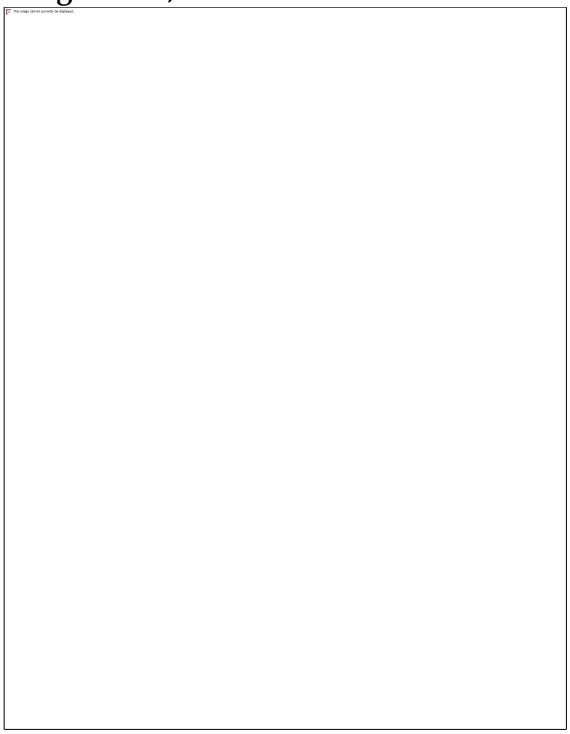
Song 2: How Great Thou Art (Hymn of Thanksgiving)
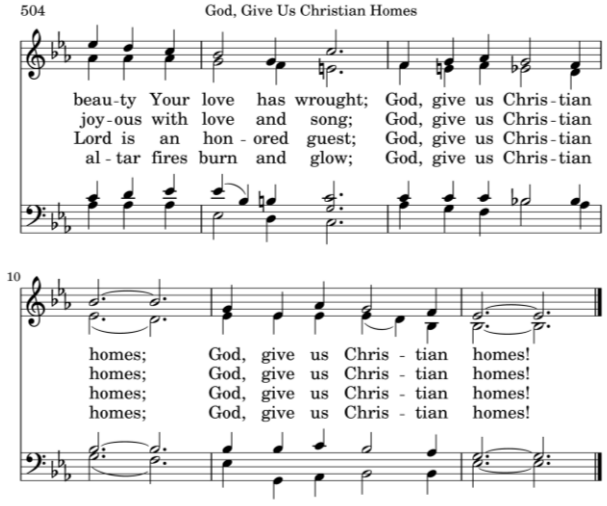


STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

Title: How Great Thou Art
Composer: Carn Boberg
Time Signature: 4/4
Home Note: B flat
Form: Antiphonal
Scale: Diatonic
Texture: Polyphonic
Melodic Expression: Conjunct Motion
Rhythm: Quadruple Time
Performance Force: Voice and Instruments
Measures: 14 bars
Textual Analysis: It is the hymn of Praise/Thanksgiving

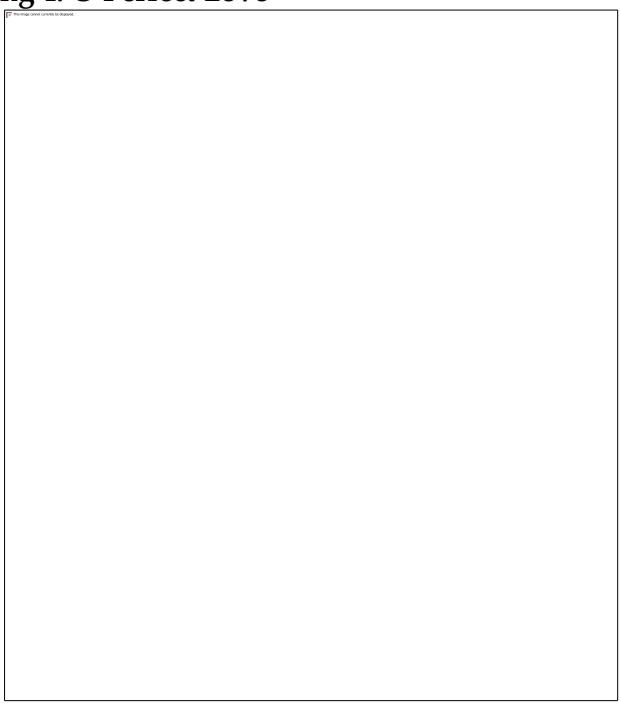
Song 3: God, Give Us a Christian Home





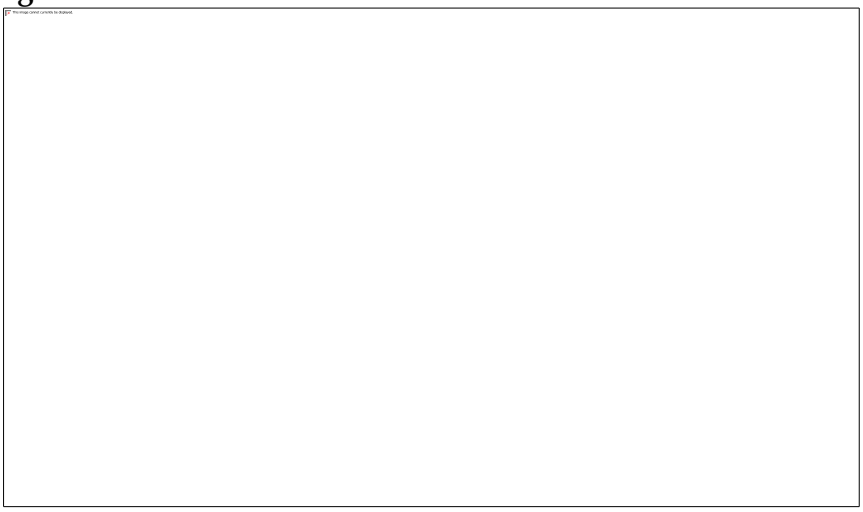
Structural Analysis
Title: God, Give Us a Christian Home
Composer: Baylus B. McKinney
Time Signature: 6/4
Home Note: E-flat
Form: Antiphonal
Scale: Diatonic
Texture: Polyphonic
Melodic Expression: Conjunct Motion
Rhythm: Compound Duple Time
Performance Force: Voice and Instruments
Measures: 14 bars
Textual Analysis: It is the hymn of the Christian Home/Marriage

Song 4: O Perfect Love



Structural Analysis
Title: O Perfect Love
Composer: Word: Dorothy B. Gurney/ Music by John Barnby
Time Signature: 4/4
Home Note: E-flat
Form: Antiphonal
Scale: Diatonic
Texture: Polyphonic
Melodic Expression: Conjunct Motion
Rhythm: Simple Quadruple Time
Performance Force: Voice and Instruments
Measures: 16 bars
Textual Analysis: It is the hymn of Love/Marriage

Song 5: Blessed Assurance



Structural Analysis
Title: Blessed Assurance (Hymn of Thanksgiving)
Composer: Words: Fanny J. Crosby/ Music: Mrs. Joseph F. Knapp
Time Signature: 9/8
Home Note: D-Major
Form: Antiphonal
Scale: Diatonic

Texture: Polyphonic
Melodic Expression: Conjunct Motion
Rhythm: Compound Triple Time
Performance Force: Voice and Instruments
Measures: 14 bars
Textual Analysis: It is the hymn of Assurance of Salvation

Conclusion

The evaluation of hymn singing in the Baptist Churches of Lagos East and Central Conferences between 2015 and 2025 highlights the significance of hymns as an essential component of congregational worship. Hymn singing has played a vital role in fostering spiritual growth, theological education, and communal unity within these churches. Over the years, various factors such as modernization, cultural influences, and technological advancements have shaped hymnody, leading to adaptations in style, instrumentation, and performance practice. Findings indicate that while traditional hymn singing remains a core aspect of worship, contemporary trends, including the incorporation of digital hymnals and modern gospel influences, have redefined the musical experience within Baptist congregations. However, challenges such as declining engagement with traditional hymns among younger worshippers, the impact of Western gospel music, and the diminishing use of indigenous hymnody have raised concerns about the future of hymn singing in these churches.

To sustain the rich heritage of hymn singing, church leaders, music directors, and congregants should promote a balanced approach that integrates traditional hymns with contemporary worship music. Additionally, the documentation and teaching of Baptist hymnology should be encouraged in theological institutions and church music programs to ensure continuity across generations. In conclusion, hymn singing remains a vital element of worship in the Baptist Churches of Lagos East and Central Conferences. With strategic efforts to preserve and revitalize hymn traditions while embracing innovation, hymn singing can continue to serve as a powerful medium for worship, spiritual edification, and community cohesion in the years to come**. The study offers practical recommendations for revitalizing hymn singing**

in these Baptist Churches based on the findings. These recommendations will benefit church leadership and music ministry teams seeking to engage their congregations more deeply in worship through music.

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Online Resources

1. _Journal of Church Music_ (online journal)
2. _Worship Music Journal_ (online journal)
https://www.singing.com
https://www.hymn.com