

MUC Hymns: Phosphorescence for the Soul (Ephesians 5:15-20)

¹⁵ Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, ²⁰giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Introducing the Theme

Video: Video: Bad Hymn Singing (S01E01h Jerusalem and Jam)

All experienced less than ideal music at church

Kurt Vonnegut summed up the value of music nicely when he asked for his epitaph to read: "The only proof he needed for the existence of God was music".

We have only been part of MUC for over a year and we learnt there is only one thing that is non-negotiable on Sunday mornings

Cartoon: We're Changing Religion Monday



What did we think of the choir? -- We're changing religions Monday.

Of course that is not uncommon in Christian gatherings

Heaven forbid that anyone suggest we move away from hymns &/or boppy tunes

A minister will be forgiven all sorts of idiosyncratic inclinations but suggest a change in music culture and that is a spiritual death wish!

Quote: *Digging to the Soul* by Chris Fotinopoulos through (*The Age*, A2 2008 p. 14)

I was about 13 when God touched me through His music. No doubt He existed in the Greek Orthodox liturgy I was exposed to from an early age as well as the Anglican hymns and psalms I became acquainted with while attending an Anglican grammar school. But it was the music beyond the church's walls that brought God closer to me.

It is not an uncommon experience for music to lead us to the sacred to the spiritual

I prefer a God who connects us with the lost and forgotten by inviting us, as St John of the Cross put it, to look into our souls. "Dig here", the angel said, "in your soul, in your soul". Music reveals God by inspiring us to search our soul for God's ever present love.

Illustration: Larry Norman concert

When I took up adult faith the one thing that just made no sense to me from a chanting Greek Orthodox background were the hymns or the Simon & Garfunkel contemporary youth service music. Jimi Hendrix or Sex Pistols it was not!

Not until invited to a Larry Norman concert that kick started my love of Christians who tried to integrate their faith with music I loved growing up from the Beatles, Stones, Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, David Bowie, Sex Pistols and so forth.

Probably still explains why I am a little dull in getting traditional hymns &/or boppy Simon & Garfunkel worship songs.

We all start with needing our own music idiom and then some of us branch out!

Video: Jam and Jerusalem (S01E01i)

You can love The Byrds and embrace Charles Wesley!

Vox Pop: When and what music became part of following Jesus for you?

Cartoon: Community (Church Musical Chairs)

You can love the Sex Pistols and embrace Gregorian Chants!

We know we need to forgive each other's sins so that we may be forgiven, so we forgive each other's music inclinations so that may enjoy our own sacred music!

Gospel Music

Illustration: Visiting an African American Church in New York

When we visited New York we were keen as tourists to experience an African American church experience. Headed to Harlem and tried to attend the Abyssian Baptist Church – there was a queue around the block. Clearly African American rock and roll religion was on the tourist map. There were more well-dressed African Americans I saw that morning than in our whole trip to the USA. A big African American man with suitable amounts of "bling" was going up and down the queue telling people that if you were in sneakers or t shirts you would not get in. I walked to an African American in a sidewalk stall and asked, "If you just want to worship God where can you go?" He pointed us to a place around the corner, the oldest African-American Church in New York, The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church began in 1796. All the clichés were there of African American church gospel music all served in a recognisable Wesleyan Choir tradition. It was fun in a cultural appropriation kind of way! Both inspiring and voyeuristic all at the same time.

Quote: Chris Blackwell founder of Island Records on U2 (Mojo June 2009)

In 1981, U2 may not have been the full-formed rock they'd become after *The Joshua Tree*, but they had enough verve and blarney to convince the label boss they has extraordinary potential. "To begin with, musically they weren't my thing," Blackwell says, "But I really believed in them. You got the feel of a person [like Bono]. If you think there's someone there who's intelligent and passionate, then you have to trust them. I think that's why Island has so much diversity. It isn't just my musical taste, I trust the people who work for me."

Some may argue that fame and money can make you generous – actually what helped Bono inhabit this space was something that may surprise

Quote: Bono on fostering his Christian life (*Rolling Stone* February 2006, pp.69-70)

What is your religious belief today? Your concept of God?

If I could put it simply, I would say that I believe there's a force of love and logic in the world, a force of love and logic behind the universe. And I believe in the poetic genius of a creator who would choose to express such unfathomable power as a child born in "straw poverty"; i.e., the story of Christ makes sense to me.

How does it make sense?

As an artist, I see the poetry of it. It's so brilliant. That this scale of creation, and the unfathomable universe, should describe itself in such vulnerability, as a child. That is mind-blowing to me. I guess that would make me a Christian. Although I don't use the label because it is so very hard to live up to. I feel like I'm the worst example of it, so I just kind of keep my mouth shut.

Quote: Bono on fostering his Christian life (*Rolling Stone* February 2006, pp.69-70)

Soon after starting the band you joined a Bible study group you and Larry and Edge -called the Shalom. What brought that on?

We were doing street theatre in Dublin and we met some people who were madder than us. They were a kind of inner-city group living life like it was the first century AD. They were expectant of signs and wonders; lived a kind of early-church religion. It was a commune. People who had cash shared it. They were passionate, and they were funny, and they seemed to have no material desires. Their teaching of the Scriptures reminded me of those people whom I'd heard as a youngster with Guggi my friend who invited me to his Pentecostal church. Now, looking back, I realise that it was just insatiable intellectual curiosity.

Quote: Chris Blackwell on role of Christian faith (Mojo June 2009)

MOJO points out that Island's top selling acts – U2, Bob Marley and Cat Stevens – all shared deep religious convictions... He says. "I've thought about it a lot, but I don't know what it means. What I did find out about U2 is that they behave the way Christians are supposed to – forgiving, turning the other cheek, acting decently. They were always really generous of spirit and hard working. They are great, great people."

It may have been flawed but it was shared Christian life that is the key

This is what Ephesians 5:15 is trying to encourage – that Christians behave the way Christians are supposed to

"Be careful how you live"

The challenge not aimed at us as individuals but the quality of our communal life

Music is inextricably intertwined with how Christians behave when they gather and act the way they are supposed to together and in the worlds we inhabit

Music feeds the desire for authenticity and authenticity fuels the desire for music

The Phosphorescence of Music

Illustration: Marine Phosphorescence

It is now understood that marine phosphorescence is a consequence of the build-up in the water of minute bioluminescent organisms: dinoflagellate algae and plankton. By processes not entirely understood, these simple creatures ignite into light when jostled. They convert the energy of movement into the energy of radiance. For their phosphorescence to become visible to the human eye, the collaboration of billions of these single cells is required, from each of which light emanates.

The existence of these plankton, long remarked upon by sailors, especially warm-water sailors, has produced some extraordinary phenomena. During the Gorda Basin Earthquake, which struck California on 8 November 1980, witnesses on the coast saw vast areas of the ocean light up. In the 1970s, several sea captains navigating the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf reported the sight, in calm seas, of vast phosphorescent wheels with luminous rotating spokes, up to 200 yards in diameter, trembling in the wake of their ships. Sometimes these wheels appeared to be below the water and sometimes they seemed to hover just above its surface.

In 1978, while crossing the Persian Gulf, under a starry sky in which stars were falling with long green tails, the captain of the Dutch vessel *Dione* saw several such wheels. There are no pre-twentieth-century records of this phenomenon, and it is generally assumed to be a function of the turbulence caused by the ships' engines. It has also been proposed that the wheels' apparent transcendence is due to the still water acting as a kind of lens, projecting the phosphorescence on to a thin layer of mist hanging just above the water's surface.

In 2004, a father and son were sailing in the Gulf of Mexico when their yacht was capsized by a gust of wind, sixty miles offshore. They clung to the hull, as it was carried on the powerful currents of the Gulf. After night fell, the water became rich with phosphorescence, and the air was filled with a high discordant music, made of many different notes: the siren song of dolphins. The drifting pair also saw that they were at the centre of two rough circles of phosphorescence, one turning within the other. The inner circle of light, they realised, was a ring of dolphins, swimming round the upturned boat, and the outer circle was a ring of

sharks, swimming round the dolphins. The dolphins were protecting the father and his son, keeping the sharks from them.

When Christians behave the way that Christians should then we become the type of communities that circle around people and keep them safe

“singing and making melody to the Lord in our hearts” in tune with the song of life

Not just for our own benefit but all those who know us so that we can be known as the kind of people that Christians are supposed to be

Conclusion

Video: Couch Choir (*Go Your Own Way* by Fleetwood Mac - Can you spot Sally?)

Video: Pub Choir (*Yellow* by Cold Play)

I have been pondering what is the kind of event that we can showcase Fellowship@10 and invite the community us to join with us

Challenge: Is the communal sing along that something for Fellowship@10 in 2025?

Of course it may not this but I hope there is something that allows us put our best foot forward and offer that we're “Christians behaving the way Christians are supposed to”

All suggestions welcomed