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**ROLES AND FUNCTIONS
OF CHRISTIAN HYMNS**

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TABLE OF CONTENT

Abstract	
Introduction	1
Chapter One Historical Background of Hymns in the Old Testament	7
A. When and Where it began?	7
B. The Importance of Hymns in Israel's Worship	9
C. Examples and Illustrations	10
Chapter Two Christian Hymns on the Gospel of Luke	15
A. The Magnificat	15
B. The Benedictus	19
C. The Gloria in Excelsis	20
D. The Nunc Dimittis	21
Chapter Three Hymns in the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa	23
A. Hymns and their roles	23
i. Hymn as a sermon	23
ii. Hymn as a prayer	24
iii. Hymn as a healer	25
B. Theology in Hymns	26
C. Hymns the Proclaimer of the Gospel	27
Conclusion	29
Bibliography	32

ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to address the significance of Hymns in worship. It examines the Biblical perspective using both the Old and the New Testaments as models to identify the functions and roles of Hymns in the life of christian believers. Illustrations and interpretations have been made to elaborate the theological implications in accordance with the context used. From here, this paper manages to relate to the current situation of Hymns within the local context.

Special attention is therefore given to the Hymns adopted by the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa. The paper identifies the origins of Hymns and their characteristics.

This paper intends to convince the christian believers particularly members of the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa that we should be flexible to the new trends of hymn, for however we sing it, there is always a theological message behind it. It is very important for one to sing it with true heart, soul and mind. All praise be go to God.

INTRODUCTION

Hymns are songs of praise that exalt and adore God as the One who rightly deserves thanksgiving, honour, glory, and power. Christian hymns aim at acknowledging the Almighty and Everlasting God, who creates and holds the world together; and pays homage to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. As one sings and ministers to the Lord in hymns, a reciprocal blessing comes upon the one paying homage.

Whenever people talk about hymns, the initial impression that comes to mind is, *hymns are church music*. This is no exception in the local context. Such impression derives from the understanding that hymns are songs of praise and thanksgiving that bring people together to worship God. Formally, this type of worship is practiced worldwide in Christian churches, and this gives us an idea of how church and hymns are related. If this is so, therefore, the composition of a hymn must reflect the nature of God both in words and content.

This leads us to the question of, what do we mean by *hymn*? Various definitions can be offered; but for this paper to stay focused, *hymn is a song of praise and thanksgiving*. This definition has the support of Harvey Guthrie, who writes, "*hymns are songs of praises in which God is glorified as God.*"¹ In this sense, it clearly spells out the uniqueness and the holiness of God whom the faithful believer honours and respects. God's holiness is related to His many other attributes, especially that He is the God of love; and therefore humanity should in return honour and respect Him. One way of showing this respect is praising God through singing hymns. Hymns therefore do acknowledge God's spiritual relationship with humanity whom he created. It reveals the response of humanity to all the good works God has done for his people.²

A good example of a hymn that adores the Creator is Hymn number 8 entitled, "*E lelei o mea uma a le Alii na ia fai*" in the Samoan hymnbook "*Pese ma Viiga.*"³ The main purpose of this hymn is to acknowledge God and His work through creation.

¹ Guthrie, H. Harvey, *Israel's Sacred Songs*. New York, Seabury Press; 1966. p.10

² Northcott, Cecil, *Hymns in Christian Worship*. London, Lutterworth Press; 1964. p.9

³ author unknown. *Pese ma Vi'iga*. Samoa, Malua Printing Press; 1909. p.7. *This is Hymnbook of the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa (CCCS).*

Furthermore, church hymns like psalms are classified as songs of praise and thanksgiving. However this does not mean that all psalms are hymnal, for there are other various classifications such as psalms of lament, of trust in God, royal psalms, and so forth, which marked different occasions. This paper, therefore, will focus only on hymnal psalms that reflect and express God's praises and thanksgiving.

It is certain that hymns play a vital and an integral role in worship. In fact, they were there at the beginning when the Hebrews first became aware of their covenantal relationship with their God.⁴ Certainly, hymns played a vital role in the spiritual and worshipping life of the people. Not only do they bring individuals together for worship, but also they are indications of personal responses to God's unconditional love.⁵ Such significance is evident in today's ministry.

This similar attitude, I suppose, was in the understanding of the first composers of the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa hymnbook. Rev. Vavae Toma,⁶ one of the composers of the latest hymnbook⁷ of the Church, reaffirmed that one of the intentions of "Pese ma Viiga", is to provide praises and thanksgiving to God, and to enable the heart to be joyful to His revelation.⁸ It is clear from this concern that the hymns recorded in this hymnbook are to direct attention, to praise, to honour, and to thank God for His love has been revealed to everyone. According to Toma, the words of each hymn reflect both the theological message and meaning of that particular hymn. By doing so, the words do become more effective in the minds and souls of the worshipper; and they are much more significant than the tunes.

For this reason, Toma affirms that the tunes which they have selected for each hymn in such hymnbook are final and should not be changed.⁹ In other words, this hymnbook is final for the use of

⁴ Deuteronomy 7:6-15. All biblical quotes and references used in this paper are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). See also Parker, I. J., Tenny, C. Merrill, White, Jr William, *Nelson's Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Bible Facts*. Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publisher; p.365.

⁵ Fiske, W. George, *The Recovery of Worship*. New York, Macmillan Company; 1931. p.132. See also Gordon Wakefield, "The Wesley Hymns on the Lord's Supper in History and Eucharistic Theology", in *Like a Two-Edged Sword*. Norwich, Canterbury Press; 1995. pp.139-140.

⁶ interview with Rev. Vavae Toma at his resident at Vaivase Tai Apia, Samoa (July 20, 2001, 3.00 p.m.)

⁷ author unknown, *Ina Pepese Ia*. Hong Kong, South China Printing Company; 1986. This current hymnbook of the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa is a collection of hymns and tunes from various authors and composers. The hymnbook contains also hymns and lyrics by Dr. Ueta Solomona, one of the compilers of *Ina Pepese Ia*.

⁸ author unknown, "Upu Tomua / Preface", in *Pese ma Vi'iga*. p.i

⁹ interview with Rev. Vavae Toma on 20 July 2001, 3.00 p.m.

the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa, and there is no place for any foreign tunes to be attached and used with these hymns. It is clear from Toma's intention that this hymnbook should be treated like the norm and standard, and must be used as if it is without any changes to it.

However, Toma's conception may not be the focus of certain groups and some individuals that have emerged today such as church choirs, youth groups, and even schools. Such groups have given changes to some of the hymns, both in tune and wording. They have even gone too far into the commercialization¹⁰ of hymns. The changes they make include giving new tunes (whether secular or *fa'asalemausau*) to the words of church hymns. This practice has led to the danger of belittling the importance of hymns in worship, thus losing out the theological message and application which the words themselves portray.

Despite the criticisms, most conservative church members,¹¹ including Vavae Toma, have raised questions pertaining to the commercialization of church hymns. Such practice plays an important role in proclaiming and spreading the gospel worldwide where the Samoans are. The practice of using new or modern tunes to church hymns can be a way of reviving hymns. It is a way that emphasizes the re-expressing of the same words and theology in a new and contextual thought.

This present study, however, will concentrate mainly on the historical background of hymns within the biblical framework of the Old and New Testament. I believe, it is important for us to know and understand the function and role of hymns within this period of time, so that we may be able to relate their importance to today's practice.

Evidently, all hymns in the 'Pese ma Vi'iga' hymnbook are bible oriented. This means that each hymn is topical and thematic. The words of hymns are written on and around a specific biblical topic or theme. In other words, each hymn in the hymnbook has a particular theology and theological message which it conveys and expresses. This is the reason why church hymns are not like just any other ordinary songs that any one can sing; but they are sacred hymns with spiritual and theological

¹⁰ This paper will not enter into the question of commercialization of church hymns - the tape recording of hymns to earn money, the misuse of church hymns for personal gain, the practice of mixing the words of church hymns with those of secular songs for everyday entertainment, the using of modern tunes that affect and lose the sacredness and theology of church hymn words, etc ... Instead, this paper will focus mainly on the theological aspect and emphasis of church hymns - church hymns are for praises and thanksgiving to God.

¹¹ I managed to interview a number of old church people about their view and opinions concerning the use of hymns.

meaning that adore, exalt, and give praises and thanksgiving to God the Creator. For this reason, therefore, church hymns should be sung from the heart, with a joyful attitude, with respect, and with honour, of the One God whom praises are directed to.

My objective in this paper is focused mainly on the **Role and Function of Christian Hymns**, particularly within the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa, and some of the challenges experienced today. Christian hymns play a significant role, and are integral aspect of worship within the Church communities. There has always been an adage within the Church that states, "*a church hymn can both be a prayer and a sermon; but a sermon and prayer can never be a hymn.*" This understanding is always in line with one church tradition that the hymn that follows the sermon in worship, must always have the same theme, theology, and application, with that of the sermon. In other words, the words and theology of the hymn following the sermon must agree and support the theological message of the preacher. The sermon and hymn must complement each other in terms of themes, of theology, and of application.

Christian hymns became known in Samoa since the arrival of missionaries, and they have become part of christian worship since then. However, the issue at hand today is the conflict between the conservative believers¹² (mostly old people) who insist on abiding with the old tunes of church hymns, and those (mostly teenaged group) who think it is about time to impose new changes to the tunes of hymns. Vavae Toma insists that this is the main reason why the latter group of people are leaving the mainline churches today, moving into the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches.¹³ Their claim is that, the mainline churches, are too conservative, in every aspect of their worship, including the singing of hymns.

The content of this paper is divided up into three chapters; hoping that the topics I have selected for each chapter will contribute one way or another to my stated goal. In other words, the three selected chapters will assist to enlighten, to explain, and to elaborate more clearly, more fully, and more profoundly, the different aspects of this paper.

¹² This group is made up mainly of the old people, who insist that hymns must not be tampered with. Hymns are sacred and holy, thus their words and tunes must not be changed. These people insist that the original words and tunes of church hymn must be strictly maintained. They give no room to changes and modifications.

¹³ interview on 20 July 2001

Chapter One examines and explains the **Historical Background of Hymns in the Old Testament**. Attention will be focused on the time and place when and where hymns originated. In addition, three examples of Old Testament hymns will be given as biblical basis to illustrate their purposes, their roles, and functions.

Chapter Two aims to identify and discuss the content of the four well known **Christian Hymns¹⁴ in the Gospel of Luke**. This will be done through exegetical work and interpretation of each hymn. It will also include Luke's intention and theological purpose behind each hymn.¹⁵

Chapter Three focusses and concentrates mainly on the **Role of Christian Hymns within the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa**. I hope to reflect on the various theological significances and implications of church hymns. The conservatives,¹⁶ on the one hand, believe that the original words and tunes of hymns should not be changed; while the liberals,¹⁷ on the other hand, believe that we should be more open-minded to the new methods and style concerning hymns today. Views and opinions of different individuals will therefore be mentioned.¹⁸

This paper closes with the '**Conclusion**' where all the loose ends will be brought and tied together. This final section aims to sum up the whole work; hoping that a solid and coherent conclusion may be reached concerning the use, the role, the function, and the significance, of church hymns in the worship and the spiritual life of both the people, and the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa.

Church hymns are very important to every christian. Through the hymns, the christian believers open up their hearts to God as they offer to Him their praises and thanksgiving, for all the kindness and goodness he has done and shown to humanity and to all his creation. Of course, the words of church hymns are much more important than their tunes; because the words convey and express forcefully, not only the theology and application of the hymns themselves; but the expressions and

¹⁴ These hymns are the Magnificat (1:46-55), the Benedictus (1:67-79), Gloria in Excelsis (2:14), and the Nunc Dimittis (2:29-32).

¹⁵ Ellis, Earle E., *The Gospel of Luke* (The New Century Bible Commentary Series). Grand Rapids, Marshall, Morgan and Scott; 1974. pp.40-41. Throughout this paper, I will not attempt to go beyond the acceptable New Testament tradition of Luke's authorship of the third Gospel.

¹⁶ See footnote 12 p.5.

¹⁷ These are the people who insist that there must be room for changes and modifications to church hymn words and tunes. These are the oppositions to the conservatives.

¹⁸ From interviews conducted, I have come to realize that there is a tension between those who believe in conserving the traditional style of hymns, and those who believe that we must be open-minded to the new trends, new methods, and modern styles of hymns.

emotions of the inner self and being of all christian believers to their God. The tunes serve only as the vehicle and medium that transmit the words of the hymns. In other words, the tunes may vary from time to time, according to the occasion and context; but the words of the hymns must remain the same; likewise its theology and theological application.

CHAPTER ONE

Historical Background of Hymns in the Old Testament

This chapter is focusses mainly on the historical background of christian hymns. Discussion will be directed on issues of origin, and the role of hymns in the worship of the Hebrew people. In addition, three Old Testaments hymns will be used as examples to illustrate the significance of theology contained in hymns. The importance of knowing the theological message in the words is essential for a person who participates in singing and praising the Lord.

A. *When and where it began?*

According to Wilson-Dickson, Christianity began in the midst of Jewish society.¹ In other words, the christian church was born out of the Jewish faith. From this understanding, it is inevitable that the first followers of the risen Lord wished to express their religious devotion in a way they were accustomed to and this included the use of religious songs.² At the same time, early Jews who were converted to Christianity, respected their custom and continued to live and worship in the community of their families and heritage. As Wilson-Dickson agrees:

The roots of their new faith were embedded in ancient practice, and they referred constantly in their writings to the Hebrew scripture whose prophecies they believed were fulfilled in the coming of Jesus the Messiah.³

From this conviction, it is clear that most of the early christian practices and customs were rooted in the Old Testament. Obviously, singing hymns was one example of these traditional practices that found their origin in the Old Testament.

Historically, the first recorded hymn in the bible is the Song of Moses.⁴ This view is agreed by various biblical scholars who also identified this song as a hymn, and believed to be one of the oldest

¹ Wilson-Dickson, Andrew, *A Brief History of Christian Music*. England, Lion Publishing; 1997. p.22.

² Bromiley, W. Geoffrey, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1982. p.788-790.

³ Wilson-Dickson. *Brief History of Christian Music*. p.22.

⁴ Exodus. 15:1-18

songs in the world.⁵ If this is the case, therefore, it is convenient to say that the original time of hymns in the Old Testament was about the time of Moses. Such period as recorded in the Bible was around 1250 B.C.⁶ Such period indicated the first time the people of Israel engaged themselves in worship and offered sacrifices to their God.

In relation to this, locations and places where people attended worship were easily recognized. These specific locations were called the sanctuaries or the holy places (cf. Ps; 65.2, 76.2, 84.3,5, 87.7, 95.2,6, 100.2,4, 134.1, 135.2, 138.2, Isa. 38.20). These sanctuaries were identified by the presence of the Ark of the Covenant that symbolized the presence of God. It was used to locate at various sanctuaries such as Bethel, Shiloh, and Dan.⁷ All of these places were locations of worship, where people were involved in singing and sacrificing to God.

Another contributing factor for identifying the origin of hymns was the specific occasions that arose within the Hebrew society. For instance, there were national and annual events which were characterized by singing and praising God. As Herman Gunkel states:

On these days, the people come together from near and far to the holy places, but a festival day is a real day of joy. The harvest has been brought in. So everyone is gathered in at the sanctuary in their best clothes and in the happiest mood. They present gifts to God, which they have vowed to present during the preceding year. In all of these worship activities, as in the meaningful images which fill every great sanctuary, the heart very delightfully perceives the nearness of Yahweh. The thanksgiving songs of Israel are related to the hymns. These thanksgiving songs were performed at the great public thanksgiving celebrations, when once again a difficult crisis was fortunately weathered with the help of God.⁸

It is clear from this statement that hymns always accompanied a specific occasion in Israel. This tradition was prominent especially in the ceremonies involving thanksgiving and praising God. The

⁵ Jamieson, Robert; Fausset, R. A. Brown, David, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*. 1871. (information from Internet)

⁶ Holladay, *Psalms through Three Thousand Years*. p.18.

⁷ refer to note 6.

⁸ Gunkel, Herman, *An Introduction to the Psalms*. Macon Georgia, Mercer University Press; 1998. p.61.

mood of the people was marked with respectful manner when approaching the sanctuaries. They always make sure that they were at their best attitude and manners when attending these occasions. Obviously, it was a symbol of respect and awe before God.⁹

B. *The Importance of Hymns in Israel's Worship*

It is appropriate to understand the relationship between the people of Israel and the God they worshipped. Actually, it was a mutual relationship when Moses initially informed them of their divine calling by the Lord their God.

that is, for you are a people holy to the Lord your God, the Lord your God has chosen you out of all the people on earth to be his people, his treasured possession. It was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors.

(Deut 7:6-8a)

This statement indicates the selecting of Israel by God to be His chosen people. As a treasured possession, God, out of His own free will called Israel to be holy and pure before the Lord not because of any special favor. This inter-relationship was founded on the covenant that God made with their forefathers. Therefore, it was that eagerness and willingness that evoked the people's heart and desire to respond. Practically, they responded through praising and worshiping God with thankfulness and awe.¹⁰

Thus, it is appropriate to define worship in terms of response. The people participated in worship in order to respond to God. It was God who had chosen them out of all nations of the world. Evidently, the people's worship was their immediate reaction in expressing thankfulness to the faithful God. The God who intervened and reacted on behalf of His people.¹¹ Therefore, their response through worship was portrayed by singing and praising.

⁹ Kuntz, Kenneth J. *Worship and the Hebrew Bible*. England, Sheffield Academic Press Limited; 1999. p.149-152.

¹⁰ Kuntz, *Worship and the Hebrew Bible*. p.149-152.

¹¹ Kuntz, *Worship and the Hebrew Bible*. p.149.

From this understanding, hymns played a vital role in Hebrew worship. For instance, in temple worship itself, hymns functioned as a sacrifice of praise, it accompanied the offering of sacrifice.¹² This act of sacrifice was determined to be the highlight of the most beautiful and most profound days of Israel when they experienced the majesty, greatness, and grace of their God with delight and humility.¹³ Whoever appeared before God to praise must think of God as a loving God. Singing was not just an ordinary activity to satisfy one's own wishes.¹⁴ Practically, singing and praising as a response to the loving God was Israel's deepest expression of her faith in thankfulness.

C. *Examples and Illustrations*

i. **The Song of Moses** (Exodus 15:1-18)

This is the Song of Moses which he introduced as a testimony of his gratitude to God.¹⁵ The song itself is classified as a holy song,¹⁶ which appeared to honour God, to exalt His name and to celebrate His praise. It is appropriate to have this song classified as a holy Song, because God alone is Holy.¹⁷ God was worthy of praises. God's divine intervention was marked by His strength and might that brought about salvation for the people of Israel. God's power over nature is clearly manifested when He parted the Red Sea and let His people to pass. There was, of course, no other god but the God of Israel who could provide salvation for the world.¹⁸

The opening verses of the song simply state the motive of the singer, and the various characteristics of God. Indeed, He triumphed victoriously, and became the people's hope for salvation. Therefore the singer praised and exalted His name, for *the Lord is a warrior* (cf. v.3). These verses opened the scene and directed attention to no one, but God alone.

¹² Leonard, R.C. "Music and Worship in the Bible" An article from the Internet. September 2001; p.1

¹³ Gunkel, *An Introduction to the Psalms*. p.59-61

¹⁴ Gunkel, *An Introduction to the Psalms*. p. 79.

¹⁵ Calvin, John, *The Ages Digital Library Commentary*; Ages Digital Library; (information from Internet) ©1998. p.194.

¹⁶ Calvin, *The Ages Digital Library Commentary*. p.195

¹⁷ Henry, Matthew, johnhurt.com; 2000 last updated May 5, 2000 created by johnhurt.com. (information from Internet) . page number unidentified in documentation.

¹⁸ Jamieson, Fausset & Brown. *Commentary on the Whole Bible*. 1871.(information from Internet)

Verses 4 to 10 indicated the destruction of Pharaoh's army in the sea, when the mighty power of God was displayed. This was clearly seen in verse 6; "*Your right hand, O Lord glorious in power, your right hand O Lord, shattered the enemy.*" It was God alone who provided the action. Apparently, he had control over nature in fulfilling His divine plan. Hence it was clearly manifested in this present situation.¹⁹

Verse 11 illustrated a crucial question about the mighty and power of God. *Who is like you, O Lord among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor, doing wonders?* Someone who was equally related to the majesty of God could provide an answer to these questions. In this case, according to the singer, God was incomparable. There was no one like Him. He was in a category of His own.

The closing verses (vs.13-18) of the song appeared as a reminder to the people about the guiding hands of God. In their long journey, they met several oppositions on the way, but it was God who protected and delivered them from the enemy. God's steadfast Love never faded or failed in any moment, but remained constantly with them.

This song provided a vivid picture of God as a redeemer and a deliver for the people of Israel. His intervention through history and His involvement with the affairs of the world evoked ones desire to return the glory and giving thanks to Him. This was a primary example of God who took the initiative. He initiated the salvation for the people, therefore, He was worthy to be honoured and praised.²⁰

Theologically, the song of Moses was a song of praise, where the singer engaged in offering thanksgiving to God for His generous love shown by delivering the people of Israel from the enemy. Evidently, God's love was reflected in the salvation of His people. The God of Israel was the God of Love, His presence in arduous situation like this, was mainly for the purpose of rescuing and delivering His people.

¹⁹ refer to note, 18.

²⁰ Jamieson, Fausset & Brown, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*. 1871. (information from Internet).

ii. Psalms 103 : 1 - 5

This psalm is an example of a Psalm of Thanksgiving to God that focusses mainly on God. The Psalmist engages himself in this act, because of the way he reacts and responses to God. In this case, his understanding and reflection of God's love is clearly evident in His words of praise. The theology portrayed in this hymn is clearly stated by the author, especially his understanding and knowledge of God.

The first five verses contain the message and theology of the hymn.²¹ Apparently, God's role is simply stated by the way the author has managed to discuss the characteristic of God and how He related to the people. Indeed, the main purpose of praise and thanksgiving is to acknowledge the goodness of God for the people.

According to Walter Brueggemann, the opening phrase, *bless the Lord, O my soul*, in verses 1 and 2 is a common formula of psalms.²² That is, God's name is firstly stated and acknowledged by the author. In this present situation, it is appropriate for the author to say so, because his emphasis on praise and thanksgiving is seen clearly in the sense that God's name should be honoured before anything in this world. That is, the psalm is a self exhortation to praise and to thank God.

The phrase, *all that is within me*, according to Arnold Anderson, literally means, *all my inward parts*, i.e., my whole being.²³ The psalmist explicitly illustrates how he is involved in praising God. To him, it was an act of giving all and offering the whole person to the Lord. In other words, singing hymns was not just an act of singing; but it was singing with the whole mind, body, and soul to praise the Lord.

Verses 3 to 5 indicate that God is the God who forgives and redeems His people. This is certainly true, not only for the physical needs but also the spirit of a person. The God of Israel is the God whose love is far more exceeding than His wrath. Theologically speaking, Psalm 103 is a Hymn of praise intended for an individual's response of praise and thanksgiving to God.

²¹ Brueggemann, Walter. *The Message of the Psalm*. Minneapolis, Minnesota; Augsburg Publishing House. 1984. p.160.

²² Brueggemann, Walter. *The Message of the Psalm*. p.160.

²³ Anderson, Albert Arnold, *Psalms* (New Century Bible Commentary Series). England, Marshall, Morgan, & Scott. 1995. (reprinted) p.795-796.

iii. Psalms 117

This psalm is an example of a hymn of praise and thanksgiving. It is the briefest or the shortest hymn in the psalms²⁴. It consists of an introductory call to praise the Lord, followed by the main part of the hymn, that gives the reason why God should be praised. Theologically, this psalm reflects the sense of respecting the Lord and honouring Him. The words indicate that the main reason of praise, was because God's love was steadfast and faithful. In this case, the psalmist honours and praises God for His faithful and steadfast love.

According to Brueggemann, this hymn is presented in a twofold stanza.²⁵ First is a summon to praise God; and second is the reason of joy. The first part is marked by the words of praise and thanksgiving. Both the verbs, *praise* and *extol* represent actions of the subjects - the nations and people. Hence, the nouns, nations and people, refer to the people of Israel who were summoned to give praise to their Lord.

The second element on the reason of praise is introduced by the preposition "for." According to Brueggemann, the basis of trust in Yahweh's steadfast love and faithfulness is clear. It is probably a general summing up of the whole faith tradition of the people of Israel.

The important of words and its message is very significant in determining the theology and meaning of hymns. In other words, by discovering the true meaning of the words and their message, it will assist a person who sings to understand not only the perception of singing and praising, but also the reason of praising. In this hymn, all the people and nations were given the summon to praise the Lord, for His love remains faithful forever.

The above discussion illustrates both the places and the occasions where hymns and psalms were first experienced in Israel. It was during the time of Moses, when the people of Israel were delivered safely by God where the hymns of praise were originally experienced. Indeed, it was during that occasion and context that they praised God and offered Him thanksgiving.

Special occasions and events marked the places where the people attended for worship and praising God. Those specific locations were known to the Israelites as sanctuaries, and the most common

²⁴ Anderson, A. A. *Psalms (73-150)* (New Century Bible Commentary Series). p.160

²⁵ Brueggemann. *The message of the Psalms*. p.160

sanctuaries during the period of the Old Testaments were Bethel, Shiloh and Dan. In such locations, the people normally engaged themselves in singing and praising God. There was no doubt about the mood and emotions of the people during such occasions; but the most notable of them was the way they responded and associated themselves to God.

The three examples above have indicated both the origin and roles of hymns in the worship of the Hebrews as well as the importance and significance of hymns during the Old Testament time. The words and content of such hymns place the focus and emphasis mainly on the theology which the hymns convey and express. The hymns, as we have seen, associated to certain occasions and events within the lives of the people of Israel.

CHAPTER TWO

Christian Hymns in the Gospel of Luke

Although, there are evidences of hymns in other New Testament books,¹ the present study focuses primarily on the four hymns in Luke's Gospel. Discussion, interpretation, and reflections specifically on their theological purposes. Hence, this task of interpretation is done in the order in which the hymns are recorded in the Gospel.

A. The **MAGNIFICAT** [Luke 1 : 46 - 55]

Luke attributes this hymn to Mary the mother of Jesus.² It is the first of the four hymns in Luke's Gospel. Like other hymns, the **Magnificat** has a theological purpose and specific intention of composition. This affirmation according to Alan Culpepper, is that;

the Magnificat is a "song of praise" which Mary sang to praise God and also her personal reply to the words of Elizabeth.³

This statement is also cited by John MacArthur as an eloquent psalm.⁴ In other words, it is a powerful and articulate hymn in terms of language and expression, that reflects Mary's present situation as a representative of the poor and the needy in the society.

In a larger scale, the Magnificat is a hymn where Mary became a symbolic figure for the nation of Israel; that is, she represented the poor and the oppressed who were living in poor and unfortunate conditions.⁵ By representing Israel in this way, the content of the Magnificat clarifies that Mary was very familiar with the Old Testament. The Magnificat symbolizes not only her familiarity with the Old Testament but also indicated that her heart and mind were filled with the Word of God.⁶

¹ cf. Mk.14:26; Acts 16:25; Phi.2; Eph. 5:14; Titus 3:4-7; Rev. 4:11. (partial examples of references)

² Ellis, *the Gospel of Luke* p.75. This view is also supported by various New Testament scholars such as: Goulder and Sanderson, Schurmann, Brown and Marshall as stated by Stephen Farris in his book *The Hymns of Luke's Infancy Narratives*. p.109.

³ Culpepper, R. Alan; *The Gospel of Luke*. Nashville Tennessee; Abingdon Press; 1995. pp.54 -56. This view also supports by Raymond E. Brown in his article named "The Birth of the Messiah". (this reference by Brown is from the internet).

⁴ MacArthur, John; "Tabletalk on the Magnificat" p.1-2. (information from Internet)

⁵ Brown E. Raymond; "The Birth of the Messiah" THE MAGNIFICAT; (information from the Internet)

⁶ see note 4.

Certainly, the Magnificat is a hymn which was composed from a number of Old Testament quotations. As reaffirmed by Culpepper, every line are echoes of the Scriptures.⁷ In this case, Luke seems to depend on references that he borrowed from the Hebrew scripture. For example, there are references from the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets, integrated within the hymn. In fact, the Magnificat contains allusions of Hannah's prayers (1 Samuel 1:11, 2:1-10). Following are examples of Old Testament references that are reflected in the content of the Magnificat.

Luke 1	Old Testament
"my soul glorifies the Lord"	1 Sam 2:1; Pss 34:2; Pss 35:9; Isa 61:10
"and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour"	Isaiah 12:2; Isaiah 45:21
"he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant"	1 Sam 1:11; Pss 102:17; Pss 136:23
"from now on all generations will call me blessed"	Genesis 30:13; Malachi 3:12
"from the mighty One has done great things for me"	Pss 71:19; Pss 126:3
"Holy is His Name"	1 Sam 2:2; Pss 99:3; Pss 111:9

The given examples illustrate how Mary was very familiar with the Old Testament. The indication that displays shows how Mary was very selective with the references she chose. More over she was very inclusive in the sense that she tried to use as many references from the Old Testament for her composition as possible.

Significantly, it is convenient to discuss the content of this hymn by describing Mary's own personal reaction, and her response to the divine message she received from the angel of God. The privilege that is given to her no doubt has been the cherished hope of any Jewish mother. In fact, the opening verse clarifies her immediate reaction about the whole incident.

The phrase, "*my soul magnifies the Lord*," has a significant theological meaning. The word, **soul**, is from the Greek word ψυχή. It has various definitions that apply to the context that is used. In this verse, the word **soul** is described as, "*the seat of the conscious element in man, that by which he perceives,*

⁷ Culpepper, *The Gospel of Luke*, p.55. This view also accepted by other New Testament scholars such as; John MacArthur, Raymond E. Brown, and C.F.Evans.

reflects, feels, desires."⁸ As a recipient of the divine blessing from God, Mary delightedly responded with great respect to her calling. Therefore, she poured out her heart and soul to the Lord and magnified His name.

The word to **magnify** describes Mary's motive about the whole event. This is an important term used by Luke in this hymn. Luke's own perception of Mary's response is unique in a way. Thus, the main question is, why did Luke use the verb 'to magnify' instead of the usual verb, 'to sing,' or 'to praise,' to describe Mary's response to her divine calling? The verb to **magnify** is from the Greek word μεγαλύνω which means to 'make great;' however, Farris stated that the verb μεγαλύνω means "to declare great rather than to make great."⁹ Therefore, Mary's response is marked by her declaration of the greatness of God.

The word of praise continues in the next verse, "And my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour." Mary's attitude toward the divine messenger, and her joyful response again is revealed in this phrase. **My spirit** is the writer's indication of the singer as none other than Mary herself. The word **spirit** is from the Greek word πνεύμα. Its original meaning according to Renn Stephen is; "it primarily denotes the wind; also breath; then, especially the spirit, which, like the wind, is invisible, immaterial and powerful."¹⁰

In this context, the word **spirit** has a similar connotation with the word **soul**. Soul means, "spirit is the sentiment element in man, that by which he perceives, reflects, feels, desires."¹¹ It is Mary's spirit where the feeling of joy and happiness is dwelled. Even more, it is her spirit that her deep sense of gratitude and rejoice are kept and controlled. In due time, that spirit is poured out and manifested before the Lord. Mary's spirit has no room for fear or despair but only for great joy and happiness. In Mary's case, praising God is one's act of being satisfied by the inspiration of the goodness and spirit of God.

From her spirit came rejoice. She rejoices before the Lord. The verb **rejoice** is from the Greek word ἀγαλλιάω which means "to celebrate, or to praise." It is also equivalent to the Greek word

⁸ Renn Stephen (Senior Editor), *Vine's, Amplified Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Iowa Falls Iowa, World Bible Publishers Inc; 1991. p.752.

⁹ Farris, Stephen, *The Hymns of Luke's Infancy Narrative*. England, Great Britain., JSOT Press; 1985. p.117.

¹⁰ Renn, *Vine's*; p.758.

¹¹ Renn, *Vine's*; p.752.

ἀγαλλιάουμαι which means "to exult, to rejoice exceedingly"¹² Mary's spirit is rejoiced to none other but to God. It is typical for her in the way she responded and replied to God. These are her expression of joy for the assurance of her divine obligation.

In analyzing this hymn, it is clear that Mary's response of joy and happiness is obviously manifested. There is no question of her joyful and gladness heart, because of all that God has done for her. In addition to her rejoice and gratitude, she was also excited for the fact that she was given the privilege to be the mother of the expected Messiah. This is the most compelling reason of her hymn of praise. That is, God has considered her to be a mere recipient of such a blessed calling.

In addition to Mary's response, it is appropriate to consider her attitude as an individual and her situation that was explicitly reflected in the hymn. It was clear that her deep sense of humility is evident.¹³ Luke uses the word 'lowliness' to define Mary's present situation. For instance, the phrase, "the lowliness of his servant," illustrates this idea. The word lowliness is from the Greek word ταπεινός. It means, to "bring low, depress, level, to humble, abase."¹⁴ Mary knows her unworthiness in comparison to the task given to her. Her own reaction indicates that she is a very low person. In other words, she is just a servant with no respect. But, she is honoured and privileged for "God has done great things for me." Apparently, her excitement and joy is founded on God.

From this conviction it is apparent that God is the initiator of her calling. God has blessed her with great and mighty things. From this statement, the focus will now shift to the role of God in the hymn.

Mary continually emphasizes God's role and character in the hymn. She offers all the praise and glory to Him, for all that He has done for her. "For the Mighty One who has done great things for me." The Lord should be magnified and be declared great because he has done great things for her.¹⁵ Mary attributes great things as the mighty deeds and acts of God. To Mary, it is God alone who has acted graciously to her.

¹² Perschbacher, J. Wesley, *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon*. Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publisher; 1990. p.2

¹³ Tannehill, C. Robert, "The Magnificat as Poem" in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, (vol. 93) Joseph A. Fitzmyer S.J.(editor) The Society of Biblical Literature; 1974. p.263-266.

¹⁴ Perschbacher, *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon*; p.401.

¹⁵ Farris, *The Hymns of Luke's Infancy Narratives*; p.117

The words, "*He has looked with favour,*" imply that Mary has found favour in God's sight. Critically, someone may assume this as an act of favoritism in God's part. However, this was not so if one considers it as a sign of God's fulfilling His own plan and will. In other words, Mary's appointment is God's own business, and only Him knows whom He chooses to fulfill His own purpose.

His mercy is for those who fear Him. Mary knew her attitude toward God. Nevertheless her fear and respect of God is rewarded with God's mercy upon her. She believes in her heart that God would always bless those who fear Him with His mercy and love.

B. The **BENEDICTUS** [Luke 1 : 67 - 79]

Luke attributes the **Benedictus** to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. The content of the hymn is a response of Zechariah as a word of thanksgiving to God for the blessing that the angel had already revealed to them. The prior incident where the angel had appeared to Zechariah and Elizabeth, indicated that Zechariah lost his speech because of disbelief and doubt about the angel's message. But when he was convinced and given the opportunity to write down the boy's name, his speech was finally restored, and immediately he praised God with the words of the **Benedictus**.

The most striking factor in this hymn is the reference to the Holy Spirit.(v.67). According to Luke, the Holy Spirit played a vital role in the life of Jesus. Even though it was not fully given until the Pentecost, Luke employed the role of the Holy Spirit in His Gospel for a specific theological purpose. To Luke, this was the same Spirit of God that had been manifested and associated with the prophets of the Old Testament which now appeared again before Zechariah. Luke presented this hymn with the addition of the Holy Spirit as a motivator that inspired the heart of Zechariah to give praise and thanksgiving to God.

The hymn begins with the word of blessing. *Blessed* is from the Greek verb *Εὐλογεῖν*.¹⁶ It means '*to bestow a blessing upon or act graciously towards someone.*' Zechariah who was filled with joy, immediately praised and blessed God. Certainly, the feeling of happiness and delight were the products of his thankful heart.

¹⁶ Perschbacher, *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon*; p.180

The phrase "looked favourably" was God's attitude toward Zechariah. The word ἐπεσκέψατο is originally from the word ἐπισκεπτομαι.¹⁷ It means 'to visit', 'to care for', 'to be concerned about.' Again, Luke here uses the term 'to favour,' which is parallel to the dialogue of Mary in the Magnificat, as the way God considered those whom He chose to fulfill His purpose. In similar manner, God's action is not out of favoritism, but of His own divine will and plan.

The phrase, *God raised up a mighty saviour in the house of David* indicates God's initiative and action on how He will fulfill his divine plan. The verb 'to raise' is from the Greek word ἐγείρω¹⁸ which is defined as 'to raise up, to bring into being, to wake, to rouse.' The term explicitly illustrates the mighty act and powerful hand of God, who alone will perform such an act.

The reference to the *mighty saviour in the house of David* (κέρας σωτηρίας ἡμῖν ἐν οἴκῳ Δαυὶδ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ v.69)¹⁹ indicates that the expected saviour is from the family of king David. This is a fulfillment of the promise to David,²⁰ concerning the establishment of his kingdom forever. Significantly, the expected saviour is from the line of David, actually one of David's offspring. Saviour has a theological significant in Luke's narrative. For Luke, the unborn child is a saviour, that will bring salvation for the people of Israel. His role as the saviour will be the model of a faithful servant; that is, someone that comes to serve but not to be served.

C. The GLORIA IN EXCELSIS [Luke 2:14]

The outstanding aspect of this hymn is the fact that it was sang by the angels. This passage from verses 8 to 14 illustrates the appearance of an angel before the shepherds who were at their usual work of looking after the flock. The sudden appearance of the angel caught the shepherds with amazement, and were terrified about the whole incident. After the revelation about the birth of Messiah, the following scene was opened by the appearance of the multitude of heavenly hosts who began to sing and praise God. Their word of praise is now known as the **Gloria in Excelsis**.

The whole content of the Gloria in Excelsis was to honour and acknowledge the presence of God, and His relation to those who were favoured by Him. The picture here, which the angels portrayed,

¹⁷ Perschbacher, *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon*; p.165

¹⁸ Perschbacher, *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon*; p.112

¹⁹ Bushell, S. Michael; "Bible Works for Windows." Documented for Internet. © 1996.

²⁰ II Samuel 7:16.

indicates the transcendence of God. In addition to this, God was seen as a universal God. It was the God who rule over the heaven and the earth. Therefore, praises and glory must be offered to Him. Not only because of God's majesty being portrayed, but also the revealing of His presence in the affairs of the world.

According to Ellis, the reference on "*those whom He favours*" is parallel with the word '*people*' (λαος) in verse 10. God's redemptive act was for those whom He pleased.²¹ The reference on *peace*, was the idea of not to be freed from disaster and misfortune but a peaceful process of healing between a sinful person and the Holy God.²² The expected Messiah whom the angels had announced would bring peace and comfort to the world.

D. The **NUNC DIMITTIS** [Luke 2 : 29 - 32]

Luke attributed this hymn to Simeon. Simeon was a righteous and devout person in Jerusalem; who was known by his life of commitment and dedication to his duty as a priest (cf, Luke 2:25). According to Luke, the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not see death until he sees the Messiah, (cf. Luke 2:26&27).

This hymn states Simeon's initial impression, when he first saw the promised child. Indeed, what the angel had promised was finally being fulfilled. In response, Simeon praised God with the words now known as the **Nunc Dimittis**.

The hymn begins with an emphatic "*now*" (νῦν). In this case, this adjective is used to indicate time. It describes an event that had taken place at that particular point of time. Simeon had finally saw what was promised to him by the angel. To him there was nothing worth than seeing and holding the promised child in his arms. Once he held the child, he was overwhelmed with joy and happiness. From that delightful experience, he cried out singing praise immediately to God.

The phrase, "*dismissing your servant*," is from the Greek phrase ἀπολύεις τὸν δοῦλόν(ν.29).²³ It means, to 'release' or 'set free'. It was apparent that Simeon was not to be released from slavery or any

²¹ Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* (The New Century Bible Commentary Series); p.82

²² refer to note 21.

²³ Bushell, *Bible Works for Windows*, Documented for Internet. © 1996.

form of it, but to be set free from anticipating to see the promised child. After seeing the promised child, he was now ready to die in peace with great joy and happiness in his heart.

Simeon's word of praise was due only for one reason; that was, "*for my eyes have seen your salvation*". It was clear from this phrase that he would not have faced death before seeing 'the Lord Christ.' Thus he declared, he would die in peace, because he had seen 'your salvation'. Here, Luke portrays that Simeon's expression of his faith to God is being spelled out by the words of his praise.

The above discussion has illustrated clearly the importance of theology in hymns. These four hymns in Luke's Gospel were generally hymns of praising and thanksgiving to God; His involvement with the affairs of the world, and especially His divine plan of salvation through Jesus Christ, was the sole purpose behind Luke's intention in recording these hymns in his Gospel. Moreover, the importance of understanding the deeper meaning and theological significance of the words were the vital factors that one needs to consider when he or she participates in singing and praising God. This similar emphasis should be reflected in the Samoan context of praising and singing hymns.

CHAPTER THREE

Hymns in the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa (CCCS)

A. Hymns and their roles

Certainly, there is no doubt about the importance of hymns in the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa. Their different roles and functions are determined by the situations and occasions involved. Several of these occasions range from family evening prayer to the formal worship on Sundays. In fact, in these various contexts, the most significant issue about hymns is the emphasis of knowing the importance of words and the message they express in relation to these occasions. The following is the discussion of the various functions and roles of hymns in the church, and also within the life of the people.

Hymns have various important functions and roles within the worship context of the church. Rev. Vavae Toma¹ agreed with such statement and he indicated briefly that a hymn has multiple roles and functions in any context. These roles will be discussed below.

- i] Hymn as a sermon
- ii] Hymn as a prayer
- iii] Hymn as a healer

i] *Hymn as a sermon*

There is a popular saying circulating with in Malua Theological College and among church ministers that "a hymn can preach, but a sermon cannot sing." This popular idea is mentioned also in the Samoan Hymnbook translated, "A hymn that is well prepared is a hymn that will bring out the message from the Word of God." On the one hand, it means that, the words and expressions in the hymn convey the message that may not only shape up one's mind and emotions, but may also reinforce his or her relationship with God. On the other hand, a sermon can never be a hymn in the sense that, it does not have a tune associated with it. Because a sermon is compiled basically for the purpose of preaching, but not to be sung. In other words, a hymn can both be a hymn and a sermon

¹ former Chairman of the CCCS; a retired minister; was one of the composer and compilers of the current hymnbook of the CCCS called *Ina Pepese Ia*.

but a sermon, can never be a hymn. In saying this, it simply means that the words of hymn not only teach, but also preach the will of God.²

Hymns are very important in the worship life of any christian. Often we hear and sing hymns when occasions such as the unveiling of a tomb stone, the dedication of a new building, a funeral, or even a wedding ceremony takes place. At church on Sundays, there is always an order of service that the minister has to follow. This order includes hymns that the congregation is expected to sing.³ It is true to say that the words of the hymns reflect the spirit of the occasion, for they reveal the deeper meaning of it. In fact, the words enable a person to relate himself to the occasion in spirit and mind, so that they may be more effective and of use.

Many hymns in the Samoan hymnbook⁴ may be linked to this idea of preaching. One example is in the hymn number 363 of the Samoan hymnbook. The message that this song expresses points to a person as the light that shines in the dark. It refers to a person representing the light of God in the world. The light as an ingredient that leads those who are lost to stand up for the Lord. The use of light defines the role that any christian believer should practice daily. It preaches about the will of God that any christian ought to live up with.

ii) *Hymn as a Prayer*

Another role of hymn is reflected in prayer. From this understanding, one may say that prayer is not just a straight dialogue with God, that is, talking or communicating to God with eyes closed. A prayer may also be expressed in songs of praise. I believe, there is not much difference between hymns and prayer, for they both convey the worshipper's message as he or she worships God.⁵

A good example of hymn as a prayer is seen in hymn number 136 in the Samoan hymnbook, "*E lo'u Alii ua ou sese.*" Theologically, the context of this hymn portrays one's spiritual relationship with God. It is referring to one's confession of sin and cry for forgiveness. The cry discloses the worshipper's utmost trust in God. As stated in line one of verse four, the worshipper is proclaiming

² Pese ma Viiga. p.4.

³ Pese ma Viiga, in the last section of this hymnbook recorded a brief guide for the minister to be used for morning and the afternoon services

⁴ I am referring to the old hymnbook, Pese ,ma Viiga; and not the Ina Pepese Ia.

⁵ Vavae Toma, interview by the author, June 2001

God's power that is in control of everything, of course, God himself is the giver of life, and without Him humanity can not be saved.

This hymn, one may say that two important point are emphasized; one, the hymn reveals the sinful person confessing his sins and repenting before God, and two, the hymn refers to God's unconditional love that forgives and forgets the sins of all people.

Another example of hymn as a prayer is seen in hymn number 100, entitled "*Le talosaga nei*," in the hymnbook "*Pese ma Viiga*." The idea behind this hymn is the call for the Holy Spirit to fulfill the soul of the worshipper. It is obvious here that, like prayer, hymns can also be used to glorify God. This hymn serves mainly as a prayer in the sense that it invokes the spirit of God to be present amidst the congregation as they come to worship God.

ii] *Hymn as a Healer*

Another important aspect of church hymns is the power they have to penetrate the suffering mind filled with terror. Of course hymns maybe used to ease and to release the pain of the heavy loaded, bringing them into the light of God.

Without doubt, one may say that the Israelites were in great fear, because of the threatening hands of the Egyptians. One can also imagine how terrified they were at the time when Pharaoh's army followed to kill and destroy them. As mentioned earlier in Chapter I,⁶ Moses' song of praise to God speaks of hope and joy when God took control in saving the Israelites. The song reflects Moses' expression of praise and thankfulness to God, for it was He that brought about healing and peace of mind to the Israelites.

The story about Saul reflects the same impression. It highlights the fact that whenever the evil spirit from God troubled him, his servant David would play the harp to calm down and to heal the troubled and suffering king. Hymn as a therapy or healer is an everyday experience when a person dies in the village, the minister often offers spiritual exhortations through prayers, preaching, and singing hymns. Likewise, church choirs would all come to participate in the occasion by offering gifts, bouquet of flowers, as well as the singing of hymns.

⁶ see. pp. 7-9

Whenever one is in pain, there is always a need for comfort and consolation. Some would talk it over with another person, while some people would prefer to meditate to God on their own free will. Others would prefer the singing of hymns as the best method for easing and releasing suffering and sadness. In this sense, hymns can be considered therapeutic. They have healing power that can ease, or even release pain, suffering and difficulties of life.

B. Theology in Hymns

The following is one example of the CCCS hymns. There is a well-known hymn in Samoa, not only within the church itself, but also within the community of people at large. In other words, people of other denominations, like the Roman Catholic, the Methodists, and others, have become acquainted with its lyric and tune. This hymn is like a national anthem to almost every household of Samoa. Following is the English translation of the hymn, with a discussion of its theological significance.

[Example 1]

Hymn #92

- v.1 Rejoice (praise) to God
Who is the creator of all
For his unconditional love for humanity
Let us praise, hallelujah and rejoice.
- v.2 Rejoice (praise) to His Son
Who descend from above
Who is our refuge in suffering
Let us praise, hallelujah and rejoice.
- v.3 Rejoice (praise) to the Spirit
Who is the great helper
Which blesses meditation and all that has been done
Let us praise, hallelujah and rejoice.

The first verse states the praise directed to God. The composer clarifies one of God's character, that is, the creator God who created the whole universe. His power of creating has no limitation. In fact, He is the creator of both the universe and all humanity. His unconditional love is clearly manifested in the life of all things that he created; God, therefore, is worthy to be praised.

The second verse elaborates the praise and thanksgiving to the Son Jesus Christ; whom is worthy to be praised, because of His loving kindness and care for the poor and those who are oppressed. Verse 2 speaks of Jesus' origin, He descended directly from above. In other words, His calling and role as the Son is divine.

In the last verse, the attention is directed to the role of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is man's great helper in any situation in life. The Holy Spirit speaks to us through many and various ways, guiding and directing ourselves to do what is pleasing in the sight of God. The Holy Spirit according to the author is worthy to be acknowledged and praised.

Theologically speaking, I do affirm that this hymn reflects the trinity of God. It speaks of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Certainly, it is a hymn of praise to the three persons of the Godhead. When we participate in singing, our praises must be directed to none other, but God alone. He is both the creator and the sustainer of life. God alone is worthy to be praised and be thanked for all His goodness and mercy upon creation and all humanity.

C. Hymns the Proclaimer of the Gospel

Another way of proclaiming the Gospel is through singing and the recording of hymns. This important task is done through recording church hymns in cassettes and video tapes. According to Leota Petaia,⁷ various church choirs and small groups have engaged in this enterprise in order to extend their mission outside the church. The sole purpose of recording hymns is not to confine the ministry of the church within its compound, but to open out to those who are not able to participate in worship services. The purpose of this practice is to cater for the needs of those who are willing to participate but are occupied with other important matters. Idea of recording church hymns may assist particular individual, with his or her spiritual need.

Another growing enterprise that promotes using of hymns to proclaim the Gospel is through local and national competitions in Samoa. This includes the annual youth gathering in Malua⁸ every

⁷ Leota Ueese Petaia, former director of the Televisé Samoa, interview with author 15 May, 2001.

⁸ this is annual youth festival held at Malua during the church annual conference in May.

Christmas, and also the Teuila Festival,⁹ where various groups display their voices and talents through singing hymns.

Significantly, another use of hymns as a proclaimer of the Gospel is evident in the traditional understanding where a related hymn in terms of themes and theology is placed immediately after the sermon. In doing this, a certain hymn that follows the sermon should agree and support the message of the sermon that has just been preached. The sermon and hymn must complement each other in terms of themes, of theology, and of application. For example, when a message of encouragement is being preached, a relevant hymn that agrees with such theme is the hymn 168 in "Pese ma Viiga" hymnbook. This hymn is entitled "Ia Tatou Faamalosi faasaga ia Iesu". This particular hymn can reinforce the message of encouragement in terms of supporting and assisting an individual to move forward and to direct attention to Jesus, who is the source of all strength and ability.

This relationship between sermon and hymn maybe seen in the usual practice here in Malua Theological College, where the emphasis is placed on using all verses of hymn. Contrary to the common practice in village churches,¹⁰ this practice derives from the understanding that the whole theology of a hymn is contained within the words. When one or two verses are omitted the important of the message and theology of that particular hymn, may be affected. In other words, this practice of singing all verses of a hymn highlights the importance of theology, message.

⁹ music competition one of the highlight of the Teuila Festival, an annual festival of Samoan Traditions and Cultural values held annually in Apia, Samoa.

¹⁰ I have experienced this during felaugaiga (where the students of Malua were allocated in different churches for preaching experience).

CONCLUSION

The Gospel of Luke, more than any other Gospel, "is the Gospel of stories, and the most beautiful book in the world."¹ The Gospel of Luke contains the popular Christmas stories about the angel's visit to Zechariah and Mary, the birth of the child in the stable, and the lowly shepherds who heard heavenly choirs sing, 'Glory to God in the highest.'

Singing hymns offer praise and thanksgiving to God, is the main focus and emphasis of this paper. This paper has attempted to examine the role and function of christian hymns within the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa; as well as trying to explore the great significance of both the theology, and theological message, which the hymns and their words convey and express. Church hymns, of course, are very significant and an integral aspect of christian worship. Through hymns, the christians convey and express their gratitude, sense of appreciation, words of praise, and thanksgiving to God, for all his goodness and mercy for all humanity. In other words, church hymns may be used in several ways, to convey and express whatever feelings the christian believer has in his/her heart, towards God the Creator. Thus through hymns, christians may express the feelings of sadness, of forgiveness, of repentant, of remorsefulness, or even joy and happiness.

In chapter one, I have attempted to clarify the origin and development of the use of christian hymns within the biblical tradition; and I have come to conclude that church hymns, [i] originated and were used in the bible as early as the time of Moses; and [ii] are biblically based and oriented. In other words, church hymns are both thematic and topical in outlook; their words and theological messages are written on and around a specific biblical theme and theology. Hymns were designed for different purposes and occasions; and when the hymns are sung with the correct tune, they would certainly express and disclose the message and the theology, which it was originally designed to portray.

The exposition and interpretation of the 'Song of Moses', and the two Psalms in chapter one clearly illustrate that point. They have also shown that hymns can be sung by an individual as well as by the whole community. The indication is that, hymns are for the use of all people; and are designed to address different situations and contexts, depending on the motive of the author or singer. All the

¹ This is the opinion of the French rationalist, Renan, about the third Gospel. See Powell, M.A, *What are they saying about Luke?* New York, Paulist Press; 1989. p.1; Barrett, C. K, *Luke the Historian*. London, Epworth Press; 1961. p.7.

three hymns from the Old Testament have one theme in common - *they all share and reflect the same theology of honouring and offering praise and thanksgiving to God, for his love and kindness towards humanity.*

Over the years, we have always recognized the importance and significance of church hymns within the christian communities. They play a very important role and an integral function in the worship and spiritual life of the christian believer. The two significant parts of a church hymn are (i) the words, and (ii) the tune. These two must complement one another, in order for the church hymns to serve their utmost aim and purpose. The words of church hymns are vitally important, in conveying and expressing both the theology and theological message of the hymns. Of course, it is the words, and not the tune, that give the church hymns their theological dimension and implication, mainly in praising and giving thanks to God. I must admit that the role, the function, and the meaning of hymns, vary according to the context and the occasion with which they were originally designed for. It is only when we participate in singing hymns and praising God when we come to terms with the inspiration to engage ourselves in devotion and meditation to God.

This attitude was seen clearly in the four examples from the Gospel of Luke. The three individuals (Mary, Zechariah, and Simeon) were very much troubled with enormous senses of disbelief and amazement, because of what God had done for them. And in reply to that gracious act of God, they cried out singing praise and thanksgiving to God. Their three hymns were individuals songs, that portray the deep feeling of joy and happiness, because God has done something great for them; for God has remembered and favoured each one of them. Thus it was adequate for them to give praise and thanksgiving to God.

This paper has indicated that the hymns in Luke's Gospel are based mainly on the Old Testament; and Luke has created and compiled those hymns without any tune attached to them. By doing that, Luke has opened up the door for creativity and alteration, especially in terms of giving a tune to such hymns.

The third hymn in Luke's Gospel. '*Gloria in Excelsis*', again is a hymn of praise and thanksgiving by a choir of heavenly host, who host, who honour and acknowledge the presence of God, and his intimate relationship with his people. Like the other three hymns, *Gloria in Excelsis* emphasizes the greatness of God in everything He does.

The one common factor between all four hymns is that, they are songs of praise and thanksgiving. Their words and theology place emphasis on God as the Creator and Sustainer of Life, and of all things. It is interesting to note that it is the words, and not the tunes, that determines the merit and worth of a hymn. For the hymns are the most important and integral aspects of worship, and not the tune. The tune is only a vehicle and medium that helps to transfer the hymns and their words, so that its theology and message maybe made meaningful.

Chapter three explores the various functions of hymns within the CCCS. Like Moses and the Israelites, as well as the authors of the Lukan hymns, the CCCS regard church hymns very significant. Of course, there are different types of hymns for different occasions; and the hymns were designed originally to cater for the spiritual need of the people.

Church hymns maybe used as a sermon, following the tradition that states, '*a hymn can be a prayer and a sermon; but a sermon/prayer can never be a hymn.*' Singing hymns without preaching a sermon, is a much more effective mean for proclaiming the Gospel. Church hymns may also be used a prayer and therapy. Surely hymns do have a prayerful and healing aspect. This attitude may be achieved only when the words and tune of church hymns complement each other. This is the only time when the healing aspect of hymns may be fully utilized. In other words, church hymns may be used also to proclaim the Gospel, to pray for the people, and to provide comfort and peace for the broken hearts. One important aspect of church hymns in worship is that they certainly promote the sense of harmony and unity amongst christian believers. They also create within church members, the sense of belonging to, and caring for, one other.

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Peni Peniamina.	Interview by telephone.	20 May, 2001.

Others :

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