HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies
ISSN: (Online) 2072-8050, (Print) 0259-9422

'… Earth's proud empires pass away…': The glorification and critique of power in songs and hymns of Imperial Britain

Author:
Gertrud Tönsing[1]

Affiliation:
[1]Department of Practical Theology, College of Human Sciences, University of South Africa, South Africa

Corresponding author:
Gertrud Tönsing,
gertrud.tonsing@googlemail.com

Dates:
Received: 22 July 2016
Accepted: 22 Aug. 2016
Published: 24 Feb. 2017

How to cite this article:
Tönsing, G., 2017, '"… Earth's proud empires pass away…": The glorification and critique of power in songs and hymns of Imperial Britain', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73(3), a3637. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.73i3.3637

Songs and hymns shape faith and play a part in shaping political landscapes. They can be used to build or maintain power as well as to critique and challenge it. This has been true for South Africa, and some brief examples will be given. But this article focuses on hymns and patriotic songs from the time of the British Empire and explores how they portray power, entrench superiority or build a common, global Christian identity.

Introduction

This article was written for a conference with the theme: 'The power of religion, and religions of power' (SPTSA January 2015). It explores this important theme for Christian theology from the perspective of Christian hymnology. Hymns and music are an important part of the way religions shape faith, sometimes more influential than sermons.[1] They are shaped by and they shape the way people see their faith and the way they live it out. This will also relate to the way believers relate to or even exercise power.

In South Africa we are no strangers to the power music has in the political sphere. The rise of Afrikaner Nationalism was accompanied by an outpouring of creativity in music and song, songs which were to mould the consciousness of a whole generation (Lüdemann 2003:13), and on the other side there were the Freedom songs of the struggle. Liz Gunner in a highly insightful article discusses the importance of the role of the song 'Umshini wami' in the rise of Jacob Zuma to the presidency. Without many words, the song was able to evoke the whole heroism of the exiled freedom fighters, cast Zuma in the role of someone resisting unfair oppression and be as Gunner puts it, a 'reclamation of voice, sound and body within the public sphere' (Gunner 2008:30), reclaimed from an increasingly distant, technocratic and unpopular government. Undoubtedly, songs have power.

This article focuses on another political force which profoundly shaped the South African political reality. This is the British Empire. It studies the songs and hymns of Imperial England, many of which are still known and sung in our congregations or communities, particularly those of English origin.

In the book *Imperialism and Music* by Jeffrey Richards, John M. MacKenzie writes in the introduction:

> Music is more than the food of love. It can also be the sustenance of patriotism and of ideology, the accompaniment of ceremony, conflict and acts of commitment. Throughout the world, those in authority and command have invariably revealed themselves to the sound of music. Political parties rouse their followers with musical invocations of the national sentiments and ideological nostrums to which they aspire. For music heightens the consciousness, often creating extremes of ecstasy or melancholy. It has the capacity to play upon the emotions and arouse its hearers to unaccustomed cheers or tears. (MacKenzie in Richards 2001:vii)

Richards confines himself to the study of music of the era of the British Empire, starting with the so-called English Musical Renaissance of the Victorian era (1870).[2] This study is confined to the Christian and religious hymns and songs of the era of British imperial power, beginning in

1.'People will remember what they sing. Hymns and worship songs have a way of sticking in the memory when far grander verses fade away' (page quoted in Hartje 2009:368).

2.The 'English musical renaissance' attempted to build up the English musical landscape and push back the influence of the Germans and Italians, particularly after the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871). A pivotal event was the founding of the Royal College of Music in 1883. This movement was supported by the Prince of Wales, who believed that music could provide an 'elevating source of enjoyment which is at the same time calculated to strengthen whose emotions that have so much influence in perpetuating a common love of country' (Richards 2001:12).

the 18th century, but focusing on the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. Some of these are still sung or performed today, but others have fallen out of use.[3]

The question of this study is, 'How are power and the critique of power reflected in hymns? How do songs function to cement group identity and power, and how can they be used to bridge divides and build a *common* identity?' Joyce Scott in her book about cross-cultural music *Tuning in to a different song* writes:

> 'Quote: Music is a universal language'. This sounds a warm and comforting thing to say. But in fact it is a myth, and almost the exact opposite is true. (Scott 2007:1)

It is the researcher's view that music does have the power to bring people together under a common language. But it cannot be denied that music's social function just as often, or even more often, is to cement an 'in-group' identity and to build confidence and spirit over against another. We can see this prominently at work on sports fields all the time. National anthems, war songs, patriotic songs all had their place in building up the psyche of powerful nations, over against the others, and if the song contains religious imagery or is a hymn of prayer, this is done even more effectively.

Research process and method

Various categories of hymns and songs have been chosen for this study. The method used will be a content analysis of the lyrics as to the images of power and powerlessness they contain and how this reflects the probable self-understanding of the British people at the time. All the songs chosen have some religious content – some more, some less. The first four come from a website: *British Patriotic songs* (Know Britain n.d.).[4] While these are not Christian hymns, they definitely have religious content and are also on occasion sung in religious contexts. They are therefore included. Then there are hymns which were composed for or chosen for the Diamond Jubilee celebration for Queen Victoria, in 1897 (Murray n.d.).[5] This was the high point of imperial power, with many people believing the British Empire to be invincible and God-ordained.

Then some old English hymnals were searched for various categories of hymns.

Four old hymnals were available to the researcher.

***Hymns Ancient and Modern* (A&M)[6]**
The edition is dated 1916, but is a reprint of the Older version of 1889. The hymnal contains 638 hymns.

The English Hymnal (EH)
This edition is dated 1906 (which was the original edition) and has 656 hymns.

These were arguably the two most influential hymn books in England at the time.[7]

The Methodist School hymnal (MSH)
The available edition was undated, but must have been published between 1905 and 1907. (The last date in the Biographical index is 1905. Annie Louisa Walker who is noted in the index as still alive died in 1907.) This hymnal contains 621 hymns.

It is obvious from the volume of hymns that this study cannot be exhaustive. Only some illustrative examples of hymns will be drawn out of these hymnals.

While the power of these songs lies largely in their music, this article will confine itself to the lyrics of the songs. The tunes all fit the category of emotive music,[8] which rouse people's feelings of loyalty and enable people to sing along.

British patriotic songs

Rule, Britannia!

The first song to be discussed here is not a hymn, but it does contain religious themes. The song *Rule, Britannia!* dates from 1740 (Richards 2001:96).[9] It became increasingly popular and is still performed today. During the Victorian era, the original words 'Britannia rule the waves' often became changed to 'rules' the waves, as by then, that was factually true (Richards 2001:98–99).

> When Britain first, at Heaven's command/arose from out the azure main;
> This was the charter of the land,/ and guardian angels sang this strain: 'Rule, Britannia! rule the waves: /Britons never will be slaves'. (Know Britain n.d.)

Here the conviction is made completely clear, the ideology that Britain's call to imperial power is from heaven itself. The guardian angels call on her to rule, and do this, because she is more righteous, more blessed, more worthy than all the other nations. The nation gains a sacred character which deserves loyalty. These other nations will succumb to tyrants, unless they submit to the power that can set them free also.[10]

The other verses do not have overt religious imagery, but the whole language is pseudo-religious, the nation gaining

3. Even the heavily imperialist tunes like 'Rule, Britannia' and 'Land of Hope and Glory' are still performed regularly in concerts, particularly where there are many English citizens, such as those by the Pietermaritzburg City Orchestra where the researcher was a participant on several occasions.

4. There are six 'Patriotic songs' on this index, four of which have religious content and are discussed in this article.

5. These are taken from the Order of Service of a Canadian Episcopal Church.

6. Following hymnological convention, hymnals and song books are listed under abbreviations rather than under publishers.

7. Eric Routley calls *Hymns Ancient and Modern* the 'most famous hymnal in the world' (1983:55) and extensively discusses the breakthrough of the *English Hymnal* (71ff.).

8. See the discussion in Tönsing about elements of tunes and what determines appeal and level of difficulty (2013:81ff.).

9. It was originally part of the musical production *Alfred* by Thomas Arne, the lyrics written by James Thomson.

10. This in the later verse:

> *The nations, not so blest as thee,/Must in their turn, to tyrants fall,*
> *While thou shalt flourish great and free,/ The dread and envy of them all.*
> Know Britain (n.d.)

a sacred character which deserves loyalty. The tune[11] is highly emotive, with big jumps and many slurs,[12] but this actually makes it too complex for a big crowd to sing the whole song, so normally it is sung by a soloist with the patriotic crowds joining in on the relatively simple, but emotive chorus. The chorus has a long slur on 'ne-e-e-e-ever', which has led to it in popular use often being changed to 'Britons never, never, never will be slaves', even more emphatic than the original (Wikipedia, Rule Britannia! n.d.).[13]

Land of hope and glory

In this song, which began as a tune from Sir Edward Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance* march the power of Britain is proclaimed as divinely given and her rule as an agent of the divine will (Richards 2001:56–57).[14] The song is addressed to Britain, but indirectly a prayer for Britain's power is addressed to God. The religious justification of power is unapologetically proclaimed. The tune is emotive with many large leaps and slurs – most emotive of course when played with full orchestra in the context of Elgar's music (Richards 2001:57):[15]

> Land of Hope and Glory, Mother of the Free,
> How shall we extol thee, who are born of thee?
> Wider still and wider shall thy bounds be set;
> God, who made thee mighty, make thee mightier yet,
> God, who made thee mighty, make thee mightier yet.
> (Know Britain n.d.)

Elgar was the foremost imperial composer, one of the most gifted England has ever produced. Some of those who love his music have tried to downplay his imperial ideology. Richards critiques this attempt of 'anti-imperial Elgarians' as absurd and explains that Elgar was a man of his time, captured by what he saw as the positive values of the Empire. He writes:

> Elgar's vision of Empire **…** is a vision of justice, peace, freedom and equality, of the pax Britannica and of the fulfilment by Britain of its trusteeship mission, to see the countries in its charge brought safely and in due course to independence – a far from ignoble dream. (Richards 2001:51)

But the prayer to 'Be made mightier' has very often been justified by seemingly noble reasons, and supported by very well-meaning people. It has still led to forms of oppression and exploitation.

God save the Queen

The most obvious patriotic song is the national anthem, God save the Queen. Addressed to God, it asks for a long and blessed life for the monarch and as such identifies the nation with the sovereign (Richards 2001:88). The first verse which is generally sung is largely unproblematic in the context of a constitutional monarchy. Obviously the term 'victorious' had its connotations in the time of the Empire:

> Send **her**[16] victorious, Happy and glorious,
> Long to reign over us: God save The Queen! (Know Britain n.d.)

The words are based on the Bible text used at coronations, 1 Kings 1:38–40 and probably date from 1745. Sung first during the Jacobite rebellion against the crown, the song was seen as a way of showing support to the royal house (Richards 2001:88). It was the first 'national anthem' of any country, and other countries followed, copying Britain. Some even used the same tune,[17] as did the USA with 'My country, 'tis of thee' (Richards 2001:93) and Germany with the imperial song to the Emperor: 'Heil dir im Siegerkranz' (Liederarchiv n.d.). It is an easier tune than the others and lends itself to being sung fully by a large crowd. The second verse, which one seldom hears today, is much more overtly a religious cementing of British power:[18]

> O Lord our God arise, scatter **her** enemies,
> and make them fall:
> Confound their politics, frustrate their knavish tricks,
> On Thee our hopes we fix: God save us all.

Fortunately, it is the third verse which one normally hears if more than one verse is sung or played for a special event. Here, it is the image of a benevolent and peaceful ruler, rather than a militant empress which is painted. It is through the ruler that God's blessings and bounty is mediated to the nation:

> Thy choicest gifts in store, on **her** be pleased to pour;
> Long may **she** reign:
> May **she** defend our laws, and ever give us cause,
> To sing with heart and voice, **God save The Queen!** (Know Britain n.d.)

Jerusalem

The last song looked at in this section is a more interesting, ambiguous song. Although listed in the website under 'British patriotic songs' this song has a critical element, which is however not always noticed. The poem by William Blake was published in 1808. It is inspired by a legend that Jesus visited

11.The lyrics by James Thomson were set to music by Thomas Arne in 1740 (Wikipedia - Rule Britannia n.d.).

12.See the discussion on features of emotive tunes in Tönsing (2013:81–88).

13.Repeating the word makes it more emphatic, although it can be seen as having 'corrupted' the tune.

14.Richards records how the *Pomp and Circumstance* March no 1, which was written in 1901, was accorded a double encore at its first performance at the Queen's Hall. For the coronation of King Edward VII, Elgar composed a coronation ode using this tune and A. C. Benson composed the lyrics for this. Of these, it is the refrain which is still widely known and sung.

15.Another example of the emotive response to this music by Elgar is recounted by Richards: 'here arose a heartening din … and it seemed that the excitement would never abate' (Bax, quoted in Richards 2001:57).

16.When a King is on the throne, the bold printed pronouns are changed accordingly.

17.The origin of the tune is not clear, though it is sometimes attributed to John Bull (1619), others find its origins in plainchant or folk tunes (Richards 2001:90–91).

18.This is the second verse according to the Website 'Patriotic songs'. Other Websites give the third verse quoted below as a second verse and add different verses. Richards records this one as second verse and recounts an attempt by Rev. S. Reynolds Hole to rewrite this verse. But it did not manage to replace this verse permanently:

> O Lord our God arise, / scatter her enemies, / make wars to cease;
> keep us from plague and dearth, turn thou our woes to mirth;/
> and over all the earth / let there be peace. (Richards 2001:142)

England with Joseph of Arimathea in his early life.[19] Blake does not confirm the legend, he merely asks the question. The implication is that at the moment the state of England is not such that Jesus could build Jerusalem there, but the challenge is to action, to make England a place to host a visit of the son of God. Most people recognise some social critique in the reference to 'dark satanic mills', which most interpreters take as referring to the social oppression of the Industrial Revolution. An alternative interpretation is that it actually refers to the Church of England (Barr 2004:20).[20] However, the call to action has often been interpreted as a triumphalist indication that England is the new 'chosen nation', where the 'new Jerusalem' that would refer to the Kingdom of God on earth would be built. In general the song is understood as a patriotic hymn, as can be seen by the fact that it is used as an anthem at Sports events, very prominently in the opening of the London Olympics (Hume & Reynolds 2012).[21]

Space does not permit a detailed analysis of this hymn here, but its ambiguity has led to its adoption by people across the political spectrum, and according to Wikipedia, it has been sung at political events of both the Labour and the Conservative Party (Wikipedia, And did those feet n.d.):[22]

> And did those feet in ancient time /walk upon England's mountains green:/And was the holy Lamb of God/on England's pleasant pastures seen!/And did the Countenance Divine/shine forth upon our clouded hills?/And was Jerusalem builded here/among these dark Satanic Mills?/Bring me my Bow of burning gold;/bring me my Arrows of desire:/Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!/Bring me my Chariot of fire!/I will not cease from Mental Fight,/nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:/Till we have built Jerusalem/in England's green & pleasant Land. (Know Britain n.d.)

What sealed this hymn's position as a 'patriotic song' is probably the rousing tune of Sir Hubert Parry which was added in 1916, during the First World War. It was commissioned to help instil patriotism, although Parry himself was critical of this, and preferred its later use by the Suffrage Movement. However it became an effective anthem to inspire the nation during both the World Wars, given a particular slant to the meaning of the words, 'nor shall my sword sleep in my hand' (BBC n.d.).

Hymns for the Diamond Jubilee Celebration

The 60th year of rule of Queen Victoria was an occasion which was celebrated throughout the British Empire and was characterised by a glorification of the Empire and the 'adulation of an almost goddess-like Empress' (Richards 2001:136–145). The order of service from a Canadian Episcopal church, which probably follows a fairly standard format (Murray n.d.), has 10 hymns, of which three make a direct reference to 'threescore years' of blessing or grace, which means they have been especially written or adapted to the occasion. Two of the hymns which are still popular today will be discussed in the later sections, that is, Praise my soul, the King of Heaven and The day thou gavest. The hymns generally depict a time of blessing, which comes from God and is dispensed not only to England, but to all nations under her care by a benevolent and generous Empress. Only a few quotes can be given here:

> God of supreme dominion, from whom all power has birth,
> Whose Praise on eagle pinion
> o'ers weeps Thine Heav'n and earth:
> We lift one voice before Thee from many a land and race,
> And with one heart adore Thee for threescore years of grace
> Praise for the sweet compassion
> which makes the wide world own
> That Love's divinest fashion is set from Britain's throne.
> (Murray n.d. Hymn 2)
>
> … By Thee alone she rules,
> Thine is the Arm which strengthens; … (Murray n.d. Hymn 3)
>
> … And looking from Thy holy heaven,
> protect the crown Thyself hast given … (Murray n.d. Hymn 6)
>
> Lord we praise for mercies past, still to this most favour'd nation
> May those mercies ever last; … (Murray n.d. Hymn 7)

The consistent picture raised in these verses is a 'most favoured nation', set by God himself to rule the world, with generosity and justice through the monarch appointed and blessed by God. There is no room in this picture for questioning whether England does indeed rule by divine right and whether her rule is always just.

Patriotic songs in the hymnals

The collection in Hymns Ancient and Modern has no overtly patriotic hymns. However, the English Hymnal and the Methodist School Hymnal have sections called 'National' or 'National Life', respectively. In these there are hymns on the Christian duty to the country. They are less overt in their glorification of British power, and there are some critical elements, calling on Britons to live pious and just lives, lest they not be worthy of the honour of the power they have. However, the feeling over superiority over the other nations is not questioned:

> If, drunk with sight of power, we loose
> wild tongues that have not thee in awe,
> such boastings as the Gentiles use,
> or lesser breeds without the Law –
> Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
> lest we forget – lest we forget.
> (Rudyard Kipling 1865–1936 EH 558 v4)

The message is clear that Britons could through laxity or excessive pride easily slip into the immoral practices and attitudes of the 'lesser breeds', and they need to prove

19. This version of the legend seems to be the more widespread, recounted in the Wikipedia Article (And did those feet in ancient time, Online). Another version quoted by A. Barr is that Joseph of Arimathea brought the Holy Grail, the 'countenance divine' to England (Barr 2004:20). While this version seems more likely, the stress on 'those feet' does not seem to match this.

20. According to Barr, Blake is aiming his criticism at the effects of secular humanism and the enlightenment on the church and true faith.

21. In the guide to the Opening Ceremony, Tim Hume and Dylan Reynolds refer to it as England's 'most recognised patriotic song' and a 'de facto national anthem' at sports events. Its images of the 'Green and pleasant land', 'dark, satanic mills' and 'chariots of fire' are echoed in different parts of the Opening Ceremony.

22. This fact could be verified from other sources only for the Labour Party (Montefiore 2011).

themselves worthy of their high calling. It is again through the power of the monarch and the blessing he or she mediates that the conditions are created for Britons to lead the lives worthy of their calling. This calling is to be agents of God's divine plan to spread the light of his gospel through the agency of the Empire (see the next section):

> The powers ordained by thee with heavenly wisdom bless
> May they thy servants be, and rule in righteousness.
> (Bp W. W. How 1823–1897 EH 565 v4)

> Through the empire spread Thy light,
> over all shed Thou Thy calm;
> Arm us for our heavenly fight by the oak, the pine, the palm;
> one world-wide confederate band, may we all be one in Thee!
> Hear us for our motherland and the lands across the sea.
> (F. A Jackson 1867–1942 MSH 613v3)

Songs glorifying the role of Western missionaries

The next category of songs to be looked at here are those that want to inspire mission to the gentiles. They do not glorify power directly, but indirectly justify the subjugation and cultural submission of other nations in the name of spreading the Christian message. Jeffrey Richards (2001) writes:

> There can be little doubt that the primary motive in the growth of the British Empire was economic … Altruistic imperialism played a very small part in the first phase of Empire, but with the need to develop a doctrine to justify the acquisition of Empire, it took on a major importance. The missionary impulse, the desire to bring the 'heathen' to the light of God and the leadership principle, the idea that the British being the greatest race in the world had a duty to provide government and justice for 'inferior races', intertwined to create a continuing theme in imperial writing: the idea that the British ran their Empire not for their own benefit but for the benefit of those they ruled. (p. 14)

It is obviously beyond the scope of this article to discuss the complex interplay of mission and imperialism, which were not the same, but did strengthen each other.[23] Most of the songs in this category are no longer sung today, but they were very popular, and sung in all languages and countries which sent out missionaries. These songs do not mention any particular nation, they are speaking of Christians in general,[24] but nevertheless, it was particular nations who sent out missionaries, often as part of the colonial project. Very few of these songs have any critical element in them.

From Greenland's icy mountains (R. Heber 1819)

The first hymn looked at here is one of the most popular of the hymns and became something of a signature tune of the missionary movement:

1. From Greenland's icy mountains,
   from India's coral strand,
   Where Africa's sunny fountains roll down their golden sand;
   From many an ancient river, from many a palmy plain,
   They call us to deliver their land from error's chain.
   3. Shall we, whose souls are lighted with wisdom from on high,
   Shall we to men benighted the lamp of life deny?
   Salvation! O salvation! The joyful sound proclaim,
   Till earth's remotest nation has learned Messiah's name. (EH 547)

This hymn was included in the *English Hymn book* edited by R.W. Dale, which according to Hall, 'was an essential weapon in the effort to construct a vital English masculinity' (Hall 1993:226).

The common theme in many of these hymns is that the call always comes from the 'heathens', who want the Western missionaries to come and save them. The image used is based on the Bible story from Acts 16:9–10, where in Paul's dream someone calls from Macedonia 'Come over and help us' – a favourite text of the 19th-century missionary movement, according to David Bosch, where the 'thought was current that the heathen in their helplessness and poverty were calling upon the benevolent help of the Christian nations' (Bosch 1991:289).

Through midnight gloom from Macedon (S.J. Stone 1871)

The 'call from Macedonia' (Acts 16:9) is the central image in another hymn which is here quoted in extracts:

> Through midnight gloom from Macedon
> The cry of myriads as of one,
> The voiceful silence of despair,
> Is eloquent in awful prayer,
> The soul's exceeding bitter cry,
> 'Come o'er and help us, or we die'.
> How mournfully it echoes on!
> For half the earth is Macedon; … (A&M:361)

It describes the plight of the unsaved in stark terms who will be condemned for eternity if they are not 'helped' by Western missionaries. It ends in a prayer to Christ:

> … Wake heart and will to hear their cry;
> Help us to help them, lest we die

This is not very subtle emotional pressure to get involved in the missionary effort, and a powerful justification for getting out there and spreading the Empire to convert the heathen. The heathen's are portrayed as desperate for the 'help' of the Western missionaries. There is no questioning of the Christian mission and its 'civilising' influence.

O Thou before whose presence (S.J. Stone 1889)

From the same hymn writer comes the following less dramatic, more prayerful verse:

1. O Thou, before whose presence
   Naught evil may come in,
   Yet who dost look in mercy

23. In her paper *'From Greenland's Icy Mountains … to Africa's Golden Sand': Ethnicity, Race and Nation in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England,* Catherine Hall discusses how even from more open-minded areas, people had an attitude of superiority:Lily Saville came from a congregation which was in the heartland of missionary and abolitionist work. Yet her eye was relentlessly ethnocentric, her confident assumption that without western intervention 'heathens' would remain in a terrible state of barbarism and that the wearing of English hats on a Sunday, however ridiculous, was itself an 'advance in civilisation', her greatest compliment that someone or something reminded her of England, was 'like us', 'like home' (Hall 1993:215).

24. Richards recounts that Britain's view of itself as the 'chosen people' came with a particular brand of evangelicalism and anti-Catholicism. The victories over the Catholics, such as that over the Spanish Armada or the Jacobite rebellion, reinforced this sense of having been chosen (Richards 2001: 366–367).

Down on this world of sin;
O give us noble purpose
To set the sin-bound free,
And Christ-like tender pity
To seek the lost for Thee. (MSH 550 v1)

There are several other examples of missionary hymns, encouraging people to go out and spread the gospel, but with less overt imperial overtones.[25]

Songs depicting God and Jesus as powerful rulers (working through human subjects)

Songs with royal images of God or Christ, depicting their power and glory are too numerous to mention. In this category would fall the still popular, *Praise my soul, the King of heaven*, which was chosen for the Diamond Jubilee Celebration (Murray n.d.:5). It is one of many which depict God as a powerful, benevolent ruler. The royal images come from the Bible and are not theologically problematic in themselves, but in the context of the Empire, they reinforced a hierarchical view of the world. Other popular hymns which could be listed here are *Crown him with many crowns* written in 1852 by M. Bridges (EH 381). Another hymn still widely sung today is *All hail the power of Jesus' name*. This was written in 1779 by Edward Perronet, who was originally a pastor of the Church of England, but had some scathing criticism of his church and later became a dissenter (Rogal 2010:23). This shows that the hymns are not always written with the intention of reinforcing state power. However, their extraordinary popularity fits in with the general spirit of the Empire and the notion that power is good and that a powerful God works through powerful human rulers. Sometimes this link is more overtly made:

Judge eternal, throned in splendour,
Lord of lords and King of Kings,
with thy living fire of judgement
purge this realm of bitter things …
… Crown, O God, thine own endeavour:
Cleave our darkness with thy sword:
Feed the faint and hungry heathen
with the richness of thy Word:
Cleanse the body of this empire
through the glory of the Lord. (Henry Scott Holland EH 423 v1)

Militant hymns

Many of the British hymns, some of them still popular today, use the militant images of spiritual warfare. However, the boundaries of physical and spiritual warfare are often blurred in these texts, and even if their original intention was not military, they easily lend themselves to be used to build up the morale within an army and a nation when going to war. For people in this era, 'deep religious faith and patriotic militarism were felt to be wholly compatible' (Richards 2001:59).

25.For example, 'Lord, her watch the Church is keeping' (A&M 362; 'God of grace, O let Thy light' (A& M 364).

Soldiers of the Cross arise (Bp W. Walsham How 1823–1897)

Soldiers of the Cross, arise!
Gird you with your armour bright;
Mighty are your enemies, hard the battle ye must fight …
… in the might of God array'd, scatter sin and unbelief …
… till the kingdoms of the world are the kingdom of the Lord.
(A&M 588)

Whatever the original intention of this hymn may have been, it lends itself easily to justifying wars in the name of spreading the Kingdom of God.

Onward, Christian soldiers (Baring-Gould 1934–1924)

This is probably one of the most widely known and sung of all English hymns (A&M 391). It was written not for the State or the army but for a children's procession at a school festival (Barr 2004:72), but its appeal went far beyond this, particularly after its pairing with the rousing tune from 1871, St Gertrude, by the famous Arthur Sullivan (Barr 2004:72). How much the text has been associated with militant imperialism can be seen by the way its title is used in many critical articles on military conflicts throughout the world.[26] It is not popularly seen as simply about spiritual warfare. It was a hymn that was easily assimilated into the imperial project. In spite of increasing criticism of militant language, the hymn has stayed popular.

Other hymns

There are other hymns in this category, some of which have enduring popularity, and only a selection can be named here: *Stand up, stand up for Jesus* (A&M 542), the older Wesley hymn with enduring popularity, *Soldiers of Christ, arise* (EH 479), *Soldiers, who are Christ's below* (EH 480), *Oft in danger, oft in woe* (A&M 291). In general they have in common that the 'war' can be interpreted in both spiritual and physical terms, and that they generally do not acknowledge that evil is always also within and among us and not only with an external enemy. These hymns were a crucial pillar of the power of an empire which portrayed itself as a power for good in the world.[27]

Songs speaking of Christ as a servant, of God as giving up his power

To find hymns in the former categories was easy and did not entail much searching. To find more critical hymns needed more searching and usually these were much less

26.A search in 'Google Scholar' with the Keywords 'Onward Christian soldiers' yielded countless sites and articles of which only the first two were about the song. The themes of the articles which this quote in their title range from historical articles, for example, on Religion and the American Civil War, or Militarism in post-Soviet era Russia. There are articles on the Just War tradition and the role of the American Religious Right.

27.Games (2011) writes: The other great theme of the Victorian hymn-writers was that of Christian warfare. They understood marching banners, pipes and drums and knees bowed in homage to a conquering power. But they also understood that battles have to be won. In Victorian England there were no prizes for losers and precious few for coming second. God gives us strength, true, but it's up to us to 'Fight the Good Fight' (p. 138).

well-known hymns, some are no longer sung. The incarnation and Christ's way of being a suffering servant are important theological themes, but they seem to attract less poetic talent than the glory of Christ the King. Not singing about these themes makes them recede greatly in people's consciousness.

Bless'd are the poor in heart (J. Keble 1819)

This hymn is still sung, though not nearly as well-known as many in the former categories. It is a counter-image to the image of the powerful Christ recalling the fact of the incarnation and is a call for Christian humility and purity of spirit. It does not draw out implications for the Christian life:

v2. The Lord, who left the heavens,
Our life and peace to bring,
To dwell in lowliness with men,
Their pattern and their King. (A&M 261)

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us (J. Edmeston, 1791–1867)

This is again a hymn that reminds us of Christ's incarnation into powerlessness. It is not really a critique of power, but again is an important corrective to all the images of the power and glory of Christ. Here it is made clear that the earthly Christ was familiar with total powerlessness, and that this powerlessness of Christ is what gives him the power to understand us and forgive: Again there are no consequences hinted at for the Christian life:

2. Saviour! Breathe forgiveness o'er us
All our weakness thou dost know,
Thou didst tread this earth before us,
Thou didst feel its keenest woe;
Lone and dreary, faint and weary,
Through the desert thou didst go. (EH 426)

Son of God, eternal saviour (S.C. Lowry 1893)

This hymn has slightly more critically aware content, a consciousness of the problematic sides of the Empire and a vision of a different social future. The servant image becomes a call to serve others:

v1 **…** Son of Man, whose birth incarnate,
hallows all our human race**…**
… heal our wrongs, and help our need
v2 As thou, Lord, hast lived for others,
so may we for others live;
Freely have thy gifts been granted,
freely may thy servants give.
Thine the gold and thine the silver,
thine the wealth of land and sea,
We but stewards of thy bounty,
held in solemn trust for thee.
V4. Ah, the past is dark behind us,
strewn with wrecks and stained with blood;
but before us gleams the vision
of the coming brotherhood.
See the Christlike host advancing,
high and lowly, great and small,
linked in bonds of common service
for the common Lord of all. (EH 529)

Other hymns

There are some other hymns with images from the incarnation where Christ lets go of power and voluntarily enters an existence of dependency and powerlessness. They do not draw conclusions for Christian living: 'We saw thee not when thou didst come' (A&M 213), 'Who is this so weak and helpless' (A&M 215). The following verse comes from a Passion hymn:

No kingly sign declares that glory now,
no ray of hope lights up that awful hour;
A thorny crown surrounds the bleeding brow,
the hands are stretched in weakness, not in power. (EH 113)

It is clear that for the people of Imperial England, at least as reflected in their hymns, Christ is much more a glorious heavenly ruler than a suffering servant. The servant image though it does appear, does not fit neatly into the hierarchical world view.

Songs critiquing power, speaking about social justice using biblical or other images

There are some hymns which have the theme of social justice because they are based on psalms or prophetic texts.

Hail to the Lord's Anointed (J. Montgomery 1821)

v1. Hail to the Lord's Anointed, Great David's greater Son!
Hail, in the time appointed, His reign on earth begun!
He comes to break oppression, to set the captive free,
To take away transgression and rule in equity.
v2. He comes with succor speedy to those who suffer wrong;
To help the poor and needy, and bid the weak be strong;
To give them songs for sighing; their darkness turn to light,
Whose souls condemned and dying, were precious in His sight. (MSH 482)

This song simply portrays the message of Jesus' message of 'good news to the poor' without spiritualising it or blunting it. It does not draw out implications or give a contemporary context for oppression, but here a prophetic social message is given a singable form which has carried through to today.

Hark the glad sound (P. Doddridge 1735)

More typical of most hymns in this category is the much older hymn of Doddridge, which clearly speaks of spiritual bondage and wounded souls, and seems to refer to the 'poor in spirit', rather than to any social group when speaking of the 'humble poor':

2. He comes, the prisoners to release, in Satan's bondage held;
The gates of brass before Him burst, the iron fetters yield.
3. He comes, the broken heart to bind, the bleeding soul to cure,
And with the treasures of His grace to bless the humble poor. (EH 6)

Such hymns use the biblical images, but in no way let them question the social stratification and view of the Britons of

their divine purpose. The images are all spiritualised and seen as referring to various categories of people within the Christian church.

The day thou gavest – Transcending boundaries

This article ends with a hymn which began in the era of deep British imperialism and uses its images, but in a way which transcends boundaries and has made it a truly global hymn. This is John Ellerton's '*The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended*' written in 1870 (A&M 477). It was adopted as the international hymn of the World Day of Prayer (WDP Committee n.d.). In the liturgies which are prepared by women of a different country each year, this hymn is the constant element, always sung at the end of the celebration in whatever language this group is worshiping in.[28]

The central image of this hymn is taken straight out of the rhetoric of the British Empire. The saying 'The sun never sets on the British Empire' is here applied to the church of God, which is the kingdom on which the sun never sets and which will endure even if the 'earth's proud empires pass away'. While there seems to be a critical element to the hymn, many commentators see Ellerton as very clearly part of the imperialist era: Michael Hawn calls the hymn a 'a prayer of thanksgiving for the expansion of the church around the world'. He quotes Carlton Young, editor of *The UM Hymnal*, who notes that this hymn 'is also an expression of late-19th-century British Victorian military and cultural imperialism that could not have been written in any other time and sung in any other church' (Hawn n.d.).

Erik Routley, an eminent 20th-century British hymnologist, observes that this missionary hymn celebrated the expansion of the church as the British Empire also expanded. 'An empire on which the sun never sets' is precisely the thought that is here adapted to Christian use. The whole setting is geographical, and each verse invites the singer to contemplate the territorial extent of Christendom.

It seems that the hymn soared in popularity when it was sung at Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 (Murray n.d.:5). It seems the Queen herself chose this hymn and asked for it to be sung throughout her Empire (Barr 2004:78, Christiansen 2007), which means she may have been far sighted enough to relativise her own reign and the Empire as just another tool in God's work, which will pass away.[29]

It seems to the researcher that an uncritical imperialist could not have written the last stanza. Its power as an inclusive rather than an exclusive hymn can be seen not only in its use in the World Day of Prayer, but also in the fact that it was used in the ceremony where Hong Kong was handed back to China in 1997 (Christiansen 2007). At the end Michael Hawn concludes:

> While definitely a product of its age, this hymn lives on while so many other hymns, saturated with blatant militant imperialism, have fallen into disuse. Acknowledging that 'earth's proud empires [*will*] pass away' [*stanza 4*], Ellerton's artistry, metaphorical depth and biblical foundations make this a hymn for any age. (Hawn n.d.)

The last two stanzas are quoted below:

> The sun that bids us rest is waking
> our brethren 'neath the western sky,
> And hour by hour fresh lips are making
> Thy wondrous doings heard on high.
> So be it, Lord; thy throne shall never
> like earth's proud empires, pass away;
> Thy Kingdom stands, and grows for ever,
> till all thy creatures own thy sway.

Conclusion

As has been argued, music has been used strongly to bring people together and build a common identity. This has been one of the functions of music throughout the generations. Often this is an identity which deliberately excludes others and builds a sense of superiority. What is clear from the study is that there is a lot more glorification of power than critique of power in the hymns of Imperial England. How much this has changed in post-colonial Britain would need to be investigated in a separate study. Music cements identities, often in narrow ways. However, music can also transcend narrow ethnic and nationalistic identities and become part of the heritage of a much broader group of people. This has happened with much instrumental music and also with some hymns which have been translated into many languages and are ultimately owned by the recipient cultures.

The hymns of Imperial England in many cases were aimed at building an identity of Christian superiority over the other nations, but being sung in English or the vernacular in many of these nations they sometimes also showed their bridge-building power. Songs that can be bridge builders obviously need to be examined for their lyrics. For example Elgar's music can have broad appeal, but the lyrics of 'Land of Hope and Glory' would remain narrowly British-focused. It is of course possible to write new lyrics to popular tunes, as has happened with the hymn, 'Onward Christian soldiers' which has been given new lyrics by Michael Forster: 'Onward Christian Pilgrims' (CAH 531).

As problematic as many of the aspects of British imperialism were, the extent of the Empire, and the spread of the Christian Church did provide a basis for the growth of a more common global identity among Christians with the core of a common global musical culture. The widespread singing of Ellerton's hymn is one of the most obvious signs of this.

28.The Women's World Day of Prayer is celebrated in over 170 countries.

29.Richards mentions under the Golden Jubilee description that a piece by Parry which included the lines 'sceptre and crown must tumble down' was not performed as the committee found it inappropriate, and a new piece was commissioned (Richards 2001:136).

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that she has no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced her in writing this article.

References

A&M Monk, W.H. & Stegall, C., 1916, *Hymns ancient and modern – For use in the services of the church with accompanying tunes*, William Clowes and Sons, Ltd, London.

Barr, A., 2004, *The nation's favourite hymns*, Songs of Praise Series, BBC, Lion Hudson plc, Oxford.

BBC n.d. "*Jerusalem" An Anthem for England,* viewed 10 October 2016, from https://video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?fr=yhs-adk-adk_sbnt&hsimp=yhs-adk_sbnt&hspart

Bosch, D., 1991, *Transforming mission – Paradigm shifts in theology of mission,* Orbis books, Maryknoll, NY.

CAH Moore, G., Sayers, S., Forster, M & Benner, S., (ed.), 2000, *Complete Anglican Hymns old and new*, Suffolk, Kevin Mayhew.

Christiansen, R., 2007, *The story behind the hymn: The day thou gavest, Lord is ended,* viewed 30 May 2016, from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/3668062/The-story-behind-the-hymn.html

EH Dearmer, P., (ed.), 1906, *The English hymnal*, Oxford University Press, London.

Games, S., (ed.), 2011, *The John Betjieman Hymnbook,* Continuum International Publishing Group, London.

Gunner, L., 2008, 'Jacob Zuma, the social body and the unruly power of song', *African affairs* 108(430), 27–48. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adn064

Hall, C., 1993, '"From Greenland's icy mountains **…** to Africa's golden sand": Ethnicity, race and nation in mid-nineteenth-century England', *Gender & history* 5(2), 212–230. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0424.1993.tb00173.x

Hartje, G.F., 2009, '"Keeping in tune with the times" – Praise & worship music as today's evangelical hymnody in North America', *Dialog* 48(4), 364–373. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6385.2009.00485.x

Hawn, M., n.d., *History of hymns: 'The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended',* viewed 10 April 2016, from http://www.gbod.org/resources/history-of-hymns-the-day-thou-gavest-lord-is-ended

Hume, T. & Reynolds, D., 2012, *Navigating the 'Isles of Wonder': Navigating the Olympic opening ceremony,* viewed 15 March 2016, from http://edition.cnn.com/2012/07/27/sport/decoding-olympic-opening-ceremony/

Know Britain, n.d., *British patriotic songs,* viewed 16 January 2016, from http://www.know-britain.com/songs/patriotic_songs_index.html

Liederarchiv, n.d., *Heil dir im Siegerkranz, Volkslied 1790,* viewed 25 May 2016, from http://www.lieder-archiv.de/heil_dir_im_siegerkranz-notenblatt_600930.html

Lüdemann, W., 2003, 'Uit die diepte van ons see – An archetypal of selected examples of Afrikaans patriotic Music', *SAMUS* 23, 13–41.

Montefiore, S.S. 2011, *And was Jerusalem builded* here, viewed 10 October 2016, from http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/moslive/article-1352842/Jerusalem-hymn-British-national-anthem-says-Simon-Sebag-Montefiore.htm

MSH Wesleyan Methodist Sunday School Department, n.d. (1905–1907), *The Methodist School hymnal*, London.

Murray, D.A.P., n.d., 'Protestant Episcopal Church, diamond jubilee thanksgiving service', June 20, 1897', in *African American Perspectives: Pamphlets from the Daniel A.P. Murray Collection, 1818–1907,* viewed 20 February 2016, from https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/AMALL:@field%28NUMBER+@band%28lcrbmrp+t1605%29%29

Richards, J., 2001, *Imperialism and music – Britain 1876–1953*, Manchester University Press, Manchester.

Rogal, S.J., 2010, *All hail the power of Jesus' name – A sung prayer of the Christian tradition,* The History of Christian Hymnody, vol. 6, Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, ME.

Routley, E., 1983, *Christian hymns observed,* Alden Press, Oxford.

Scott, J., 2007, *Tuning in to a different song*, Cluster Publications, Pietermaritzburg.

Tönsing, J.G., 2013, *Searching for the 'good song', determining the quality of Christian songs within the polarities of worship,* Unpublished PhD thesis, viewed from http://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/40212

WDP Committee, Scotland, n.d., *A history of the world day of prayer,* viewed 1 June 2016, from http://www.wdpscotland.org.uk/WDPhistory.html

Wikipedia, n.d., *And did those feet in ancient time*, viewed 11 December 2015, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/And_did_those_feet_in_ancient_time

Wikipedia, n.d., *Rule, Britannia!*, viewed 24 April 2016, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rule,_Britannia!