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Singing the Lord's Song . . . In Times Like These: Exploring Worship and music in some English-speaking Caribbean contexts

Nicole Ashwood

United Church in Jamaica

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Historical Background

The Caribbean, a region of over 7,000 islands situated on approximately 25000 square miles of water between North and South America and to the East of Central America. Although the landscapes are somewhat different and our current politics are varied, we bear a similar history of Europeanization and colonization at the dawn of the 16th century. And, because of the nature of the colonization and its unique status, Guyana is often included in the classification, and this maintains for the reflections of this paper.

Stumbled upon by Christopher Columbus et al in 1492 on one of his expeditions for a shortcut to India, the region was primarily a Spanish enclave before privateering, politics and economics broadened the rulership of the colonies, making room for British, Dutch, and French ownership. Under the various regimes, the region enjoyed differences in enculturation, and, with the commodification of humans in the late 16th -19th centuries, various elements of worship seeped into the landscape. The result – a virtual potpourri of worship styles, ranging from High Church (Anglican and very formal Catholic) to grassroots practices; from moderately European to syncretized elements especially from the African and East Indian cultural practices and religious ways, which further ensures that each context is unique our despite shared heritage. One should not assume therefore, to speak for the entire region; for even within the same national context, the practice of worship can and will differ; thus one speaks of patterns and trends which are somewhat common to the Caribbean.

Development

As slavery became the primary economic base for the region, Catholicism was *de rigeur* for the French and Spanish Caribbean. With their plethora of saints and high holy days, it was fairly easy for syncretization to abound – one would simply 'baptize' the African gods and demi-gods with the names of venerated Catholic saints and practicing the old ways would be legitimized - hence Voodoo and Santeria were alternate religious forms in 'Christianized' Haiti and Cuba respectively from the early days of colonial Caribbean. Although the Catholic influence remains in the British Caribbean, one will recall that the rift between Henry VIII and the Catholic Church resulted in the formation of the Church of England, and so upon their arrival in the region they brought with them Anglican - not Catholic - priests Methodists and Baptists. This meant that there was for the most part a greater diversity of Christian worship in that region. Additionally, unlike Cuba and Haiti, in the British West Indies, much of African religious practices were outlawed, and so very little of the old ways were formally retained in the Christian worship life and music. This was not entirely the case in Trinidad, where Shouter Baptists indigenized their traditions and grafted this unto their Christian practices.

However, in countries like Jamaica, although African religious practices were outlawed, there are undercurrents of indigenous practices in the Revival and Pocomania contexts. This is often reflected in the heavy African syncopation in the rhythms of several local choruses which have made their way into current worship services. One such example is 'Hol on to yuh Victory'. In the background, you can hear the heavy beat of the African drum which is a main feature in African rhythms and this is enhanced by the inclusion of percussion instrumentation including the tambourines.

C3: Singing the Lord's Song . . . In Times Like These [Exploring Worship and music in some English-speaking Caribbean contexts]

Although much of the Afro-Jamaican worship is infused with the influence of the published works of Ira D. Sankey (this is still used today), a key theme in historically Jamaican worship choruses is the Exodus and the subsequent inheritance of the Promised Land (over in heaven) as the fulfilment of God's promises to release the children of Israel from bondage by transporting them 'over on the other side'. This is evident in the lyrics of 'When I get there'.

*When I get there when I get there
I will sing and shout when I get there
Hallelujah, praising the Lord when I get there.*

Diversity

But the Caribbean region is not solely comprised of European and African traditions, there is a strong East Indian presence, and, they – for the most part – had free rein to retain their traditions upon their arrival in the Indies at the end of the formal slave trade in 1838. A mix of Hindus and some Muslims, they were settled mainly in Trinidad and Guyana, although they may be found in many other islands such as Jamaica and Grenada.

Christianized primarily by the Canadian Presbyterians in both Trinidad and Guyana, the worship life of the East Indian church was strongly influenced by the music and culture of the peoples. The guitar was the primary instrument of accompaniment and though drums and pianos/organs feature greatly in their music today, one will note that the rhythm of the East Indian differs somewhat from the African and this is evident even in the way we clap to a beat. Additionally, some of their hymns/choruses/songs retain the Hindu influence, with lyrics being composed in Hindi. These are referred to as Bhajans. Two such examples are 'I have decided to follow Jesus' (an actual testimony of an Indian prince who left his Hindu lifestyle for Christianity) and 'Karo Meri Sahae'

Further, the denominational influences upon the region have also served to create some diversity in liturgical format and by virtue thereof, in the choice of worship music. This means that even in a particular country there is no definitive style, rhythm or format which would be claimed as its own. In the former days, the distinction between 'town' and 'country' would have had some bearing on worship formats and music selection, especially in Jamaica, but this is not always the case. Now there is even some blurring of the lines between liturgical formats of high church and normal churches especially with regard to instrumentalization and inclusion of indigenous/locally written songs and choruses in worship.

Current Reality

There is growing recognition of the need for research into the development of Church music throughout the Caribbean, particularly in relation to the singing of our own songs in corporate worship. Although there has not been an official comprehensive study, a cursory glance at the English-speaking Caribbean reveals that most of the songs being sung are composed by non-Caribbean persons. Evidence can be found in the hymnals that are being used in the region. A few decades ago, a Caribbean Hymnal was published. However, it did not gain much traction in the Caribbean church and is currently out of print. It contained songs composed primarily by Jamaican and Trinidadian composers.

C3: Singing the Lord's Song . . . In Times Like These *[Exploring Worship and music in some English-speaking Caribbean contexts]*

In Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, and quite likely all the other English-speaking territories, it was the Catholics who led the way in composing and singing the worship songs of the Caribbean people. One suspects that this may have been the result of Vatican II, where issues related to indigenized worship were ratified and the liturgical format of Catholicism changed worldwide. This has manifested itself in the production of a Caribbean hymnal, showcasing regional hymnodists, and the hymn selections are categorized according to the Catholic liturgy. However, this trend was not widely embraced and adopted by the other traditions, and today we are still struggling to express ourselves through our own songs in worship.

Happily, there have been recent publications of Caribbean Hymnals by the Anglicans and the Methodists which include songs written by Caribbean composers within and without traditional mainline church. But, the struggle exists and persists in the garnering of acceptance and usage/adoption of these hymnals in other denominational contexts on a regular basis. Many church communities do not acknowledge that there is a problem, and are content to continue using songs from non-Caribbean composers, at best indigenizing them by adapting the rhythms. For, having been Christianized by Europeans who did not generally condone enculturation or assimilation in worship, rather condemning most acts of cultural retentions as syncretism or demonic, the typical Caribbean worshipper experiences a marked hermeneutic of suspicion toward Caribbean expression in worship.

In promoting and facilitating the singing of our own songs in worship we recognize the following **challenges**:

1. The globalization of Contemporary Christian Music that sees our airwaves dominated by non-Caribbean music
2. The fact that most of our songs are not scored, thus facilitating the sharing of songs.
3. The fact that most of our Church musicians are not musically literate
4. The lack of sufficient high quality recordings of our own songs.
5. The need for greater motivation from our leaders, motivating our songwriters to produce more indigenous songs and putting pressure on the song/worship leaders to use more of our own songs as they lead.
6. The need for (greater) inclusion of music in our theological training institutions.
7. The unwillingness to claim and embrace our own as being worthy as an offering unto God, unless it has been baptized/endorsed by Euro-North American worshippers.

Presently, we retain much of the old – we still have spaces where 'High Church' is the order of the day and the cultural superiority against African worship forms still persists in some places. But we are also mellowing, and the blend of the old and new is resulting in our finding our authentic voice, where we sing praises unto our God, in our own unique ways in our own tongue. Join us as we share a few of our songs of deliverance, proclamation and praise with you...

Calvin Institute of Worship Symposium 2014 Caribbean Song List Sampler

Him a mi daddy-oh (Jesus is my Father)

I will not suffer, I will not beg for bread
The Lord is my Provider, I will not beg
for bread

Him a mi daddy oh (x3)
Jesus a mi daddy oh

When I need peace, He is Jehovah
Shalom
When mi sick ina mi body, He is Jehovah
Rapha
(Don't you know that) God is my
provider and I will not beg for bread

Him a ...

Tings areddy betta (things are already looking up)

Tings areddy betta, tings areddy betta
Because the Lord is on my side
Tings areddy betta, tings areddy betta,
tings areddy betta

Ya esta bien, ya esta bien
El Senor esta con migo
Ya esta bien, ya esta bien, ya esta bien!

Jesus is my Deliverer

Jesus is my deliverer (x3)
I know he delivers me
How do you know he delivers (x3)
I know he delivers me
Pain ina mi back him deliva (x3)
I know he delivers me
Jesus is my provider (x3)
I know he provides for me
How do you know he provides (x3)
I know he provides for me
Roof over mi head him provide (x3)
I know he provides for me

See what the Lord has done for us

See what the Lord has done for us
See what a mighty God he is
The walls are tumbling down (x3)
So let's praise his holy name

Jesus is da winnaman

Jesus is da winnaman, da winnaman, da
winnaman
Jesus is da winnaman, da winnaman all
the time
He is the winnaman,
the winnaman (x6)
the winnaman all the time!
I am on the winning side
The winning side, the winning side
I am on the winning side, the winning
side all the time!

A no one praya mi pray (I haven't just now established a prayer life)

A no one praya mi pray,
mi pray inna night
An mi pray inna day
For every time mi go pon mi knee
Devil (or is it demon) haffi run weh

Hallelujah (Caribbean Hallelujah - words adapted Nicqi Ashwood 2013)

Halle, halle, halle-lujah (x3)
Hallelujah!

I AM the Rock of Ages; cleft towards me
I AM the Rock of Ages; building unity
I AM the Rock of Ages; restoring
harmony
Hallelujah!

I AM the God of Moses, I'll part the sea
I AM God of Hagar, looking out for thee
I AM Alpha & Omega, till eternity
Hallelujah!

Calvin Institute of Worship Symposium 2014 Caribbean Song List Sampler

I AM Jehovah Jireh; providing for thee
I AM the Lord of Hosts – here to set you
free
I AM your Messiah; I'll return for thee
Hallelujah! (repeat chorus twice)

Amen, amen, amen! Amen, amen,
amen!

Our Father – Father Ho-Lung version (Jamaican)

Our Father who art in heaven, holy,
holy, holy be Thy name
Our Father who art in heaven, holy be
Thy name
Thy Kingdom come on earth, Thy will be
done on earth
Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in
Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, give us
this day our daily bread, Give us this day
our daily bread and forgive us our
trespasses. And forgive us our
trespasses. As we forgive those who
trespass against us ... forgive us our
trespasses.

[Rep. first two lines ...Our Father who
art in Heaven ...]

Do not lead us into temptation; do not
lead us into temptation [But] Deliver us
from all evil, deliver us from all evil. And
forgive us our trespasses, and forgive us
our trespasses As we forgive those who
trespass against us ... forgive us our
trespasses.

[Rep. first two lines ...Our Father who
art in Heaven ...]

Do not lead us into temptation; do not
lead us into temptation Deliver us from
all evil; deliver us from all evil.

Enter Into Jerusalem

Enter into Jerusalem let us go to God's house
With the healthy and the sick, with the worker
and the weak Let us go to God's house.
Enter into Jerusalem let us go to God's house
Come and run with the wind with the God who
reigns in peace, Let us go to God's house!

Chorus:

***We go celebrate! We go celebrate! We go
celebrate! O Israel! Praise the name of the Lord
on high, Praise His name in song Praise the Lord
with a heav'nly song, with a heav'nly song,
With a heav'nly song Praise the Lord!***

Enter into Jerusalem, mek we walk-a-down
there With the young and the old, with the little
and the large Mek we walk-a-down there. Enter
into Jerusalem, mek we walk-a-down there,
Swaying to de breeze with the God who reigns
in peace Mek we walk-a-down there.

Enter into Jerusalem let us go to God's house,
With your mama and your papa, with your
uncle and your aunt, Let us go to God's house.
Enter into Jerusalem let us go to God's house,
Run and catch de breeze with the God who
reigns in peace. Let us go to God's house

**Calvin Institute of Worship Symposium 2014
Caribbean Song List Sampler**

I have decided/ Yisu ke piche

I have decided to follow Jesus; (x3)
No turning back, no turning back.

Though none go with me, I still will
follow; (x3)
No turning back, no turning back.

Take the whole world, but give me
Jesus (x3)
No turning back, no turning back.

Though I'm rejected, and shown no
mercy (x3)
I'll wear a crown, I'll wear a crown

Sing glory, glory and hallelujah (x3)
I'll wear a crown, I'll wear a crown

Yisu ke piche mai chalne laaga (x3)
Na lautunga, na lautunga

Ghar koi mere, saath na aawe (x3)
Na lautunga, na lautunga

Sansar ko chhor kar, Yisu ko lekar (x3)
Na lautunga, na lautunga

Agar main uska, inkar na karun (x3)
Taaj paunga, taaj paunga

KARO MÉRÍ SAHA-E

4th Metre. (

Trillude and Refrain Rather slowly.

HELP ME LORD JESUS.

Ka - ro me - ri sa - háe Ma - si - há ji Tu - ma bi - na

Karo méri saha-e, masiha ji
Tuma bina kúchhu na saha-e
Karo méri saha-e

Darshana dijai apano kijai 2
Lijai mohi bacha-e,

Fine.

Yah jaga ko nistarana karana 2
Janama liyo tuma a-e

ka - chhu na sa - háe Ka - ro me - ri sa - háe.

Tina dina méñ uché kabartén 2
Déshina téñ batara-e

Air.

Sūna lijai Prabhu binati méri 2
Aūgūna pai nahi ja-e, masiha ji.

HELP ME LORD JESUS. AMIN.

1. Da - ra - sha - na di - jai a - pa - no ki - jai... Da - ra - sha - na

Help me Lord Jesus
Without you I can hear nothing.

di - jai a - pa - no ki - jai Lí - jai mo - bí ba - chae.

Give me a view of yourself and
make me your own
Take me and save me

For the sake of saving the world
You came to earth and gave birth

On the third day you rose from
the grave
The natives were confounded

Hear or listen to my prayer
O Lord
Let no evil befall me

Amen.