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Faculty of Theology

Department Of Spiritual Theology

The Role of Music as a Liturgical Practice for Transforming the Spirituality of Choir Members in the Light of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* in Mpiri Deanery, the Catholic Diocese of Mangochi, Malawi.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Theology in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Masters/Licentiate Degree in Theology with Specialization in Spiritual Theology.

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NAIROBI 2026

DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this thesis is wholly original with no submissions to any university or other organization for the award of a degree or other academic credential. I further certify that, to the best of my knowledge, all materials and sources from other authors have been appropriately cited and referenced in the text and bibliography.

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DEDICATION

I devote this thesis to my parents, Lucy Chamanza Chipondeponde, for their encouragement and moral support. To my dad, Evaristo Marko Chipondeponde, who should have wishes to see this work, continue to rest in peace. I also dedicate this work to my local ordinary, Right Reverend Montfort Stima, bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Mangochi whose leadership, encouragement, support and pastoral care has enabled me to complete my studies.

Lastly, I dedicate my work to my brothers and sisters in appreciation of their support, encouragement, and prayers. Thank you so much for your support, my dear friends in the vineyard.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAS	*Acta Apostolic Sedis*
CUEA	Catholic University of Eastern Africa
AMECEA	Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa
ECM	Episcopal Conference of Malawi
CCC	The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
SC	*Sacrosanctum Concilium*
MoE	Ministry of Education
ITCZ	Intertropocal Connvergence Zone
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CoBRA	Community-Based Resilience Analysis
UNDP	United Nations Developing Programme
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
SOCCOM	Social Communication
US	United States
PAC	Public Affairs Committee
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
CARD	Churches Action in Relief and Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
TVET	Technical and Vocational education Training

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of music in the liturgy to bring about the spiritual transformation of the choir members during the liturgy in Mpiri deanery of Mangochi with the guidance of the second Vatican council's teaching known as sacrosanctum concilium. It is based on the conviction that, on the one hand, sacred music, as a performance art, could lose its formative effect, and, on the other, when it is based on theological reflection becomes an instrument of prayer, formation and evangelization. The study places emphasis on a transdisciplinary approach by accessing the data obtained in the study through the Sacred Scriptures, theological reflections and anthropological approaches as well as by distributing a questionnaire to the choir members and the leaders of the church. It emphasises the Bible and ecclesiological basis of the use of sacred music for spiritual formation, moral development and communal identity. The results show that sacred music could have a positive role in the level of participation that attendants have in the liturgy and impacts the moral and social behavior of its members. Despite this, there are some important weaknesses, such as limited theological preparation, performance-driven practices, and inadequate application of Church teaching and problems in leadership and inculturation. The study finds there is a need for intentional formation, reflection and pastoral guidance, and that music in the choir may become a way of discipleship and evangelization.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Music occupies a central and indispensable place in the liturgy which itself stands at the heart of Catholic life. Within the Church's tradition, music is a profound expression of faith that enables deeper participation in the liturgical celebration. Through sacred music the faithful are drawn into a more intimate encounter with God as it enhances both the communicative and participatory dimension of the liturgy. This understanding is clearly articulated in the Constitution on sacred liturgy, *the Sacrosanctum Concilium* which affirms that sacred music is the more holy, the more closely it is joined to the liturgical rite. This shows the willingness of the Church to continue existing and developing music as a discipline that is an integral part of worship and a means of developing Christians.

Although sacred music is a central feature of the church's liturgy, little research has been conducted on the role that choir members' participation in liturgical music plays in the church in relation to spiritual development particularly in an African local context as in Mpiri Deanery. Most of the present studies concern themselves largely with the theological and liturgical values of music on a global level, and do not consider the effect of music on people's spiritual life and experiences in specific cultural and social contexts. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap with a research on the role of liturgical music in enhancing the spiritual life of a choir member in Mpiri Deanery.

This is accomplished using the qualitative research technique that is participant observation, interviews and reading of relevant theological and liturgical documents. The compass of this study comes from texts by the Sacrosanctum Concilium and other texts within the Church which provide a theological basis to understanding of music as a way of shaping and informing Christian spirituality.

Accordingly, the study is aimed at finding out the extent to which liturgical music as an integral part of worship facilitates spiritual growth of the members of the choir as a community in Mpiri Deanery, ecclerial and cultural context. In this theological study it is explored how Liturgical Music, on the basis of the theological principles contained in Sacrosanctum Concilium, relates to the communal and spiritual life, as well as the influence of Liturgical Music on the daily Christian life, dedication and faith of choir members.

The Study is structured in four chapters. Chapter one, presents the general introduction including the background of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, research question, significance of the study and methodology. Chapter two, develops a theological and comparative framework of the study, by engaging key philosophical and theological figures such as St. Augustine of Hippo and John Paul II, alongside African anthropologists such as Charles Nyamiti and John Mbiti. It further examines perspective of music within Judaism, Islam as well as within the *Chewa* traditional religion in order to provide a broader religious and cultural context for understanding the role music in spiritual formation.

Chapter three offers a biblical, theological and liturgical analysis of music as a formative practice. It examines selected text namely Psalms, 52, 32 and 1, as well as the key canticles of the church namely the *Benedictus, the Magnificat and the Nunc Dimittis.* It analyses the *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (112-121) highlighting its formative, transformative and reformative role in shaping faith and lived experiences of those who participate in local and universal church. And finally chapter four presents the research findings from the deanery followed by recommendations for pastoral practice and further study and then the general conclusion.

1. FORMATIVE EVENT

The Mpiri Deanery in the Catholic Diocese of Mangochi, Malawi, comprising six parishes, hosted a much-anticipated Deanery Choir Festival on July 20th, 2024. This event aimed to celebrate the liturgical contributions of choirs through competitive singing and musical ethos and to foster unity among the parishes. Each parish was asked to send five choirs, and all necessary preparations were made to ensure the festival's success. On the day of the event, although some minor logistical adjustments were made, things went well and the judges had been carefully selected outside the diocese and announced the results.

But there was an unusual and stampeded reaction when the results were announced. Some choirs believed they had done extremely well and with eager encouragement were not satisfied with what they achieved. They were extremely dissatistied and started creating trouble and making insults at the judges, the organizers, and even making threats of physical assaults. It became worse when any member of the choir used aggression and threw a stone to an organizer, who was severely injured and needed immediate medical attention. The situation is not an isolated one as it has also happened in other deaneries especially during choir competitions and other similar events.

As a member of the organizing committee, witnessing this behavior from individuals who regularly participate in the sacred liturgy was both shocking and deeply disheartening. This incident raised profound questions about the role of liturgical participation in shaping the moral and spiritual behavior of choir members. How could individuals, who seem to actively participate in liturgical celebrations; intended as a means of spiritual formation and transformation; engage in such indiscipline, disruptive and violent conduct?

For this reason, I have chosen to reflect on the role of music as a spiritual practice in shaping the behavior of choir members of Mpiri Deanery in the Diocese of Mangochi, Malawi.

2. Purpose

Explore and study the role of music as an inspiration spiritual practice harnessed with liturgical ethos so as to transform choir members in the light of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* in Mpiri Deanery in the Catholic Diocese of Mangochi.

3. Rationale

Having worked in the Diocese of Mangochi for 17 years as a priest, I have observed and experienced some challenges with choir members in different parishes of the diocese. As such, the thesis seeks to address the disconnection between active liturgical involvement through singing and personal behavior. Specifically, it explores why the participation in spiritual practices, such as singing or choir membership, does not consistently translate into spiritually grounded and morally upright behavior, particularly when individuals are faced with stressful or competitive situations.

Although the Church's aim is the spiritual formation of her members through liturgical practices, this is not the case, as is illustrated by the dismay and chaos coupled with a brawl at the Mpiri Deanery Choir Festival. This dissonance points to issues of the effectiveness of liturgical engagement which leads to a total moral and spiritual change.

The study will explore this phenomenon to identify their common root cause and give some ideas on how music being spiritual practice can be renewed to induce behavioral consistency and spiritual growth. The results will ultimately help to develop ideas about how to make

spirituality more 'transformative' within the Church in order to create a culture where it inspires worship as well as permeates peoples' lives in a meaningful way.

4. The Central Question of Investigation

What can be achieved by the vast study of Catholic liturgy as a practice using music that develops musician's spirituality in the light of the Second Vatican Council (Sacrosanctum Concilium), to improve life ethos and facilitate deeper evangelization in Mpiri Deanery of Catholic Diocese of Mangochi in the Republic of Malawi?

5. Working hypotheses

Perhaps, deep study of music as liturgical means of transforming the spirituality of the members of the choir in the light of Sacrosanctum Concilium could be an ecclesial means of advancing and enhancing evangelization in Mpiri deanery. The inculturated catechesis that focused on the role of music as an instrument of transformation in the light of Sacrosanctum Concilium may contribute to deepen spiritual maturity, stereotyped life ethos and Christian discipline of the members of this community, especially the choir members of the Catholic Diocese of Mangochi in the deanery of Mpiri.

6. Methodological considerations

In the application of the methodology used in this study, it should be noted that spiritual theology methodologies used to carry out this study include basic, dialogical and integrational approaches. These methods offer a holistic way of researching the Congregational-Liturgical-Lifestyle of Choir Participants.

i. Foundational Approach

The methodology adopted is first, the reflective account of the incident on how it played out during the Mpiri Deanery Choir Festival to the researcher. The way some choir members behave presents an unprofitable contrast between what they do and what is required of their presence in liturgy in terms of attitudes and values.

As a social and spiritual event, the Choir festival is designed to foster a sense of community, enhance liturgical singing and contribute to the development of musical and performance skills. Individuals' lack of coping mechanisms for disappointment in a time of failure, however, also shows the need for greater spiritual formation among choir members. In this way, the choir as a collective group is able to see the building blocks that are essential for the Spiritual development of the choir members: Humility, Patience, Love etc. It brings to the foreground how the liturgical processes contribute to the growth of a gracious lifestyle and a spiritually mature ethical outlook in difficult times.

ii. Dialogical Approach

Follows up on these insights, using the dialogical approach by engaging in a conversation with other disciplines like philosophy, psychology and sociology. Theological theories of forgiveness and spiritual development are integrated with models of emotional regulation and behavioral change from psychology, for instance. Also, there are sociological analyses of group dynamics and competition in religious contexts that give a wider perspective to the behaviours.

iii. Integrational Approach

The integrational approach puts together the knowledge gained in the foundational and dialogical phases in a cohesive knowledge system. The research approach ensures that the questions being investigated are questions which can lead to actions to solve the challenges observed in the Mpiri Deanery.

Suggestions are crafted for improving spiritual development and consistency in behaviour through liturgical involvement. These include practices for a reflective approach, emotional intelligence and the connection of the liturgical teachings to current issues. All recommendations will not only serve to correct the situation in Mpiri Deanery but also will help in the overall scenario of Mangochi Diocese. The integrational approach underscores the need to implement theological and practical solutions from a holistic perspective for Church communities for spiritual development and moral integrity.

7. Structure

The thesis will have four chapters. Chapter one looks at the geographical position of the diocese of Mangochi and population of the case study, ethnic composition, Climatic conditions. The chapter will consider the socio-political situation, including their economic back ground and the history of the diocese. The Chapter will take a look at the religious composition of Mpiri deanery. It will also highlight the origin of the festivals and the objectives the choir festivals. It will further look at the challenges and successes of choir festivals. This will be followed by an integrative reflection

The chapter two explores theologians, Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) and Pope John Paul II (1920-2005), their background and their contribution to music as spiritual practice that can shape

behavior and foster spiritual development in the church. The second part of the chapter considers the contribution of anthropologists like Charles Nyamiti (1931-2020) and John Mbiti (1931-2019) to see their contribution. The chapter also looks at other world religions like Judaism, Islam, especially how music is perceived to influence and shape the behavior and spiritual development of the people. The chapter also considers the *Chewa* traditional religion of Malawi. The interest here is their music in relation to the behavior. This will be followed by an integrative reflection.

Then the chapter three looks at the Old Testament especially the Psalms of David, to see how their music influences the behavior of the Israelites and the spiritual development. Then the chapter further looks at the New Testament especially the Canticles, *Benedictus, Magnicat* and the *Nunc Dimittis.* It further discusses the teaching of the church on music as a spiritual practice in the light of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* which is the church's constitution on liturgy. Then there will be an integrative reflection.

In chapter four, involves two steps. First, looking at the research findings and secondly, the recommendations and then integrative reflection followed by the general conclusion.

CHAPTER ONE

THE BACKGROUND OF MPIRI DEANERY

Introduction

Choirs sing in the context of activities of worship and in choir festivals. It takes place within a particular cultural, the environment, sociological and political context - and it affects the attitudes, behaviors and spiritual experiences of those within the choir. Thus the spiritual development and musical expression of choir participants is highly affected by the community in which they live. They may manifest cultural influences and social structures in their patterns of worship as well as their relationships with others, and their reactions to pastoral initiatives, which revolve around their daily experience of physical environment, cultural heritage and the social structures around them.

It is within this overall context that this chapter aims to give a detailed introduction to this study. To share insights into the spiritual and liturgical positionalities, the historical development of Mpiri deanery, its geographical location and climate are laid out as they influence the settlement of humans and their pastoral access to that place. The chapter further analyzes the ethnic- religious makeup of an area, socio-political context and economic activities, which are all factors that form the lived experiences, and spiritual expression of choir members.

Beyond this, the chapter reflects on the history and development of the Choir Festival in the Diocese of Mangochi as well as its goals, successes and challenges. These festivals are significant not only in the development of their musical skills, but also in their spiritual identity and in building community spirit amongst choir members within the deanery.

The chapter concludes with an integrative reflection, drawing together how these contextual elements influence the spirituality, participation, and pastoral formation of choir members in Mpiri Deanery.

1.1. Background of Mpiri Deanery

By a decree dated 31 July 1889, and with the approval of *Propaganda Fide*, the African Missionaries refered commonly as the White Fathers erected the *Apostolic Pro-Vicariate of Nyasa*. This ecclesiastical territory encompassed what is now Eastern Zambia and almost the whole of present-day Malawi. The first mission station was established at Mponda in Mangochi in December 1889[1].

The mission at Mponda, however, was short-lived. When Nyasaland was declared a British Protectorate in 1891, the White Fathers temporarily withdrew from Mponda and relocated to Tanganyika because of political tensions and administrative uncertainties.[2] Despite this withdrawal, the responsibility for evangelization in Nyasaland remained entrusted to the White Fathers. In 1897, the territory was elevated to the status of a Vicariate Apostolic under Bishop Joseph Dupont, marking what sources describe as a renewed consolidation of the Catholic mission.[3]

The White Fathers realised the enormity of the field of pastoral work, and they asked the Montfort Missionaries over to join in the work of evangelisation. In 1901 the Montfort Fathers opened a mission at Mzama in the present Mzama District. This later led to a working pastoral division of

[1] Missionaries of Africa, "Early Mission Records of Nyasaland 1889–1895," *Society of Missionaries of Africa Archives*, Rome, 1896. 22.
[2] Ian Linden, *Church and State in Malawi: A Study of Mission Politics,* (London: Longman, 1974), 43
[3] Thomas Pakenham, *The Missionary Expansion in Central Africa,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1902), 61.

mission areas in Malawi with the White Fathers carrying on work in the Central and Northern Mission Areas, with the Montfort Missionaries taking over in the Southern Mission Area (which eventually became Mpiri Deanery).

The coming of the Montfort Missionaries and the founding of the Shire Apostolic Prefecture by the Montfort Missionaries did not mean dissension or even a sudden division of evangelization spaces but rather a sensible division of the evangelization space to improve pastoral efficiency.[4] As part of this redistribution, Nguludi Mission originally founded by the Missionaries of Africa was handed over to the Montfort Fathers, who made it one of their principal missionary centers in Southern Malawi.

The Shire Apostolic Prefecture was later elevated to the status of a Vicariate and, in 1952, renamed the Blantyre Vicariate under Bishop Louis Auneau. In the same year, the Zomba Vicariate was erected with Bishop Pullen Hardman appointed as Apostolic Vicar.[5] This new jurisdiction, covered Zomba, Mangochi, and Machinga and significantly influenced the eventual ecclesial identity of Mpiri Deanery.

Mpiri traces its origins to 1913, when it formed part of the Shire Vicariate under the Montfort Missionaries. By 1935, the area then known as Chikala, which included Mpiri, had an estimated 800 Christians.[6] Because of the long distance which was approximately seventy miles from Nankhunda in Zomba to Chikala, the missionaries established the first church at Likhomo, which

[4] Joseph Chakanza, *Religion and Culture in a Changing Malawi,* (Balaka: Montfort Media, 2023), 55.
[5] Malawi Conference of Catholic Bishops, "History of the Catholic Church in Malawi," in https://ecmmw.org/about-us/history-of-the-church-in-malawi/. (Accessed 11/10/2026).
[6] Bruno Epis, *Mbiri ya Mpiri Parish,* (Lilongwe: Montfort Press, 1984), 6

became the foundation of Mpiri Parish. This development later facilitated the opening of additional mission stations, including Nsanama and Namandanje.

When Mangochi was declared an Apostolic Prefecture in 1969, covering Mangochi District and parts of Machinga, the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Mpiri was officially transferred from Zomba to the newly established Mangochi Vicariate,[7] which later became the Diocese of Mangochi. According to the Strategic Plan of the Diocese of Mangochi (2017–2022), the diocese was canonically erected in 1973,[8] with Bishop Alessandro Assolari appointed as its first bishop.

Shortly thereafter, Mpiri Deanery was created, comprising the parishes of Mpiri, Nsanama, and Namandanje, making it one of the first three deaneries in the diocese, alongside Mangochi and Balaka. Subsequent pastoral growth led to the establishment of additional parishes, including Masuku, St Mary's Ntaja, and Holy Cross (Ntaja), as well as the sub-parish of Mkwepere.

Currently, Mpiri Deanery has ten priests serving in six parishes,[9] with between one or two priests per parish. The Parishes include; Mpiri, Namandanje, Nsanama, Masuku, St Marys, and Holy Cross (Mofolo Woyera)[10]. It also hosts four communities of religious sisters[11] at Masuku, Namandanje, Mpiri, and Nsanama. The deanery sustains a vibrant liturgical life, supported by

[7] Malawi Conference of Catholic Bishops, "History of the Catholic Church in Malawi," in https://ecmmw.org/about-us/history-of-the-church-in-malawi/. (Accessed 10/102025).
[8] Diocese of Mangochi. *Strategic Plan 2017–2022*, Mangochi Diocesan Secretariat, 2017, 6.
[9] Diocese of Mangochi, *Pastoral Reports and Parish Growth Records 1973–2005*, Diocesan Pastoral Office, 2006. 36.
[10] Francis Anekwe Oborji, "Mbiti, John Samuel," in The Dictionary of African Christian Biography, https://dacb.org/stories/kenya/mbiti-johns/.
[11] [11]Diocese of Mangochi, *Pastoral Reports and Parish Growth Records 1973–2005*, Diocesan Pastoral Office, 2006. 36.

close to 90 choirs," which remain central to evangelization, youth involvement, and the strengthening of communal identity.

1.2. Geographical Location

The larger part of what is referred to as Mpiri deanery is located in Machinga district and partly in Mangochi district, the eastern part of the southern region of Malawi. According to the map of Malawi[12], sourced online, the deanery shares its boundary with the Shire River and Liwonde National Park to its western side[13]. While as on the northern part it shares its boundary with Mangochi deanery, which is found in Mangochi District, to the eastern side it borders with Mozambique[14]. The deanery also borders with the Catholic Diocese of Zomba to its south[15].

The Machinga District council data, indicated that Mpiri deanery has a total area of about 1194km² and the population for the area is estimated to be 116, 614.[16]

1.3. Climatic Conditions

The climatic conditions of Mpiri Deanery share the general climatic characteristics of Malawi, which is classified as subtropical. The subtropical climate system is defined as a single major rainfall season that takes place in the summer of the Southern Hemisphere. The warm-wet season, which runs from November to April, accounts for around 95% of the annual precipitation, which

[12] See Map of Malawi in the annex, showing the georgrapical location of Mpiri deanery
[13] New Macmillan School Atlas for Malawi, Revised Edition, Macmillan Malawi, 1998. 17.
[14] Diocese of Mangochi, *Strategic Plan 2017–2022*, Mangochi Diocesan Secretariat, 2017. 3.
[15] See Map of Mangochi Dioccese showing the location of the Catholic Diocese of Zomba
[16] Machinga District Council, Directorate of Planning and development, Liwonde, 22 July 2025.

ranges from 700 to 2,500 mm.[17] This pattern is strongly influenced by the *Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone* (ITCZ),[18] which is the primary driver of seasonal rains in Malawi.

Mpiri Deanery has a cold, dry winter season during May till August, with mean temperatures between 17°C and 27°C and minimum temperatures between 4°C and 10°C, just like the rest of Malawi.[19] The region frequently sees chilly southeasterly breezes called locally as Mwera, which adds to the dryness of the season, and humidity levels are typically low at this time. The hot-dry season, which precedes the start of the rainy season, starts in September and October after winter or the cold season, with average temperatures rising over 25°C.[20]

In recent decades, the Eastern Region of Malawi, including Mpiri Deanery, has become increasingly vulnerable to extreme weather events such as prolonged dry spells, flash floods, and tropical cyclones. Research conducted by the Department of Climate Change and Meteorological Services shows that these events are strongly linked to the broader global phenomenon of climate change, which has disrupted normal rainfall patterns, increased seasonal variability, and heightened climate-related risks in Malawi.[21]

The most recent major catastrophes were the cyclones that struck the Southern region of Malawi and the neighbouring Mozambique Province of Malawi's Nkhata Bay District in 2023 (Cyclone Freddy). The cyclone brought six months of rain in one week causing massive floods and

[17] Malawi Department of Climate Change and Meteorological Services, "State of Malawi Climate Report 2023," Lilongwe: 2023. 14.
[18] ICTZ is low pressure belt on the earth near the equator, where Northeast and Southeast trade winds converge. It is known for persistent clouds, thunderstorms and significant Tropical rainfall.
[19] Ministry of Natural Resources and Climate Change. "Meteorological Services Annual Summary 2022," Lilongwe: MNRC, 2022. 9.
[20] Ministry of Natural Resources and Climate Change, 11.
[21] United Nations Development Program, "Community-Based Resilience Analysis (CoBRA) Report," UNDP Malawi, 2016. 29.

mudslides, said CARE Malawi and the Red Cross.[22] The cyclone damaged key buildings including, but not limited to, bridges, irrigation schemes, health facilities and schools, which caused a major interruption in transport and social services. Official estimates of the deaths are around 680, people missing was estimated at 537, and nearly 600,000 people were displaced.[23] Cyclone Freddy hit uneventful waters, with Al Jazeera News Agency calling it the strongest cyclone ever to form in the Southern hemisphere, and likely 'the longest-lasting tropical cyclone on record'.[24]

Such climatic changes have far-reaching socio-economic impacts in the rural areas of Mpiri Deanery. The destruction of crops especially maize, rice, and legumes, resulted in acute food shortages, while households were left without proper shelter and clean water. Women, particularly expectant mothers and those caring for infants, were disproportionately affected due to disrupted health services and increased caregiving burdens.[25] Furthermore, repeated climate shocks have weakened household resilience, heightened poverty levels, and increased rural–urban migration in search of alternative livelihoods[26]

Climatic conditions also have pastoral implications. Flooded roads, destroyed bridges, and seasonal impassability of river crossings affect priestly mobility, limit access to outstations, and disrupt liturgical gatherings.[27] In Mpiri Deanery, choirs often struggle to rehearse or participate in deanery-level festivals during the rainy season because of poor accessibility and the need for

[22] CARE Malawi & Malawi Red Cross Society, "Joint Cyclone Freddy Impact Assessment Report, 2023," Lilongwe. 7.
[23]CARE Malawi & Malawi Red Cross Society, 14.
[24] Al Jazeera. "Cyclone Freddy: Southern Africa Devastated," Al Jazeera Online, 13 March 2023. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/13/storm-freddy-kills-15-in-malawi-mozambique. (Accessed 19/07/2025).
[25] United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). "Cyclone Freddy Situation Report – Malawi," March 2023. 8.
[26] Leonard Nyirenda and Dalton Dzonzi. "Land Use and Vulnerability in Machinga District," *African Journal of Rural Development*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2012, 51.
[27] Fr. Medrick Mlava, Interview, the Pastoral Secretary, Diocese of Mangochi, 14 July 2025.

community members to focus on agricultural activities. Thus, climate variability directly influences the rhythm of parish life, liturgical participation, and the continuity of choir formation programs.[28]

1.4. Ethnic Composition

The Eastern Region of Malawi, comprising Balaka, Mangochi, Machinga, and Zomba Districts, is predominantly inhabited by the *Yao* and *Lomwe* ethnic groups with other smaller groups like the Mang'anja or the *Nyanja* along the Shire River and other smaller tribes. As such, Mpiri Deanery reflects a broader ethnic regional pattern, with the *Yao* forming the largest proportion of the population, estimated at 57.8%, followed by the *Lomwe* at 27.5%, while the *Chewa* or the *Nyanja* constitute approximately 6.4% of the population.[29] Joseph Chaphadzika Chakanza, in his study on religion and culture in Malawi, also affirms the demographic dominance of the Yao in the Eastern Region, highlighting their historical settlement patterns and socio-cultural influence.[30]

Despite the fact that Chichewa has developed as the lingua franca in Malawi, and still serves a vital role in national communication, Mpiri Deanery is predominantly a Yao-speaking area, and Chiyao is widely used in the home, in markets, at community gatherings and in traditional ceremonies. There are pockets of Lomwe speaking populations in the deanery albeit in smaller numbers. Chichewa is still used in administrative and business work, and as a catechetical language in their respective parishes, especially during the inter-parishes coordination, communication and catechesis within the diocese.[31]

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[28] Mlava, 14 January 2025.
[29] National Statistical Office, "Malawi Population and Housing Census Main Report 2018," Zomba: National Statistical Office. 47.
[30] Joseph Chaphadzika Chakanza, *Religion and Culture in a Changing Malawi*, (Lilongwe: Montfort Media, 2023), 118.
[31] Episcopal Conference of Malawi. *Malawi Catholic Directory*, (Lilongwe: Montfort Media, 2002), 68.

In recent years, the population has been becoming more linguistically and culturally diverse due to intermarriage, internal migration, shifts in employment, and the flow of rural–urban migration. [32] This has brought about small groups of other ethnic populations (Ngoni, Sena and Tumbuka) especially in the mission institutions and trade centers.[33]

1.4.1. Cultural Significance of Music among the Yao and the Lomwe

The *Yao* and the *Lomwe* attribute significant cultural and social value to music, which plays an integral role in marking life-cycle events, social gatherings, communal labor, healing rituals, and other ceremonies. As Gregory notes that music in African societies is not an independent art form to be enjoyed for its own sake; rather, it is woven into the fabric of cultural identity.[34] Among the *Yao* and *Lomwe* communities of Mpiri Deanery, music is used to express joy, sorrow, victory, work rhythms, rites of passage, and communal solidarity.

Traditional dances such as *Tchopa and Musila*[35] among the *Lomwe* and *Beni and Manganje*[36] and *Chiwoda*[37], *M'bwiza*[38] among the *Yao* serve as vehicles for transmitting oral histories, values, and communal memory, often depicting themes of warfare, migration, social cooperation, or moral

[32]John Lwanda and James Phoya "Malawi at 50: Culture, Sports and Music," *Society of Malawian Journal*, Vol. 72, No. 1, 2019, 47.
[33] Machinga District Council, "Machinga District Socio-Economic Profile 2017–2022," Machinga District Planning Office, Liwonde, 2017. 21.
[34] Andrew H. Gregory, "*The Role of Music in Society in the Social Psychology of Music*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). 129.
[35] *Tchopa and Musila.* These are traditional dances among the Lhomwe in Southern Part of Malawi, found in the districts of Mulanje, Thyolo, Phalombe and Chiradzulu. *Tchopa* is also called Chopa. They dance in circular while crisscrossing each other.
[36]*Beni* and *Manganje* are traditional popular dances in Malawi, particularly among the Yao of Mangochi, Machinga, Salima, Balaka, and parts of Zomba, performed for entertainment, celebration and other ceremonies.
[37] *Chiwoda* is also a *Yao* and *Chewa* dance for women commonly perfomed at weddings, funerals and political rallies.
[38]M'bwiza, is also a dance among the *Yao* often performed during the night. They dance a man and woman tied togrther by wrapper in their waist.

instruction.[39] These dances and songs are not only performed at ceremonies but also influence everyday musical sensibilities, including the styles used in church choirs.

1.4.2. Initiation Rituals and Musical Influence

An important cultural institution among both the *Yao* and the *Lomwe* is the practice of pubertal initiation[40] ceremonies, through which boys and girls aged approximately 7 to 13 undergo structured instruction before their incorporation into adulthood. Music plays a central pedagogical role forming the basis for teaching discipline, moral conduct, life-skills, cultural knowledge, and gender-specific responsibilities. Nwachukwu observes: "Initiation songs serve as tools for education, cultural preservation, and gender socialization in African communities."[41]

During initiation period, young boy and girls are taught various skill such as mastery of rhythm, responsiveness to call-and-response patterns, and the ability to memorize lengthy songs.[42] The skills they acquire during initiation period helps in their later involvement in church choirs. As a result, liturgical singing in Mpiri is profoundly shaped by indigenous musical forms, blending Catholic liturgical tradition with deeply rooted cultural rhythms.

1.4.3. Implications for Liturgical Music and Choir Spirituality

The Yao and Lomwe strong music culture has close linkages with the spirituality of choir members in Mpiri Deanery. They are culturally prepared for active involvement in music, their impressive ability to put instruments to use, singing together in groups and expression in worship. This results

[39]John Lwanda and James Phoya "Malawi at 50: Culture, Sports and Music," *Society of Malawian Journal*, Vol. 72, No. 1, 2019, 54.
[40] It is a rite of passage, making transition from childhood to adulthood through rituals.
[41] Kasiso Nwachukwu, "Music, Gender and Tradition in African Initiation Rites," *African Music.* In https://africanmusiclibrary.org/blog/music-gender-and-tradition-in-africa-initiation-rites. (Accessed 28/09/2025).
[42] Kasiso Nwachuku, Online Source. (Accessed 28/09/2025).

in high level of congruence, harmony and rhythm sensitivity among church choristers in Mpiri, which are tied to their musical background.

A fusion of cultural and liturgical music in context enhances the Catholic liturgy, promotes a deeper spirituality and builds a sense of community, identity and belonging amongst the choir members and beyond. It is important, therefore, to have an understanding of the ethnic makeup of Mpiri Deanery to understand how music is used, not just as an art, but as a way of meeting God into the lived reality of the culture of the community.

1.5. Religious Composition

The 2018 Malawi Population and Housing Census indicates that with 77.3 % of the total population identifying themselves as Christians, Christianity is the dominant faith in Malawi, with only about 13% identifying as Muslims, forming the second largest religious community in Malawi.[43] This is however not the case in the Eastern Region which has some of the most predominantly Muslim districts of Mangochi and Machinga (which make up Mpiri Deanery).[44] Diocese of Mangochi has approximately 247,916 Catholic faith against a total population of 1,520,600 and this means catholic make up to 16% of the total population[45] in the diocese.

In Mangochi District, which constitutes part of the deanery, Muslims account for approximately 72.6% of the population, while in Machinga they make up 66.9%, according to census data.[46] Over 50% of the Muslims in Malawi are found in these two districts, in historic Swahili Arabic trading ports, where earlier coastal settlements, in the 19th century, facilitated cultural spread of Islam.[47]

[43] National Statistical Office. "Malawi Population and Housing Census Main Report 2018," Zomba: National Statistical Office, 2019, 37.
[44] National Statistical Office, 37.
[45] Malawi Conference of Catholic Bishops, https://ecmmw.org/diocese-2/diocese-of-mangochi/#:~:text=Right%20Rev%20Montfort%20Stima%20(DP,Historical%20Notes: (Accessed 31/01/2026)
[46] National Statistical Office, 115.
[47] U.S. Department of State. "Malawi International Religious Freedom Report 2023," Washington, D.C., 2023. 9.

This demographic scenario creates an interreligious context as significantly unique as Mpiri Deanery where Christians and Muslims cohabit in everyday social, economical and educational life. Inclusive co-existence of Christians and Moslems is what the Catholic church advocates and inspires according to Vatican II (Nostra Aetate).[48]

1.5.1. The Impact of Religious Composition on Liturgical Music

The religious diversity in Mpiri Deanery directly affects liturgy and spirituality as it pertains to church choirs.The implication of spiritual life and religious diversity in Mpiri Deanery on the liturgy and spirituality is especially to the church choir. Because the Catholic population is a minority in several parts of the deanery, parish and church, choirs play an important evangelizing and identity-building role,[49] often serving as a public expression of Catholic presence in predominantly Muslim communities. In this regard, choir processions, Marian hymns, and festive liturgical celebrations often become visible markers of Catholic identity,[50] fostering cohesion among believers and strengthening their spiritual belonging.

Moreover, the coexistence with Muslim communities influences the style, content, and performance of liturgical music. Music therefore becomes a bridge of cultural dialogue, even when theological differences remain.[51]

1.5.2. Christian-Muslim Coexistence and Sources of Tension

The strong presence of Islam in the area has historically shaped social dynamics and interreligious relations. While the coexistence between Christians and Muslims in Mpiri is generally peaceful,

[48] Vatican II Document, *Nostra Aetate*, 3, (1965), 739; AAS 58 (1966), 741.
[49] Ticha Masiiwa, "The Vital role of Church Choir in Delivering People to Christ" *Masvingo Diocese, SOCCOM Post*, 9 April, 2025, 1.
[50] Masiiwa, 1.
[51] Saulos Chimbalanga, Oral interview, Director of Music, Diocese of Mangochi, conducted on 10 July 2025.

periodic tensions have emerged, especially around issues of religious identity, education, and cultural expression. Among the many conflicts was concerns about the wearing of hijab in Christian-owned schools in Muslim dominated communities. Following the violation of hijab in teachers' school uniforms at St. Louis Catholic Primary School (Mpiri Primary School) teachers came under attack by clusters of suspected Moslem men and boys who attacked them and hindered learning in 2021.[52]

The occurrence was similar to incidents that had occurred in Balaka District earlier and the situation is considered sensitive, as regards the issue of religious identity that is experienced in schools.

> The issue was then mediated under the framework of the Public Affairs Committee (PAC) with the involvement of the Malawi Conference Catholic Bishops (MCCB), the Muslim Association of Malawi (MAM) and Ministry of Education (MOE) and by the end, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was reached allowing Muslim girls to wear hijab in school uniforms in Christian schools. [53]

The agreement that happened in May, 2021, reflects the ongoing need for structured interreligious dialogue in regions such as Mpiri Deanery. Fortunately, the agreement is still in force and has helped to bring stability to the region.

1.5.3. The Role of Interreligious Dialogue

Organizations such as the Public Affairs Committee[54], the Interreligious Dialogue Committee,[55] and the Centre for Social Concern[56] have played a critical role in mediating tensions and promoting

[52]Hijab is a head covering traditionally worn by Moslem women symbolizing modesty, privacy, and religious faith.
[53] Ministry of Education. "Memorandum of Understanding on Religious Dress Code in Schools", Lilongwe: MoE Publications, 2021, 4.
[54] Public affairs Committee is a faith based civil organization, made of Christian churches organization, Muslim organization and other faith groups. Its main role is to promote good governance and democracy.
[55] Interreligious Religious Dialogue committee is faith based platform that brings together various religious group to talks, cooperate and act together on national issues.
[56] Center for Social Concern (CSC) is a Catholic Church Based research and advocacy organization.

peaceful co-existence. Their efforts have helped strengthen mutual respect between Christians and Muslims, encouraged collaborative social action, and prevented the escalation of conflicts.[57] The interreligious interventions are very relevant to the context of Mpiri Deanery, where the Church's pastoral journey is always big, crisscrossed and crossed by a culturally mixed up and religious pluralistic context.

1.5.4. Implications on Choir Spirituality

Seeking to comprehend religious make up in Mpiri Deanery is an important factor in appreciating Choir spirituality. When the Christian community is in a minority at many of the village sites, music is used not only for liturgy but as a means of courage, identity, spiritual consciousness and resilience. The participation in Choir and liturgies deepens the members' faith in a pluralistic environment, fosters community spirit, gives members a chance to live their Catholic identity (through culturally appropriate music) and a positive witness (through peaceful living).[58]

Therefore, the theological context of liturgical music at Mpiri Deanery gives a much needed background to analyse how liturgical music promotes, shapes, and creates the spiritual lives of the choir members particularly in their interreligious lives in the as they face everyday life.

1.6. The Socio-Political Situation

Mpiri Deanery, one of the oldest deaneries in the Diocese of Mangochi, was formed in the early 80s mainly to ensure better pastoral coordination and contribute to effective evangelization in all the parishes of the deanery.[59] The 553rd paragraph of the Code of Canon Law prescribes, according to the Christo-Catholic Church structure, that it is governed by a Vicar Forane or a Dean, who is

[57] Public Affairs Committee, "Annual Interreligious Dialogue Report 2020", Lilongwe: PAC Secretariat, 2020, 3.
[58] Ticha Masiiwa, 2.
[59] Fr. Saulos Chimbalanga, Interview, Diocesan Director of Church Music, Mangochi Diocese, 13 June 2025.

appointed by the diocesan bishop for a certain period, as prescribed by canon 554 §2 of the Code of Canons of the Catholic Church. To maintain continuity in the Office of the Dean, Mngochi Diocese applies a 3 year term which can be renewed for three years, and then evaluated at the appropriate time.

Apart from its sacrament and spiritual work, the Catholic Church in Mpiri Deanery works closely with the Government of Malawi, NGO and Faith Based Organizations in championing social transformation and social welfare. The Diocese of Mangochi, through its Social Development Directorate, plays its part in social, health care, agribusiness, peace and justice and developmental programs in the region that complements government programs. [60] Such a partnership is especially important in remote and vulnerable communities like Mpiri, where mission institutions may be the only providers of critical services to the community.

1.6.1. Political Landscape and Voting Patterns

Malawi's overall political story plays a dominant part in the socio-political environment of the Mpiri Deanery. After Hastings Kamuzu Banda (1896–1997) and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) ended their one-party rule, Malawi declared a multiparty democracy in 1994. Since then, political allegiance in Malawi has often followed regional and ethnic lines, as noted by studies such as Afrobarometer.[61] In the Southern Region, including Machinga and Mangochi, political support has for a long time favored the United Democratic Front[62] (UDF), which drew strong backing from the *Yao* population, particularly during Bakili Muluzi's presidency (1994-2004).

[60]Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM), 87.
[61]Afrobarometer. "Malawi Round 5 Survey: Identity Voting and Regional Census in Malawi", Afrobarometer Working Paper No. 72, 2007, 11.
[62] United Democratic Front was the first democratically elected party in Malawi.

However, the political dominance of the UDF declined after 2004, when President Bingu wa Mutharika (1934-2012) left UDF to form the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). The *Lomwe* community, to which Mutharika belonged, strongly supported the DPP, shifting political influence in the region. As it is today, four out of six constituencies in Mpiri deanery are represented by the DPP MPs while the other two in the deanery are occupied by the UDF MPs. [63] This nod to ethnic identity, socioeconomic interests, and political loyalty underscores an enduring unity across the entire spectrum.

1.6.2. Impact on Spiritual life

The socio-political setting of Mpiri Deanery strongly influences the nature of the activities of church choirs and the morale of its members. For many young people, the church choir offers a nourishing context in which they can both challenge and affirm their emotions and personal story, in times of political unrest, economic difficulty or interruption to their schooling.

In addition, mobility is impaired by political uncertainty and unreliable infrastructure in many areas, making it problematic for choirs to compete or even train further away than in their own deanery. Choir being an identity-marker can lead to tensions affecting membership, particularly if the family from one religion view it as such while the family from the other do not. Choir literacy is also being shaped by limitations in education, such as looking at staff notation or liturgy, and needing to learn things more orally and practically.

The socio-political context therefore is not just background information, it also has a huge impact on choir members spiritual, liturgical and musical experiences; influencing how they participate, understand and live their Christian vocation in Mpiri Deanery.

[63] Parliament of Malawi. Constituency Representation Report, Lilongwe: Parliament Press, 2025. 177.

1.6.3. Education Challenges and Opportunities

The problems that are faced in the education are quite great in Mpiri Deanery. Fears of religious conversion that went along with Christian mission education hampered the early 20th century enlistment of children in mission-initiated schools in many Muslim communities. [64] This accounted for the historically low levels of ratings, literacy, and attendance in school in the region. While perceptions have shifted a lot, quality education in real terms is still a problem ranging from high drop out rates associated with poverty to high child labour rates, very long distances to school and also early marriage.[65]

The Government of Malawi has tried to enhance access to education through the Constitutional guarantees of free and mandatory elementary education (Article 13 and 25 of the Constitution of Malawi 1997). Yet, in spite of these legislations, Mpiri still faces problems like less teaching materials, teacher shortages and poor infrastructure.

In the deanery, the Church is playing a pivotal role in the realization of these gaps in the mission schools and through the youth programmes and via the mentoring and promotion of literacy by religious sisters, both academically and spiritually.

1.7. Economic Activities

Where most households in Mpiri Deanery depend on a subsistence agriculture, small commercial activities and informal trade as a means of livelihood, the economy can be described as typical of the rural economies in Malawi. Agriculture continues to stay the mainstay of livelihood, generating

[64] Reijnaerts Henri, *Montfortians in Malawi*, (Limbe: Montfort Press, 1986), 63.
[65] Samuel Elias Kayuni, "Access to Education Rights in Malawi," *European Journal of Applied Sciences*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2025, 13.

over 85% of living income in the form of smallholder farming for more than three quarters of families.[66]

Maize is cultivated, as well as cassava, sorghum, groundnuts, sweet potatoes and legumes. Some soils in the east of the deanery, especially within the villages that are affected by the Lake Chirwa basin, have the potential to produce vegetables throughout the year which means that greater food availability would benefit these households. Irrigation agricultural activities are limited but some irrigation programmes spearheaded by the Diocese of Mangochi Social Development Office (SCDO) are offering alternative agricultural activities. [67] However, these have failed to significantly improve agricultural productivity including reliance on rain-fed systems, accessing improved seeds and environmental degradation and recurrent climate shocks including periods of droughts and floods.

1.7.1. Agriculture as the Primary Economic Activity

Most of the farmers in agriculture in Mpiri Deanery are subsistence farmers. Households do not grow big parcels, and they employ traditional technologies and tools in work. Although maize is the main food crop and influences food security and economic development in the region, it is also the most vulnerable crop in relation to the region's climatic variability. Households continue to be food insecure throughout the lean season, typically in the months October – January, when their food harvests have been exhausted. [68]

A small number of cash crops (e.g. tobacco, cotton and rice) are produced, but only in small amounts because the price for these crops is variable at the national market. In a period of climate

[66] National Statistical Office of Malawi. *Integrated Household Survey (IHS5)*, Zomba: NSO, 2022, 3.
[67] Diocese of Mangochi Social Development Office (SCDO). *Annual Report*, Mangochi: SCDO, 2021, 12.
[68] National Statistical Office of Malawi, 45.

change, many families are now facing increasing vulnerability and end up relying on food aid supplies in very bad climatic years.

1.7.2. Livestock Production

Livestock rearing is an important secondary source of livelihood. Goats are raised indoors in most homes along with chickens, pigs and a few cows. Considering that these are the resources that goats use less intensely than cattle, goats have become the most widespread livestock in the area. Livestock is used by families as a method of "saving" or "insuring," whereby families are able to sell their livestock, if necessary, to obtain quick cash. Countries such as World Vision Malawi and CARD have helped to build livestock pass on Programs, which have enhanced household resilience and food security. [69]

The rearing of livestock is also integral to cultural life, such as in marriage ceremonies, funerals and initiation ceremonies, all of which indicates a strong relationship between economic and cultural life.

1.7.3. Fishing and Related Activities

This is an inland Deanery but through seasonal labour migration, fishing is a contribution to the local economy. During the high seasons, many men head out to beaches at lakes Chirwa and Chiuta (refer to the map on the map index) out to work for them. Fishing income is reinvested into feed the family, and thus helps them cover basic costs such as school fees and food. In spite of this seasonal movement, however, there are noted social problems that stem from marriage tensions, the separation of families and higher rates of exposure to infectious diseases, like HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STD), that engage lakeshore communities and have been discussed

[69] World Vision Malawi. Livelihoods and Resilience Report, Lilongwe: WVM, 2020, 22.

in research on lakeshore economies.[70] The persistence of circular migration in the deanery and fishing places is still a key component of households' livelihoods.

1.7.4. Small-Scale Trading and Informal Sector Activities

There is a significant level of small-scale trading within Mpiri Deanery and small-scale trading is a major contributor to the agricultural income. Agri related products, fish, meat, fruits, vegetables and second hand cloths (kaunjika) are sold in local markets of Mpiri, Nsanama and Ntaja. Majority of traders are women particularly in vegetable vending, fish selling and selling of small domestic items. [71]

Other employed informally include mechanical repair, tailoring and carpentry and bicycle taxi (kabaza). [72] During a down commission, when crops are not being harvested and families need a source of income, these little businesses are of particular importance.

1.7.5. Education and Civil Service Employment

The chances of formal employment in Mpiri Deanery are low. Very few jobs in the civil service, especially teaching and health services, policing and local admin. Mission schools like Mpiri, Namandanje and Masuku have teachers, medical workers and support staff. These are relatively stable positions with relatively stable wages but numbers too low to make an impact on the high numbers of unemployed in the region, especially youth. [73]

This always sees many youth moving to towns like Blantyre, Zomba and Lilongwe in order to find short-term jobs and thus strengthening the rural-urban linkages through remittances. The migratory

[70]Wiseman Chirwa, "Fishing, Migration, and Vulnerability along Lake Malawi." In Rural Livelihoods in Malawi, University of Malawi Press, 2019, 88.
[71] IMF Staff Country Report. "Malawi: Joint Staff Advisory Note," Issue 223, Volume2012, 6.
[72] Malawi Ministry of Trade, "National Strategy for Financial Inclusion III 2024-2028." Lilongwe, 2024, 37.
[73] Stiveria Mpinganjira, "TVET for Social economic Development in Malawi: Gaining Insights from China's Vocational Educational System." *The North American Academic Research,* 8 (3), 2025, 204.

trend is an indicator of the national trend of the young people escaping from rural areas to get jobs outside the agricultural sector.[74]

1.7.6. Economic Hardships and Their Impact on Church Life

The economic problems in Mpiri Deanery have great impact on the activities of the parish and on the choir's activities. Choir members find themselves wanting to bring designed Lenten presents to school, as household poverty makes it hard to provide them with uniforms, hymn books and musical instruments while location challenges make it hard to have choirs attend the deanery events.

Another thing the research revealed is that a lot of people during the lean ration season cut down on the pastoral activities that they do, because many of them have to focus on each household's survival. Always migrating youths make it hard to keep singers cohesive and lack of funds necessitates strong bonds and contributions from community members to sustain choirs. [75] The choir is a very important spiritual and social space for the members despite these hurdles, they get encouraged here and emotional support. This helps the economic circumstances of the deanery to have a significant impact on the spiritual experiences and strength of the choir.[76]

1.8. Historical Background of the Diocesan Choir Festivals

Choir festivals are the events in which it is possible to bring together various choirs to perform music and celebrate it. [77] The emergence of choir festivals dates back to early religious and

[74] Malawi Government and United Nation, "Malawi National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security 2024-2029," Ministry of Youth Sports and Culture, Lilongwe, November 2024. 15
[75] Joseph Chunga and Seth Evance, "Toward Malawi 2063:Youth Confront High Unemployment and Economic Anxiety. In https://www.afrobarometer.org/publication/ad1006-toward-malawi-2063-youth-confront-high-unemployment-and-economic-anxiety/. (Accessed 19/09/2025).
[76] Titus Phiri "Choir Participation and Spirituality in Malawi," *Journal of African Christian Ministry,* Vol 3. No 1. Septermber 2018, 51.
[77] John Gordon Davies, *The New Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship,* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1972), 544.

community events, mainly in the church context where choral singing was an integral part of worship.

The exact dates of the origins on the choir festivals that have been held in the Diocese of Mangochi are still unknown but data collected with the support from the Office of the Pastoral Secretary show that the musical assemblies for the purpose of practicing praise and worship has been a part of the parish life. [78] During the early years in Southern Malawian churches, there were mainly two roles for a choir: to animate the liturgy, to lead the communal singing during Mass and other big church feasts. This eventually led to the establishment of informal singing competitions at harvest festivals, ordinations and patronal feasts in many parishes over a period of time, culminating in the development of organised choir festivals.

In the past, these local parish celebrations were designed for a wide variety of purposes, including encouraging the adoption of music in catechesis, providing a venue for evangelization, increasing youth participation and opportunities for a celebration of the community during liturgical and cultural occasions.[79] The choirs also exhibited a strong musical culture, found in the S.W. part of Eastern Malawi, of singing and rhythmic play being an essential component of religious and social activity.

Much greater development toward a more co-ordinated festival structure across the diocese took place in the mid 2000s. The Pastoral Secretary says choir festivals started to be organised according to pastoral plan in 2007 and that they have continued in an official manner up to date. This work was part of the wider Church of Malawi interest in the development of musical standardisation,

[78] Mlawa, 13 June 2025.
[79] Chakanza, 78.

musical formation and promotion of inculturation in church worship recommended by the Pastoral Commission of the Episcopal Conference of Malawi.[80]

Diocesan Choir Festivals have proven to be vital to the promotion of Catholic identity and Catholic spirit, especially in areas where there are strong Islamic and traditional cultural influences. Music, as a very important cultural expression amongst the Yao and Lomwe, was found to be an important pastoral activity for catechesis, unity building and inter-parish collaboration. [81] Now this festival continues to reinforce evangelization and unity in the Diocese of Mangochi, and Mpiri Deanery in particular.

1.8.1. Objectives of the Choir Festivals

The main purpose of the establishment of the Diocesan Choir Festivals was to advance in the liturgical lives of the Diocesan choir members, to promote liturgical excellence, to strengthen the spiritual formation of all choir members in the Diocese of Mangochi. The overall purpose of the festivals is to have the Church Music to be a vehicle for evangelization, ecclesial unity and spiritual development of the Christian community, and also to promote liturgical atmosphere and discipline in the church during the sacrament of the church. Choir festivals, therefore, should not be just competitive events, but instruments of promoting a rich liturgical culture in the diocese.[82]

The festivals also help to promote the improvement of liturgical music through encouraging voicing/choir singing, musical interpretation, and keeping to the directions of the Church on liturgical music. The Episcopal Conference of Malawi is constantly highlighting that liturgical music has to inspire the full and active participation of the faithful (Sacrosanctum Concilium 14),

[80]Episcopal Conference of Malawi, *"Pastoral Music Guidelines for Malawi,"* (Lilongwe: ECM Secretariat 2010), 4.
[81] Chakanza, 45
[82]Medrick Mlava, *Interview*, Pastoral Secretary, Diocese of Mangochi, 13 June 2025.

and choir festival can be a structured way whereby choirs can be formed and evaluated in accordance to these requirements.[83]

The other major goal of the festivals is to encourage inculturation, in which choirs perform in music and rhythms which are relevant to the cultural characteristics of the Yao, Lomwe and other ethnic groups living in the diocese and to evangelize the Catholic faith in these musical forms. [84] Inculturated music is music, says Nyondo, "which lets the Gospel plant roots in a people's culture and lifts their spiritual awareness through familiar musical patterns."[85] The festivals therefore provide an opportunity for choirs to bring in local music and traditional rhythms along with local culture into Catholic worship, that is in a way that is acceptable to the Church.

The festivals are also designed to foster unity and co-operation between parishes, for choirs to meet each other, exchange experience, and develop relationships between deaneries.[86] The festivals foster a spirit of communion, which is symbolized by their shared musical practice, inter-parish meetings and good competition, and which is true to the mission of the Church.[87] In some situations like Mpiri Deanery, the parish areas are widely dispersed over a vast area, the background culture and religion has a wide variety.

Also, choir festivals serve as an important way of maintaining young people's interest. Many choir members are young people who feel that they have a sense of belonging, spiritual direction and

[83] AMECEA News, "Liturgical Commissions Urged to Promote Sacred Liyurgy in Malawi." 15 March 2024, https://communications.amecea.org/index.php/2024/03/15/malawi-liturgical-commissions-urged-to-promote-sacred-liturgy/. (Accessed 02/09/2025).
[84] Mlava, 13 June 2025.
[85] Patrick Nyondo, *Liturgical Music and Evangelization in Malawi*, (Lilongwe: Likuni Press, 1999), 34.
[86] Mlava, 13 June 2025.
[87] Chakanza, 69.

moral guidance at the choir particularly in the rural parishes. [88] The festivals help keep them active in the Church, and develop their leadership skills, discipline, team work and sense of confidence.

Finally, liturgical, spiritual and ecclesial songs are motivated by Sacred Scripture, sacred tradition, Catholic doctrine, spiritual integrity and moral teachings that can be created and sung at the festivals and performed by choirs. Thus, music can be used to pronounce or convey faith, to address contemporary social issues and reinforce Christian values within the community.

1.8.2 Successes and Challenges of the Choir Festivals

Since their beginning, the diocesan choir festivals have contributed immensely to the Diocesan's liturgical development, spiritual and social life. Their work can be seen in the significant improvements in the standard of choir music, promoting singing between and within parishes and an increased Catholic identity through music. The festivals have contributed much to the awareness of the role of the liturgical singer in deepening the understanding of the role, and have called into action the practice of choirs, helping to raise their level of liturgical singing, the Diocesan Music Director said.[89] The change is reflected in an improvement in vocal discipline, harmony performance and observance of the liturgical rules of participation of the choirs.

1.8.2.1 Musical Priorities and Success

a. Festivals have enhanced catechesis and evangelization one of the major achievements of the festivals. The festivals have consolidated the catechetical role of the musical form in parish life, by inspiring choirs to write their own songs based on scripture, church teaching and moral instruction. [90]

[88] Mlava, 13 June 2025.
[89] Chimbalanga, 13 June 2025.
[90] Chimbalanga, 13 June 2025.

b. Music can be a very effective tool in the transmission of Catholic values, particularly with young and newer people, as many people will remember the Catholic values from festivals, which they will have learnt through their songs.[91]

c. The festivals have also helped to promote inter-deanery harmony and team working.[92] In the spirit of communion, choirs from far away parishes get together during festivals, some of whom have not come together much due to geographical, infrastructural etc. difficulties. The enjoyment and creation of music has brought people closer together and helped them overcome cultural and language barriers and deepen their sense of belonging to the diocese.[93] These musical encounters in Mpiri Deanery have helped greatly to build an atmosphere of good communication between the choirs of parishes dominated by the Yao and Lomwe people.

d. The festivals have served to a great extent as a focal point for youth development, training leadership, discipline, teamwork and ethics. Choirs are a source of stability and Christian mentorship, and a positive peer interaction for many young people particularly within a socially and economically stressful environment.

e. Finally, the 'competitive', and 'formative' character of the festivals provide the youth something to aim for and enthuse about in maintaining an active membership of the Church.[94]

[91] John Phillip Sele, "Sacred Music as a Catalyst for Theological Reflection and Social Development: A Critical Review of the African Christian Tradition," *Journal of Fine and Creative Art, Music, Media and Communication Studies,* Volume 1, No. 2. 2025, 2.
[92] Chimbalanga, 13 June 2025.
[93] Chimbalanga 13 June 2025.
[94]Naum Ogora, "Strategies For Retaining Church Youth for Evangelism Activities in Suneka District," *Journal of Humanities and Social Scieneces,* Vol 7, Issue 1. May 2025. 5.

1.8.2.2 Musical Challenges and Weaknesses

a. Financial constraint is one of the foremost concerns. Many parishes find it difficult to raise funds to cover the financial requirements for travel, meals, uniforms and rehearsal resources for festival involvement." However, as was also the case in other districts like Mangochi and Machinga, economic problems prevent many rural Christians from being able to attend or take part in choirs - either as members or to attend the performances - affecting the quality of the busy concerts.[95]

b. Another challenging issue is the lack of trained choir teachers and liturgy music experts.[96] The response to being in choir is strong, but numerous choirs do not have qualified leaders or music educators who can provide instruction in appropriate singing practices, singing in harmony, and the correct interpretation of the liturgy. [97] This has sometimes led to the production of music which has not adequately matched the expectations of Catholic liturgical music.

c. Logistical issues are also affecting the smooth running of the festivals. The situation is often difficult due to poor road system, difficult long distances between the various parishes and poor festival venue systems. [98] The season of rainfall poses a great deal of difficulties for travel to these outstations which are situated in remote areas.

d. The festivals sometimes face tensions arising from competition. While competition is intended to motivate choirs toward excellence, it can occasionally lead to misunderstandings, jealousy, or discouragement, especially when judging criteria are

[95] Luka Mateyu, interview, Mpiri Deanery Choirs Chairperson, Mangochi Diocese, 30, July 2025.
[96] Mateyu, 30 July 2025.
[97] Mateyu, 30 July2025.
[98] Chimbalanga, 13 June 2025.

perceived as unclear or unfair.[99] Such tensions underscore the need for ongoing formation in spirituality, humility, and pastoral understanding.

e. There is a tendency for the choir of copying the tune, melodies from the Pentecostal, Charismatic and Protestant churches.
f. Most of the choirs lack well trained musicians, choirmasters. This was noted because most of the songs had shallow Catholic theological and doctrinal determinations.[100]
g. There was a tendency of renouncing and rejecting the traditional musical instrument like drums, flute, and xylophones in favor of the modern instruments like the piano, keyboards and other heavy metallic instruments.[101]

Notwithstanding these difficulties it is just noting that the Choir festivals are still a very important aspect in the liturgical life of the Diocese of Mangochi. While they meet with challenges, their achievements demonstrate that these festivals can serve as effective aids to encouraging spiritual life and liturgical excellence within the diocese, and can be enriched and become even more effective in the future, with continuing pastoral care, better planning and ongoing support from the parish clergy and lay members.

Integrative Reflection

The historical, social, cultural, religious and environmental context in Mpiri Deanery lays an important background for the understanding of the spirit of the choir and the life experience of those who are members of this choir in the Diocese of Mangochi. The previous sections shows how the spiritual identity of choirs is intimately linked to the wider context that gives shape to the

[99] Chimbalanga 13 June 2025.
[100] Clement C. Majawa, Interview, Catholic University of East Africa, Nairobi, 27/01/2026.
[101] Majawa, 27 January 2026.

life of the day in the deanery. Instead, every historical, socio-political, cultural and religious experience is a crystallization, a challenge and enrichment of spirituality.

The missionaries from the White Fathers and Montfort Missionaries starting operations in Mpiri Deanery in the early years of the 1900s have influenced the liturgical and pastoral character of Mpiri through the years culminating today in the structure within the Diocese of Mangochi. The Church's development of parishes, growth in Christian communities and the development of deanjees established a rich learning environment for the development of autonomous choirs as missionaries of evangelization. The same historical forces also made liturgical music an integral part of parish life; choirs played a major role in parish worship and community building.

All geographical and climatic conditions affect parish lives and therefore the activities of choirs at Mpiri. Mobility is influenced by seasonal changes particularly the rainy season and so are access to outstations and the incidence of choir meetings. Those environmental realities generate their own spiritual sparks and instills moments of disturbance as this shows us how the experience of choir members is as much of a reality of prayer and music as it is one of the challenges of living in a rural, climatically-exposed area.

Due to its ethnic make up, the deanery is made up largely of Yao, Lomwe, and Chewa people which contributes to the choir's spirituality through a variety of cultural expression pertaining to music, dance and communal identity. The traditional rhythms, initiation values, and respect and unity patterns of preliturgical times still continue to influence the relation and prayer among choirs and also the way they sing. Meanwhile, cultural differences over initiation and gender issues manifest as moral and spiritual conflicts that the members will have to contend with. The importance of grasping these cultural dynamics is therefore necessary in the interpretation of choir participant's internal spiritual experience within the choir.

From a religious perspective, a high proportion of Muslim population exists and there are also Christian communities in Mpiri Deanery. Catholic choirs are formed under a pluralistic environment that moulds both Catholic identity and their mission, where music becomes a Catholic symbol as well as a tool for peaceful co-existence. A context where choir spirituality is developed by a lived experience of a religious diversity, a setting that challenges and deepens one's Catholic identity. Choirs are instruments of witness, evangelization and dialogue when people sing.

Other external factors such as socio-political and socio-economic factors of the deanery also impact on the development of the choir spirituality. In such an atmosphere, choirs offer spiritual nourishment, emotional support, sense of community, and moral guidance, along with bringing relief to poverty, alleviating youth unemployment, helping to heal political divisions, and expanding access to services. In choir, the participants find a place of safety, they learn to be disciplined, cooperative, leaders, and they have learned about Christian values in the context of difficult situations.

The study of the history and goals of the diocesan choir festivals add to the picture of the integrative nature of music in the life of the Church. The festivals offer opportunities for spiritual development, catechesis, unity and culture. They show the opportunities and difficulties of the use of liturgical music in pastoral formation. The challenges are not insignificant, including budget constraints, schedules and logistical issues as well as the potential for rivalry, while the successes are not yet to be deceived, including growing liturgical standards and greater evangelization. These elements illustrate the way choir spirituality develops in enabling and limiting places.

To sum up, the choir members' spirituality in Mpiri Deanery is formed by a complex interplay of the historical, geographical, cultural, religious, socio-political, economic and liturgical influences. Choirs are not separate entities, but part of the life of the community. Thus, their spirituality is

relational, contextual and dynamic; influenced by their joys and challenges of life here in the deanery. The integrated perspective will serve as a foundation for the theoretical basis for understanding choir spirituality and how it is expressed and manifested in the Catholic tradition that will be further explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HUMAN EXPERINCE OF MUSIC FOR A TRANSFORMATIVE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Introduction

Music plays a vital role in shaping the spiritual, moral and emotional experiences of life. In ancient religious rituals, songs of worship and their music did not just serve for entertainment only, rather as a means of going beyond the ordinary. Across the cultures and beyond the traditions, people use music to link up with God, the human nature and the world.

This chapter, therefore, explores music not just as an element of the dynamism of culture, but rather a powerful force which facilitates profound spiritual awakening, moral re-awakening and the inner transformation. As such the chapter examines contribution to music from theologians within different periods. It will focus on the insights of St. Augustine (354-430 AD) and St. John Paul II (1920-2005) on music as a transformative force for spiritual awakening.

Furthermore, the chapter examines the teachings of anthropologists like Charles Nyamiti (1931-2020) and John Mbiti (1931-2019) on church music to acknowledge their valuable contribution to human experience of music from an African perspective, in particular, the spiritual value of African musicology. Nyamiti emphasizes on looking at the various elements of culture including music as a way of trying to understand the African spirituality and a religious communication. In the same regard, Mbiti looks at music not as an accessory to the African religion but rather an integral part.[102] The two anthropologists have one thing in common; they look at music as having transformative power.

[102]John Mbiti, *African Philosophy and Religion,* (Nairobi: East African Education Publishers Ltd, 1969), 26.

Additionally, the chapter looks further at world religions like Judaism, Islam and the *Chewa* traditional religion from Malawi. The aim is to appreciate how religion in which music is embedded, shapes the moral and spiritual behavior of the people. It is the hope that a look at these world religions and local religion like that of the *Chewa* will offer profound insights on how sacred music as a spiritual practice can transform the general character of the choir members.

2.1. Theologians on Music

Music within the Catholic Church is part of functional theology as such a theological reflection becomes imperative to the understanding of it because it frames music as a formative activity that engages the holistic person.[103] St Augustine and St. John Paul II are among the significant theologians who articulate clearly on how music forms the desires and the discipline within the liturgical worship.

St. Augustine of Hippo[104] is one of the earliest theologians who had an enormous influence on music. In one of his famous book the *Confessions,*[105] he does accept that Music has that profound power. He accepts his own fear that delighting in melody may overshadow the sacred word. Having these concerns, do not make him to hate or reject music, instead he shows how formative the music can be.

On his part, John Paul II[106] continued building on the music tradition by noting that the sacred music aids in the participation of worship.[107] He acknowledges that music serves the liturgy and

[103] James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation,* (New York: Baker Academic, 2009), 239.
[104] *You found me in Silence,* is a popular song attributed to St. Augustine.
[105] *Confessions* is a 13-book autobiographical work in which St. Augustine of Hippo reflects on his journey from a sinful life to a Christian of faith.
[106] *Barka*, is one of the many songs in which Pope John Paul was featured.
[107] John Paul II, "*Chirograph for the Centenary of the Motu Proprio Tra le Sollecitudini"* in https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/2003/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_20031203_musica-sacra.htlm. (Accessed 13/04/2026).

the worshiping community.[108] For him, the beauty of the music becomes a media to truth and goodness and in the end forming virtuous habits.

The two musicological theologians show that music within the Church functions as a spiritual discipline shaping the behavior and character. As such the choir becomes a school of virtues.

2.1.1. St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD)

2.1.1.1. Background

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD), is one of the greatest theologians and Doctors of the Church, born in Thagaste in North Africa, then, part of the Roman Empire.[109] He was raised in a mixed religious household, with a pagan father, Patricius, and a devout Christian mother, Monica.[110] Although the family environment was strongly Christian, he was not baptized during childhood. His parents, despite their modest means, invested heavily in his education, hoping to prepare him for a successful legal career. This required him to study far from home, including at Madaura, where he received a classical education[111] that was considered essential for social advancement.

During his youth, he experienced a period of moral struggle, which he later described critically in his *Confessions*. While he portrayed these years as marked by excessive indulgence, scholars such as John O'Meara argue that his behavior must be understood within the broader context of fourth-century pagan society thus O'Meara say: "In comparison with pagan behavior, in the fourth century Africa, Augustine's action may not have been as he portrays them; but judged by the

[108] John Paul II, Online Source. (Accessed 13/04/2026).
[109] John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized,* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2.
[110] Rist, 2.
[111] Mary Clark, *Augustine,* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 1.

Christian standards of the Bishop of Hippo who wrote *Confessions*, he was justified in speaking 'so small a boy so great a sinner."[112] He later continued his studies in Carthage, where he developed interests in literature, rhetoric, and philosophy. At the age of nineteen, his encounter with Cicero's *Hortensius* enkindled a burning desire for truth and made him feel that all his ambitions were misplaced.

Although influenced by *Platonism*,[113] which helped him understand the nature of God and divine order, St. Augustine ultimately found fulfillment in Christianity, recognizing Christ as the ultimate source of truth. He was baptized in 387 AD,[114] after which he returned to Africa and embraced a monastic life. Ordained a priest in 391AD and consecrated Bishop of Hippo in 396 AD.[115] He combined pastoral leadership with deep theological reflection.

His theological major works, the *Confessions*, *De Trinitate*[116], and *The City of God*,[117] continue to shape Christian thought, including reflections on worship, music, and spiritual formation. *Peter Brown*[118] and *Henry Chadwick*[119]are other notable writers that have written about St. Augustine.

[112] John J. O'Maera, *The Young Augustine: An Introduction to the Confessions of St. Augustine,* (New York: Longman Press, 1954), 13.
[113] *Platonism* is a Philosophical doctrine that abstract, perfect and unchanging concepts called forms or ideas are more real than material objects.
[114] Rist, 4
[115] Rist, 4.
[116] *De Trinitate* is a monumental 15-book theological work by St. Augustine of Hippo that defines the Western Christian understanding of God as one essence in three persons (Father, Son and the Holy Spirit).
[117] *De Civitate Dei,* is a 22-book work by St. Augustine, written between 413 and 426 which presents a Christian philosophy of history, theology and politics.
[118] Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo,* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000).
[119] Henry Chadwick, *Augustine,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

2.1.1.2. Contribution to Music

2.1.1.2.1. Music a Religious Pathway to Divine Contemplation

St. Augustine's contribution to music starts by his recognition that music played an important role in his spiritual conversion and transformation. According to him, music is a way to connect to God and a sign of gratitude for the wonder of his life, furnished with body senses and above all for his protection and thus he says: "You command me to praise you and to confess you and to sing to your name O Most High."[120]

Music for him is a powerful force to divine contemplation through which one is able to move the soul and the mind at the same time, leading the mind and heart so that they are uplifted towards God. He describes how singing the Psalms uplifted his mind and soul as a catechumen. He says: "What cries did I send up to you, my God, when I read the Psalms of David, those canticles of faith, those songs of devotion, which exclude a boastful mind."[121] When the mind is uplifted and moved, one is able to experience the presence of God. In this regard, therefore, singing becomes a means of connecting oneself with the divine.

As one who was greatly influenced by the Platonic school of thought, Augustine agrees with Plato and Neo-Platonists that mathematics was not simply for navigation, music and construction of figures…it was by which one could understand the world in rational terms, and at the same time, improve the soul.[122] Augustine adds that the comprehensive understanding of these mathematical proportions found in music, navigation and the construction of figure, should manifest the divine

[120] St. Augustine, *Confession of St Augustine*, Edward Pusey (Transl), (New York: P. F. Collier and Sons, 1966), 33.
[121] Augustine, 195.
[122] George S. Claghorn, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Timaeus,* (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1954). 29.

and cosmic order and that their harmony should help the human soul to become more aware of the ultimate truth towards the divine.

2.1.1.2.2 Music as Prayer for the Transformation of the Soul

St Augustine underscores the profound power of music to shape both the emotional and spiritual life of a believer. Reflecting on his own experiences of conversion, he recalls how the hymns moved him to tears in the early days of renewed faith not because of the melodies but because of the sacred truth they carry, he remarks: "When I recall the tears I poured out on hearing the church's songs in those first days of my recovered faith and how even now I am not moved by the singing but by the things sung…."[123] For him, through the song, the soul is opened to deep reflection repentance and praise. Thus, music becomes a form of prayer that reaches beyond spoken words touching the inner depth where transformation take place.

John Calvin (1509-1564), influenced by Augustine words; "He who sings well prays twice" affirms the spiritual force of music. He argues: "Music engages the emotions, but also one singing engages not only emotions but also the mind."[124] For John Calvin singing is an active spiritual discipline that engages both the heart and mind. When the choir members sing, they do not just express the feelings but they internalize divine truth allowing it to take root in them. In this way music becomes a prayer that forms discipline and the renewed soul.

2.1.1.2.3 Caution against Sensory Pleasure in Church Music

By Contrast Augustine warns that the pleasure of music can be deceptive. He admits that the delight of the sound can tempt both the performer and the listener giving themselves to the pleasure

[123] Augustine, 247.

[124].Emma Ross, "Making Music in the House of God. "How Augustine Influences Martin Luther and Jean Calvin's Opinion on Music." Cedarville University, 4-12-2024. https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu. (Accessed 26/09/2025).

of the senses in away, weakening the soul. He states: "This contentment of the fresh to which the soul must not be given over to, be enervated doth oft beguile me, the soul not so wanting upon reason as patiently to follow her; but having been admitted merely for her sake, it strives even to run before her and lead he."[125] When music beauty begins to dominate rather than serve reason it risks drawing the attention away from prayerful reflection and towards emotional gratification. For him music itself is not evil but a gift that must be handles with care.

The caution has implications on the choir members who must guard themselves against being carried away by performances, skills and emotional effects. Their task is to ensure that music pleasure is ordered towards the liturgical worship allowing the devotion to take control rather than music.

2.1.2. John Paul II (1920-2005)

2.1.2.1. Background

In the twentieth century, the Catholic Church was profoundly shaped by the life and ministry of Pope John Paul II (1920–2005),[126] one of its most influential and enduring Pontifical figures. He was born in Wadowice, Poland, on 20 May 1920 and was baptized shortly afterwards.[127] His childhood was lived in a land of political upheavals, foreign occupation and war. The early traumas of suffering, loss and oppression impacted profound beliefs regarding spiritual outlook, moral vision and later theological thinking. Both his mother Emilia Kaczorowska and his father Karol Wojtyla Sr passed away early in his life—his mother at the age of nine and his father at his early

[125]Augustine, 248
[126] Peter Hebblethwaite and Ludwig Kaufmann, *John Paul II: Pictorial Biography, (*New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1979), 10.
[127] Hebblethaite and Kaufmann, 10.

20s—and this nurtured in him a rich inner life and devotion, including that for the Virgin Mary which he expressed in his episcopal motto Totus Tuus (All Yours). [128]

It was in 1938 that Wojtyła started university courses in Polish language and literature, starting to excel in poetry and drama, thus proving his affinity for the arts and culture.[129] But when the Nazis invaded Poland in 1939, his academic career was interrupted and the universities underground. At this time, he studied secretly theology and philosophy, while being assigned to manual tasks such as quarrying and then in a chemical factory. All these experiences contributed to his great respect for the dignity of Labor and the human person, found in his social teaching, including the encyclical Laborem Exercens (On Human Work, 1981).[130] This was also a period that realized his artistic perception, as well, creating great poetry that was filled with spiritual depth created under the stress of hardship.

Ordained a priest in 1946, he was an outstanding scholar, obtaining his doctorate in theology, [131] with high distinction, in 1948, while working in the clandestine seminary in constant danger.[132] His ecclesial career continued to go smoothly: in 1958 he was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of the cathédrale of Kraków, in 1964 he became Archbishop, and in 1967 he was promoted to Cardinal.[133] He was also a bishop and a theologian, and as such was involved in the Second Vatican Council

[128] Hebblethwaite and Kaufmann, 16.
Totus tuus (Totally Yours) Is a profound theological motto rooted in the Mariology of St Louis de Montfort's true devotion to the Blessed Mary, it signifies total surrender, entrusting one's entire life to Christ through the Virgin Mary. Choir members are called to offer their voices and talents "totally" to Mary to use them for her Son. Their singing becomes a prayer not just a performance.
[129] Lord Longforrd, *Pope John Paul II: An Authorized Biography,* (New York: William Marrow and Company, 1982), 42.
[130] Longford, 44.
[131] Mieczyslaw Malinski, *Pope John Paul II: The Life of Karol Wojtyla,* (New York: Crossroad Books, 1979), 41.
[132] Malinski, 41
[133] Longford, 44.

(1962-1965) which was significant, participating in discussions on human dignity, culture and the Church's relationship with contemporary life that resulted in Gaudium et Spes (Joy and Hope).[134]

He was a very historic Pope when he was elected in 1978. He faced some political and ecclesial expectations because he was the first pope to come from a communist country since more than four centuries ago and was the first non Italian pope in so many years. [135] His tenure of close to 27 years on the throne culminated in one of the longest in the history of the Church, during which he taught extensively, was deeply spiritual, was ecumenically honest, was exceedingly kind to the pastoral, and had a significant world influence.[136]

John Paul II authored many publications, including fourteen encyclicals, other writings that would become apostolic exhortations, constitutions and letters, and other philosophical and spiritual works.[137] His writings addressed faith, culture, morality, human dignity, and the role of art and beauty in spiritual life. This background reveals how experience, suffering, culture lived, and artistic sensitivity informed his understanding of spirituality. He wrote on issues of faith, culture, morality, human dignity and the importance of art and beauty in spiritual life. This background helps to uncover the depth of his thinking about spirituality, that is brought out by experience, suffering, culture lived, and artistic sensitivity. These elements would ultimately influence his thinking about music and art as powerful spiritual forces capable of improving and/or transforming

[134] *Gadium et Spes* is a pastoral Constitution from the Second Vatican Council, promulgated Pope Paul VI, in 1965, outlining the church's mission in modern world.
[135] Don Miller, "Saint John Paul II," in https://www.franciscamedia.org/saint-john-paul-ii/, (Accessed 20/10/2025).
[136] Miller, Online source. (Accessed 20/10/2025).
[137] Miller, Online Source. (Accessed 20/10/2025).

persons and communities. He died in 2005, [138] and was beatified in 2011[139] and his legacy continues to be a source for theological reflection and spiritual formation.

2.1.2.2. His Contribution to Sacred Music

2.1.2.2.1 The Choir Members as Participants in Divine the Creation

In his *Letter To Artist* (1999), the Pope looks at the artists, musicians and singers as inclusively participators of the divine power of the mystery of creation which God the sole creator of all things[140] has wished in some way to associate them. For him, the artists have the power to bring out beauty from their work and through them the word of God can be re-echoed, and God saw everything that he had made, behold, was very good (Gn1:31). He calls the artists to become conscious of their gifts and through it become aware of themselves and creation, through their talents they should praise God who has given them the talents and the source of all beauty.

Contrary to many contemporary understanding, the Pope views music as a sacred beauty, and not just as a mere an expression and appreciation of talent, but rather, a theological experience that has a divine origin, mission and has the power to lead one to the transcendent. John Paul II looks at sacred music as a way to encounter the divine, as space where human creativity cooperates with divine action.[141] In this way the choir members do not just become performers. Through their voice they participate actively in God's creative work by making divine beauty audible within the liturgy. This encounter between man and the divine has positive influence on the part of an

[138] Malinski, 43.
[139] Malinski, 44.
Beatification is a top level recognition by the Catholic Church that the deceased person has lived a holy life, is in heaven, can intercede for others. It is the third of four steps in the canonization process, designating the individual as "blessed."
[140] John Paul II, *To the Artist, 1999. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_23041999_artists.html#:~:text=1162%2C%20loc.,63. (*Accessed on 15/10/2025).
[141] John Paul II, online source. (Accessed 15/10/2025).

individual. It brings profound change, calling, and a clear sense of purpose and transformation of a person. Music becomes a divine-human medium where man encounters God. Jorge River agrees: "Music creates a sacred space where worshippers can connect more deeply with God. The rhythms and melodies help individuals focus on God's presence, setting a mode for spiritual reflection."[142] Through choral singing, this sacred space is not only experienced by the singers themselves but is extended to the whole assembly. The choir members then participate in divine creation by mediating Gods beauty and grace to others through sacred songs.

2.1.2.2.2 Music as a Prayer in the Liturgical Tradition

Additionally, John Paul II sees music as a spiritual practice that is deeply rooted in the church's tradition, not for entertainment purpose but rather to express and help the faithful to lift up their hearts to God.[143] As part of art, music uses symbols to communicate and express what is in the depth of the human heart, that is, things which would have been difficult if not impossible to express and communicate without those symbols The Pope stresses that sacred music has to be full of honor, with sound theology and gratifying the spirit. He writes: "Sacred music as a combination of sacred words and sounds must be in harmony with the faith and express prayer in music."[144] Sacred music becomes a prayer and that it has to be revered.

[142] Jorge Rivera, "*Exploring the Role of Music in Worship and Religious Practice,"* 18 March 2025, in https://trademark.church/role-of-music-in-worship-and-religious-practice/#:~:text=Expressing%20Faith%20and%20Emotions%20Through,comfort%20in%20times%20of%20sorrow. (Accessed 15/10/2025).
[143] Rivera, Online Source, (Accessed 16/04/2026).
[144]John Paul II, Online Source. (Accessed 15/10/2025).

John Paul II considers music as an integral part of the liturgy[145] with special emphasis on the Gregorian chant.[146] For him the chant is especially suited to the Roman liturgy with a very special and a unique heritage which has been passed on from generation to generation forming part of the church's tradition. The tradition is seen to be the center of music development in Europe and beyond. The Pope notes that the increased Gregorian chants which were encouraged by Pope Paul VI, and the proliferation of the Gregorian Choirs contributed to the renewal of sacred liturgy and sacred music in particular.[147] Additionally, he notes: As much as the Gregorian music has special place in the church however other forms of music are also encouraged.[148]

2.1.2.2.3. Quality of the Sacred Music in the Church

John Paul II calls for the quality of sacred music in the church.[149] He reminds the faithful that not all musical forms are suited to the liturgical celebration urging that sacred music has to be in line with the principles of sacred music which the church advocates to be effective. He was responding to the question on whether drums should be used at Masses celebrated at the conference.[150] While making a remarkable contribution John Paul II concedes by appreciating drums played well,[151] and that rhythms, are essential parts of music and the drums highlight and drive the rhythm of a piece.[152] Additionally John Paul II notes that music piece has rhythm in it whether or not with drums.[153] For the Pope, the church had already laid down the three principles that should help her

[145] John Paaul II, *An Address to the Participants in the International Congress of Sacred Music.* Decastery for Commucation, Saturday, 27 January, 2001. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20010127_religious-music.html. (Accessed on 15/10/2025).
[146] *Gregorian Chant,* developed in Medieval Europe 6th-9th centuries and named after Pope Gregory I, it is a plain chant characterized by free rhythm, modal melodies and meditative, spiritual focus
[147] John Paul II, Online source, (Accessed 15/10/2015).
[148] John Paul II, Online source, (Accessed 15/10/2025).
[149] John Paul II, Online Source. (Accessed 15/04/2026).
[150] John Paul II, "*Mass Drums*," in https://didobonaparte.wordpress.com/2011/10/20/mass-drums-jive-with-the-church/, (Accessed 20/10/2025).
[151] John Paul II, Online Source, (Accessed 20/10/2025).
[152] John Paul II, online source, (Accessed 17/04/2026).
[153] John Paul II, Online Source, (Accessed 20/10/2025).

determine good music. These include sanctity, goodness of form, and universality.[154] These principles resonates with Pope Saint Pius X (1835-1914) who states: "Sacred music should possess, in the highest degree, the qualities proper to the liturgy, and in particular, sanctity and goodness of form, which will spontaneously produce the final quality of universality."[155] Sanctity means that music must be holy, and must therefore exclude all profanity, not only in itself but in the manner in which is presented by those who execute it.[156] And goodness of form means, it must be a genuine and authentic art form, otherwise, it can exert on the minds of those who listen to it that efficacy which the church aims at obtaining in admitting into her liturgy the art of music sound.[157] And that music must be universal in the sense that while every nation is permitted to admit into its ecclesiastical compositions those special forms which may be said to constitute its native music, still, these forms must be subordinate in such a manner to the general characteristics of sacred music that nobody of any nation may receive an impression other than good on hearing them.

By advocating for these qualities John Paul II wanted the sacred music to be of good quality, music that serves its purpose, that is, glorification of God and the sanctification of the faithful.

[154] John Paul II, Online Source, (Accessed 17/04/2026).
[155] Pius X, "Tra Le Sollecitudini," On Sacred Music, 8 December 1903, in https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius10/tra-le-sollecitudini.htm. (Accessed 20/10/2025).
[156] Pius X, Online source. (Accessed 20/10/2025).
[157] Pius X, (Accessed 20/10/2025).

2.2. Anthropologists Contribution

2.2.1. Charles Nyamiti (1931-2020)

2.2.1.1. Background

He was a prominent African Christian theologian from a Catholic Nyamwezi family in Tanzania. He was born on 9 December 1931 in Ndala, near Tabora[158] and completed his secondary education in 1954.[159] He then entered Kipalapala Seminary, where he received philosophical and theological formation, and was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Tabora in 1962.[160] After ordination, Nyamiti continued his study in the West and attended Louvain University from 1963 to 1969 obtaining a doctorate in Dogmatic/Systematic Theology as well as Music Theory and Piano study.[161]

Subsequently, in Vienna, he pursued his studies focusing on Cultural Anthropology and Music Composition, earning a further doctorate and a Doctor's degree (licentiate). The interdisciplinary studies greatly influenced his theological outlook, notably in his theological synthesis of culture, music and spirituality in African Christian theology. On completion of his studies, Nyamiti went back to Tanzania where he served at Kipalapala Theological Seminary from 1976 to 1981.

In 1983, he joined the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic Higher Institute of Eastern Africa in Nairobi (CHIEA),[162] later the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), where he served as

[158] Francis E. Orboji, "Charles Nyamiti: Legendary Pioneer African Theologian," A Journal Contextual Theology, Vol 6, December 2020. 74.
[159] Orboji, 74.
[160] Orboji, 75.
[161] Francis Enekwe Orboji, " Nyamiti" in Dicationary of African Christian Thelogians," in https://brill.com/display/book/9789004320031/B9789004320031-s002.xml, (Accessed 21/10/2025).
[162] Francis E. Orboji, "Charles Nyamiti: Legendary Pioneer African Theologian," A Journal Contextual Theology, Vol 6, December 2020. 75.

a lecturer until 2019. Nyamiti was a highly respected church scholar and contributed extensively to African theology through numerous influential works. He also served the wider Church as a consultant to the *Vatican Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue,*[163] a founding member of several ecumenical theological bodies, and a co-editor of *African Christian Studies*. He died on 19 May 2020 and was buried in his home archdiocese of Tabora.[164]

2.2 1.2. His Contribution to Music

2.2.1.2.1. Music as a Means for Moral Education

Music and education are intrinsically inseparable. According to Eder Jose de Almeida Golvea music is a significant teaching method.[165] The African tradition has often considered music as an element of culture that functions as teaching and transmitting cultural values, ethics and norms of the society.

Nyamiti's opines that Christian worship should integrate these music traditions to promote moral formation saying: "Theology must speak through the cultural media which shapes the African soul."[166] This means that sacred music becomes an important tool to promote virtues like humility, unity, justice at the same time discouraging behaviors contrary to the Christian and communal ethics.

[163] Oborji, Online Source. (Accessed on 21/10/2025).
[163]Oborji, Online Source. (Accessed 21/10/2025)
[164] Oborji, 75.
[165] Eder Jose de Almeida Golvea, "Music as a Pedagogical Resource in the Teaching-learning process," *Multidisciplinary Scientific Journal of Knowledge,* Vol 1, January 2025. 3.
[166] Charles Nyamiti, *African Tradition and the Christian God,* (Nairobi: Gaba Publication 1976). 27.

2.2.1.2.2. Music as a Transformative Spiritual Experience

For Nyamiti, spiritual transformation is the ultimate goal of theology, which is, shaping an individual to be Christ like. He illustrates this by calling Christ our "brother-ancestor."[167] As brother-ancestor, Christ's goal is the restoration of primordial beatitudes which includes our divine adoptive state as offspring lost because our sin."[168] Music as a deeply effective means, plays an important role in facilitating the encounter with God. This transformative encounter captivates inner conversion leading to the outward change of behavior. Jesse Mugambi notes: "Inculturated worship that engages music and art mediates the presence of God through culturally familiar forms,"[169] thereby fostering a renewed and social transformation.

2.2.1.2.3. Music as a Reinforcement of Social Bonds

In his study Models *of the Church in Africa in African theology,* Nyamiti presents the church as a family of God. He looks at the unity found within a human family as being mirrored in the church. Thus he says: "Unity of blood or consanguinity is considered as unity of life,"[170] In African families, unity is rooted in blood or consanguinity, understood as shared life that binds members together. Similarly in the church, this unity is established through Jesus in which members are believed to share common life (blood)[171] of Jesus.

It implies that like the early Christians who gathered, share food and praise God (Acts 2:47; 5:46), the church comes together as a communal body. In the African context, liturgy is deeply communal

[167] Francis Anekwe Oborji, "*Charles Nyamiti: Legendary Pioneer African Theologian,"* Ministerium a Journal of Contextual Theology, Vol 6, December, 2020. 10
[168] Oborji, 10.
[169] Jesse Ndwiga Mugambi, *Religion and Social Reconstruction of Reality,* Nairobi: (University Press, 1996). 32.
[170] Charles Nyamiti, "Models of the Church in African Theology" in *Faces of African Theology, Proceedings of the 7th Interdisciplinary Sessions of the Faculty of Theology and Department of Religious Studies, Catholic University of East Africa, (*Nairobi: CUEA Publications, 2003). 87.
[171] Nyamiti, 99.

and often expressed through singing. Communal singing strengthens social bonds and reinforces a shared identity among worshippers. Through singing together in worship, individuals can potentially be transformed into moral agents who act in solidarity with others, embodying the unity of the church as a Family of God.

2.2.2. John Mbiti

2.2.2.1. Background

John Samuel Mbiti was on 30 November 1931 in Mulango, a village in the district of Kitui, the Eastern part of Central Kenya. He belonged to the Akamba ethnic group and the name 'Mbiti' means a child dedicated to God.[172]

Mbiti started his primary school right in Kitui and after completion he enrolled with Alliance High school in a Kikuyu territory.[173] He thereafter went to Makerere University where with the interaction of the Catholics he thought of becoming a priest. Although he had specialized in English, Sociology and Geography, he went to Rhodes Island in the United States of America where he studied theology at Barrington College in the year 1954.[174] He then went back home to Kenya where for two years, he taught at Kagunda Teachers College.[175] He earned his Doctor of Philosophy in Theology in 1963 at the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom.[176]

Ordained as a pastor in the Anglican Church, he taught Theology and Religion at Makerere University in Uganda.[177] Thereafter, he served as the director of Ecumenical Institute Bossy, world

[172] Resane, Online Source. (Accessed 12/12/2025).
[173] Resane, Online Source. (Accessed 12/12/2025).
[174] Chris Abakaare, "Critique of An African Philosophy of Time in John Mbiti," *Nnadiebube Journal pf Philosophy,* Vol 6 (1), 2023. 114.
[175] Resane, Online Source. (Accessed 13/12/2025).
[176] Francis Anekwe Oborji, "Mbiti, John Samuel," in The Dictionary of African Christian Biography, https://dacb.org/stories/kenya/mbiti-johns/. (Accessed 13/12/2025).
[177] Chris Abakare, "Critique of An African Philosophy of Time in John Mbiti," *Nnadiebube Journal pf Philosophy,* Vol 6 (1), 2023. 114.

Council of Churches in Geneva Switzerland. He was a visiting professor at many universities in Europe, Canada, America, Australia and Africa and he had travelled widely in many countries within and outside Africa. He died on October 5, 2019 at the age of 87 in Switzerland.[178] He survived by a wife and four Children.

Mbiti is credited to have published over 400 articles, reviews, and books on theology, Philosophy and Literature,[179] where his main focus was Africa. His famous works include,

> African Religions and Philosophy (1969), followed by another well know books, Concepts of God in Africa (1970), New Testament Eschatology in an Africa Background (1971), The Prayers of African Religion (1975), An Introduction to African Religion (1975) Bible and Theology in African Christianity (1986)[180] etc.

2.2.2.2. His Contribution to Music as a Spiritual Practice

Mbiti underscores the centrality of the African music and how fondly are the African people to music. He says: "Africans are fond of music,"[181] noting that "music, dance and singing are found in every African community."[182] In his book, *An Introduction to African Religion,* Mbiti discusses how religious are the African people with their cultures and how music as an element of culture has influenced their activities.

2.2.2.2.1. Expression of Ethical Principles

For Mbiti, the African beliefs and ethical principles are mostly embedded in oral tradition such as proverbs, riddles and stories which are a major source of African wisdom and a valuable part of African heritage.[183] These are often expressed through music and performances. In this regard

[178] Abakare, 14.
[179] Oborji, Online Souce(Accessed 13/12/2025).
[180] Resane, Online Source. (Accessed 13/12/2025)
[181] John Mbiti, *An Introduction to the African Religion,* (Oxford: Heinemann Education Publishers, 1975), 9.
[182] Mbiti, 9
[183] Mbiti, 8.

music becomes a vehicle of transmitting the moral lessons and cultural wisdom from one generation to the next.

2.2.2.2.2. Its Role in Rituals and Communication

For Mbiti, music, alongside dances and drums, have a role in socio-religious rituals. They provide communication with the divine, the ancestral spirit, sometimes facilitating spiritual experiences such as spirit possession. Thus, he writes: "Music gives outlet to emotional expression of the religious life, and is a powerful means of communication in African Traditional life."[184]

In the same line Celestine Mbaegbu, emphasizes that, music plays an indispensable role in helping Africans relate with the divine. He states: "Music plays an indispensable role in religious life of the Africans by helping them to relate with the divine."[185] Mbaegbu's assertion reinforces Mbiti claim by showing that music is not merely expressive but also facilitates an encounter and communion with the sacred.

2.2.2.2.3 Reinforce communality (*Ubuntu*)

For Mbiti, music plays a vital role in reinforcing community life and the philosophy of *Ubuntu.*[186] He captures this in his well-known statement: "*I am because we are; and since we are therefore I am.*"[187] The statement underpins the belief in individual identity and well-being are inseparable from the community emphasizing interconnectedness and shared humanity.

[184] Mbiti, 27.
[185] Celestine c. Mbaegbu, "The Effective Power of Music in Africa," *Open Journal of Philosophy,* Vol 2, (1), 13 March 2015. 177.
[186] *Ubuntu* is a Bantu term, translating to "humanity" or "I am because we are." It is a philosophy emphasizing that an individual's well-being is interconnected with others.
[187] Mbiti, 108.

Within this frame, music especially singing and dances serve as a powerful social force. For Mbiti communal music practices foster unity, strengthen social bonds and sustains the collective life of the society by reaffirming the values of togetherness.

2.2.2.2.4. Traditional Music as an expression of African spirituality

For many African societies, religion permeates all the aspects of life including music. Mbiti's quote: "Africans are notoriously religious,"[188] highlights how spirituality is interwoven into the African life. Music becomes a powerful expression of African spirituality because it is one of the main ways Africans communicate with the spiritual world. In expressing Mbiti's thoughts Kwabena Nketia says: "Music in African societies is integral to communal and ritual life, accompanying events from sacred rites to ceremonies. Because these performative context overlap with religious worship and traditional spiritual practices, music becomes a medium for expressing and engaging with the spiritual dimension of life."[189]

2.3. WORLD RELIGIONS

2.3.1. Judaism

2.3.1.1. Background

The history of Judaism can be traced back to the era of the patriarch Abraham and the covenant he made with God. This became the foundational moment of shaping the Jewish identity and purpose.[190] However, Judaism did not emerge at a single moment but developed gradually from the life and tradition of the Israelites.[191] Because of this gradual development, is difficult to identify single founding events that marked the beginning of Judaism. That being the case, the Israelites in

[188] Mbiti, 1.
[189] Kwabena J. H. Nketia, *The Music of Africa*, (New York: W. w. Norton, 1974), 13.
[190] Paul Johnson, *History of the Jews,* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 1.
[191] Martin Goodman, *History of Judaism,* (New York: Princeton University Press, 2018), 7.

their early development, did not understand themselves as members of a religion as in modern sense. Instead, their, identity was based on the people, memory and shared experience thus a sense of shared history rather than the creed brought the Jews together. Seth Schwartz says: "the identity of the Jews was initially ethnic and cultural before it became theological"[192] The Covenant that Abraham made with God (Genesis 12: 1-10) and the Exodus from Egypt experience (Exodus 12:31-42) helped the Israelites to be identified as the chosen people of God (1Peter 2:9).

One of the important elements in Judaism which can be described as central to the religion is its emphasis on the law and practices.[193] The law functioned not as simple text but a guide for everyday living. Thus, it regulated the worship, ethics and social behavior. Goodman notes that the Jews focused so much on actions rather than belief, saying: "It was concerned with what Jews did rather than what they believed."[194] Judaism is a "religion of Covenantal Nomism,"[195] meaning that the Jews followed the law as a response to their relationship with God rather than a way to have salvation. As such religious observances shaped the daily life of the people, and strengthened their relationship within the families and the community thereby giving them an identity.

Another historical religious observational aspect of the Jewish life was its focus on the Temple in Jerusalem which served as a symbol and heart of rituals and worship. Sacrifices which were offered by the priest were an important act of worship. That is why the destruction of the Second temple of Jerusalem in 70 AD was considered a catastrophe.[196] The destruction was also considered a turning point because it made Judaism to transform in order to survive. Shaye Cohen shares: "The

[192] Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society,* (New York: Princeton University Press, 2001), 21.
[193] Schwartz, 23.
[194] Goodman, 11.
[195] Ed P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestine Judaism,* (New Yoke, Fotress Press, 1977), 34.
Cf: *Covenantal Nomism* is the 1st Century Jewish Belief that one enters God's covenant through grace and maintains that status through obedience to the law rather than earning salvation through works.
[196] Goodman, 15.

loss of the temple required Jews to redefine how they related to God without sacrifices or a central sanctuary."[197]

Following the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, Rabbinic Judaism as the dominant form of Jewish life.[198] With this Rabbinic Judaism, authority changed from the priests to the rabbis who were entrusted with the role of interpreting scriptures and the application of the law to new situations. Jacob Neusner argues: "The rabbis preserved Judaism by turning study, debate and ethical living into acts of worship."[199] The transformation allowed Judaism to survive in the diaspora and to remain a living tradition despite the subsequent political displacement.

2.3.1.2. Judaism's Contribution to Music as a Spiritual Practice

Judaism offers a distinct understanding of music as spiritual practice whose purpose in not primarily for aesthetic purposes or an expression of emotions but rather a moral formation and disciplined living.[200] Through the Biblical texts, rabbinic teachings and mystical teachings, music is viewed as a tool for shaping character, cultivating communal responsibly and aligning human behavior with the moral law (Duet 31:19-22). This view highlights a model of spirituality in which music function as an ethical force rooted in daily life rather than an escape from it.

2.3.1.2.1. A Pathway to Moral Refinement

One of the foundational ideas in the Jewish thought is that music has the power to influence the soul and thought in human behaviors. The Hebrew Bible has a connection between sound and moral or psychological state. In the books of Samuel, whenever David played the harp, it soothed King Saul's troubled spirit (1Sam16:23).

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[197] Shaye D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah,* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1987), 4.
[198] Goodman, 16.
[199] Jacob Neusner, *Judaism, The Evidence of Mishnah,* New York: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 9.
[200] Abraham J. Heschel, *God in search of Man,* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1955), 28.

This is an indication that music restores emotional balance and proper conduct. The rabbinic literatures adds that the spiritual exercises, music inclusive, lead to *tikkun hamidot* that's refinement of character traits.[201] As such music is viewed not as the expression of the self but the ability to breed joy, self-control and humility.

2.3.1.2.2. Fixed Prayers Shape the Inner Spiritual Discipline

The ethical orientation is reinforced through the structured use of melody in Jewish prayer. Rather than encouraging free musical provision, Judaism devised fixed prayer modes known as *nusach* and each prayer day, week-day, Sabbath or festival had a distinct musical framework that had remained stable for centuries.[202] The repetition of the melodic patterns over a life time helped the worshippers train in emotional discipline and attentiveness. As such worshippers learned to associate certain musical modes with reverence, introspection, joy, shaping habitual responses.[203] In this way music contribute to the formation of consistent and reliable spiritual behavior.

2.3.1.2.3. Torah Cantillation (*Ta'amei HaMikra)*

One of the particular contribution of Judaism is the singing of the law. The law is not simply read but is sung according to the precise musical signs known as *ta'amei ha-mikra* (Cantillation marks).[204] The marks help to guide emphasis and interpretation ensuring that the text is transmitted accurately and respectfully.[205]

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[201] Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, *Mesilat Yesharim: Path of the Righteous, (*Amsterdam: Musar, 2011), 9.
[202] Abraham Idelsohn, *Jewish Music in its Historical development*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1948), 41.
[203] Idelsohn, 41.
[204] Idelsohn, 48.
[205] Marshall Portnoy and Josee Wolff, *The Art of Torah Cantillation: Step by Step Guide to Chanting Torah*, (New York: Behrman House, 1999), 7.

2.3.1.2.4. Community and Community Musicological Experience

Jewish sacred music is primarily communal rather than solo centered. Unlike other traditions that emphasize solo performances and individual ecstasies, Jewish music mostly sung in groups, especially congregational prayers, Sabbath and table songs are responses led by the cantor.[206] It is interesting to note: "Even the highly trained cantors are not considered as performers but rather representative of the community."[207] The communal aspect helps to train the social behaviors of cooperation, empathy and shared responsibility. In that way music aids individuals to subordinate their egos to collective identity.

2.3.1.2.5. Memory, Identity and Ethical Continuity

Jewish music serves as a vehicle of memory and moral continuity. The melodies that are associated with prayer, holidays and other historical experiences assist in preserving the collective identity across generations and geographies.[208] Edwin Seroussi also notes "Jewish communities often retained musical tradition even when languages and surrounding changed."[209] These melodies remind them of who they are and how they are expected to live more especially in time of difficulties. In that way music becomes a moral archive and spiritual repository for dignity, sustainability, resilience and responsibility.

2.3.2. Islam

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, defines Islam as total surrender to the will of God.[210] It can also mean "submission." The follower of Islam is called a Moslem. It is a monotheistic religion centered on the belief in one God and the guidance given through his final prophet Muhammad.

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[206] Portnoy, and Wolff, 13
[207] Portnoy and Wolff, 13.
[208] Edwin Seroussi, *Music and National Culture in Israel,* (New York: University of California Press, 2004), 8.
[209] Seroussi, 9.
[210] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam: Region, History and Civilization,* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 3.

2.3.2.1. Background

John Esposito describes Islam as a religious tradition that emerged in the 7th Century, in Arabia.[211] The religion emphasized on ethical monotheism, spiritual discipline and moral responsibility. The Arabian Peninsula in which Islam developed, was a region characterized by diverse religious practices including polytheism, Judaism, Christianity and other indigenous beliefs. According to the Islamic tradition: "Islam began with the revelation of the Qur'an to the prophet Muhammed around 570 to 632 AD in Mecca."[212] Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the literal word of God (Allah) revealed in Arabic over a period of approximately 23 years.[213] It is the ultimate source of guidance for beliefs and conducts. These revelations guide personal piety and social justice, calling individuals to submit (Islam) to the will of God.

The early development of Islam took place in a predominantly oral culture, where revelations were experienced through recitation and listening.[214] This means that the Qur'an was not a written word but a spoken and heard word for the purpose of shaping the beliefs, emotions and the conduct of the followers. The oral and auditory dimensions became the foundational to Islam, because it influenced Islamic worship and continues to influence Islamic attitudes towards sound, recitation and music.

Another milestone in the history of Islam happened with the *Hejira* (an escape, from persecution, of Muhammad from his native land Mecca.) to Medina in 622 AD.[215] With the movement Islam developed into an organized religious community with structured rituals like prayers, fasting and

[211] John Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 5.
[212] Esposito, 6.
[213] Esposito, 6.
[214] Schimmel Annemarie, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam,* (New York: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 17.
[215] Esposito,13.

communal worship.[216] These practices acted as a form of spiritual discipline, training believers in self-control mindfulness of God and ethical living. Religious observance in Islam became inseparable from the daily life, reinforcing the fact that faith must be expressed through action.

After the death of Muhammed in 632 AD, the religion he had founded, experienced an expansion across the Middle East, North Africa, parts of Europe and Asia.[217] The expansion was crucial in its development because it brought the religion into contact with diverse cultures with varied traditions and musical experiences. This made Islam to have varied interpretation of music's permissibility and the spiritual values. That is, while the scholars from the two main groups of Islam, the *Sunni* and the *Shia*, view music with caution due to concerns of moral distraction, others especially the *Sufis* (Islamic mysticisms) embrace music and chanting (*Sama)* as a means of spiritual discipline and ethical refinement.[218]

It presents a strong argument that throughout the history of Islam there have been debates over music. These debates arise and reflect a broader concern of behavior, piety and spiritual discipline.[219] They are rooted in the Qur'an and the *Hadif* (the sayings of the Prophet) and Islamic legal traditions. These debates form an essential basis for understanding of Islam's historical and religious foundation before analyzing music as a spiritual practice within the faith.

2.3.2.2. Contribution of Islam to Music as a spiritual Practice

The Islamic thought on music is not unified. Classic and contemporary scholars fall into two camps: Firstly, those who approach music with caution for its potential for moral distraction, secondly, those who embrace it as a spiritual neutral medium whose ethical values depend on the

[216] Esposito, 14.
[217] Fred M. Donner, *Mohammed and the Believers: At the origins of Islam,* (Harvard University Press, 2010), 17.
[218] Annamarie, 23.
[219] Amnon Shiloah, *Music in the World of Islam,* (New York: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 34.

content, intention and effect.[220] The latter mostly championed by the *Sufi* thinkers and the *Jurists* understand music as a meaningful spiritual practice that shapes behavior, emotions and moral character.

2.3.2.2.1. A Spiritual Approach to Remembrance of God.

For the *Sufis* and the *Jurists* music is taken highly for its role in remembrance of God. The proponents of this view argue that melody and rhythm help focus on the heart and intensify awareness of divine presence.[221] Al Ghazali famously defended the spiritual listening of music by saying: "Music does not generate spiritual state but rather reveals and strengthens what already exists within the listener's heart."[222] William Chitticks adds: "Music functions as a catalyst for remembrance when the listener approaches it with sincerity and discipline."[223] Through this way, music makes its contribution by shaping behavior as well as strengthening mindfulness, humility and devotion.

2.3.2.2.2. Emotional Purification and Psychological Balance

Islamic spirituality is not aimed at suppressing human emotions but at orienting them towards God. The *Sufi* thinkers argue: "Music directs the emotions such as repentance, love and hope towards the constructive way, helping the heart to do away with anger, arrogance and excessive inclinations of the human heart to the worldly concerns."[224] By guiding emotional energy towards spiritual ends, music contributes to moral sensitivity and the cultivation of self-control.

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[220] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Isramic Art and Spirituality,* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), 151.
[221] Annemarie, 31.
[222] Ines Weinrich, "Al Ghazali on Listening to Music," *Isramic Sensual History,* Vol 2. 2024. 414.
[223] William Chittick, *Sufism,* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 194.
[224] Annamarie, 56.

2.3.2.2.3. A Medium for Ethical and Moral formation

Islam views music as an ethical and moral formation. Those who support music in Islam argue that sound and poetry have a powerful influence on human behavior by shaping mood, memory and motivations. Devotional songs put much emphasis on the virtues such as patience, gratitude, compassion, humility and justice. Titus Burckhardt notes: "When moral teachings are internalized through aesthetic experience, they become deeply rooted and enduring."[225] Thus music serves as an effective medium for moral education especially for communal and pedagogical context.

2.3.2.2.4. Music as a Way of Community Building and Cultural Integration

Music plays a vital role in community building and cultural integration. This is done through shared musical practices that eventually strengthens communal bonds, reinforcing collective identity and transmit spiritual values across generations.[226] Historically, the acceptance of local musical forms allowed Islam to spread across the diverse cultural context while maintaining its ethical framework.[227] As such music does not only contribute to individual formation but also to social cohesion and cultural integration.

2.3.3. The Chewa Traditional Religion.

2.3.3.1 Background

The Chewa Traditional Religion is an indigenous religious system of the Chewa people of Malawi and parts of Zambia and Mozambique.[228] It predates Christianity and Islam and has historically shaped the social organization moral values, political authority and the cultural identity.[229]

[225] Titus Burckhardt, *The Art of Islam, Language and Meaning,* (New York: World Wisdom, 2009), 89.
[226] Nasr, 165.
[227] Nasr, 165.
[228] Orville Boyd Jenkins, "Chewa of Malawi" in http://orvillejenkins.com/profiles/chewa.html. (Accessed 17/04/2026).
[229] Wim Van Binsbergen and Matthew Schoffeelers, "Theoletical Explorations in African Religions" in https://www.quest-journal.net/publications/ASC-1239806-232.pdf. (Accessed on 26/12/2025).

Although the majority of the *Chewa* adhere to other world religions today, small group of people still practice the religion. The influence of the *Chewa* traditions continue to be felt on customs and other rituals today.

The Chewa traditional religion did not arise in isolation or as fixed, abstract system. Instead, it was shaped by the real-life conditions in which the *Chewa* people lived, that is, the socio-historical and environmental context of Malawi.

It is not based on scriptures or written documents, but transmitted orally through myths, rituals, ceremonies proverbs and elders of the society.[230] For the *Chewa*, religion was viewed to be holistic, that is, not separated from other aspects of life but rather it is woven into every dimension of existence, no distinction between what was religious and secular. Religious beliefs were embedded in everyday activities such as marriages, farming, leadership and funerals.[231]

The Chewa religious practices evolved alongside the formation of *Chewa* Chiefdoms and kinship systems like the *Phiri* and the *Banda*. The chief among the Chewa was not just political but also religious leaders helping to maintain harmony between the community, the ancestors and the spiritual world.[232]

[230] J. Van Breugel, *Chewa Traditional Religion*, (Lilongwe: Kachere Series, 2001), 16.
[231] Mbiti, 2.
[232] Binsbergen and Schoffeelers, Online Source. (Accessed on 26/12/2025).

2.3.3.2 Pillars of Chewa Traditional Religion

2.3.3.2.1 Belief in the Supreme Being

Central to Chewa traditional religion is the "belief in the Supreme Being called *Chauta,*[233]*Leza*[234] *or Namalenga.*"[235] *Chauta* is the ultimate source of life, rain, fertility and moral order. However, *Chauta* is considered very transcend from the daily affairs. As such, direct worship of *Chauta* is rare, and communication with divine is usually mediated through ancestral spirits. This understanding of God reflects the common feature in many African religions whereby the Supreme Being is acknowledged but approached indirectly[236]

2.3.3.2.2 Ancestors and the Spirit World

Ancestors (*Mizimu*)[237] occupy an important role among the *Chewa.* The *Chewa,* just like many African communities believe that the deceased family members continue to exist in a spiritual realm and remain actively involved in the affairs of the living.[238] The ancestors are considered to be custodians of moral conduct and social order of the society. When the ancestors are honored through sacrifice and rituals, they provide protection, health fertility and prosperity. When neglected, or when the society is filled with immoral behavior, the ancestors may be provoked. These acts are believed to anger the ancestors and as a result, they punish societies by bringing in illnesses, misfortunes or other calamities.

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[233] *Chauta,* is a comibation of Cha-uta. Cha means of, uta means bow symbolically is linked to the arch above or the sky or heaven. Among the *Chewa* it is the other name of God.
[234] Leza, one who forgives.
[235] Yusuf M. Juwayeyi, "Archaeology and Oral Tradition in Malawi: Origins and Early History of the Chewa," *Canadian Journal of African Studies,* Vol 55, Issue 3, September 2021, 679
Cf, Namalenga means one who creates (God).
[236] Bolaji E. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion,* (London: SCM Press Limited, 1973), 144.
[237] *Mizimu* are the spirits of the dead; who while living were respected and lead a good and moral life.
[238] Binsbergen and Schoffeelers, Online Source (Accessed 27/12/2025).

The *Chewa* traditional religion recognizes the presence of what are called, 'territorial and nature spirit.'also called (*Mizimu). T*hey are considered higher than the ancestors and are associated with forests, rivers dams, hills and other sacred places.[239] These places are treated with reverence as they are often used for rituals such as rainmaking and other communal prayers.

2.3.3.2.3 Religious Leaders and Rituals

Religious authority in the *Chewa* traditional religion rests in the elders, chiefs and traditional healers called *Asing'anga.*[240] The *asing'anga* are believed to have spiritual powers, knowledge and the ability to communicate with the spiritual world, diagnose misfortune through rituals and herbal medicine.

Rituals are part of the practical *Chewa's* expression of the traditional religion. Their major rituals include, "rainmaking, funerals, cleansing rites, initiation ceremonies (*Chinamwali*) for girls and masquerades (*Nyaau/Gule wamkulu*) for boys[241]. People often connect the *Gulewamkulu*[242] or the *Nyau* institution with the ghost of the deceased who serve as bridge between the spiritual and the physical world.[243] The *Nyau* institution, combines the religious, moral and education functions and reinforcing community values.[244]

All in all, complex and deep rooted belief centered on the *Chauta* worship, beliefs and reverence of *Mizimu,* maintenance of the peace between the people and the spiritual world is the *Chewa*

[239] Christopher Wrigley, *The River-God and the Historian: Myths in the Shire-Valley and Else Where,* (London: Cambridge Press, 2009), 50.
[240] Michael Gelfand, *Medicine and Customs in Africa,* (Harare: E. & S. 1964), 28.
[241] Kenji Yoshida, Mask and Transformation among the Chewa of Eastern Zambia and Central Malawi, "*Senri Ethnological Studies,"* Vol 1,Article 31, 1991, 206.
[242] *Gule wamkulu,* The term serves as a collective noun for several categories of *nyau* dancers, is used in a symbolic manner to suggest that it is superior to other dances performed by this Chewa ethnic group.

[243] Anthony Gilbert Mtuta, Gulewamkulu institutional and Organizational Factors Influencing Community Development Projects in the Area of T/A Chauma in Dedza District, Malawi, "*International Journal of Anthropology and Ethnology,"* Volume 7, article number 21, 2023, 1.
[244]Yoshida, 207.

traditional religion. The *Chewa* traditional religion continues to show its influence in many aspects among the people in Malawi despite the presence of Islam and Christianity as the dominant religions. Its continued presence, today shows how the African traditional religion can be resilient and the ability to adapt to the changing social and religious landscape.[245]

2.3.3.3 Chewa Traditional Religion's Contribution to Music

2.3.3.3.1 Music as a Medium for Communication

In the Chewa traditional religion, music plays a vital and indispensable role, serving as a key medium through which communication between the spiritual world and the physical world is made possible. During important rituals such as rainmaking, funerals and initiation ceremonies, specific songs and drums are used to invoke the spirits (*mizimu*) and invite their presence among the living.[246] The songs and drum are not played randomly, they follow established patterns that are believed to be spiritually effective and meaningful.

In the *Nyau* cult, music and drumming accompany the masked dancers (*Nyau)* that represent ancestral spirits.[247] They symbolize the ancestral spirits-making the ritual space a crossing place between the community and spirit world. In this regard, music is not entertainment, or performance, but rather a sacred conduit through which spiritual power is accessed, and the harmony of the communal community is reinforced.

2.3.3.3.2 Music as a Religious Method of Morally Forming

A traditional belief that music plays a vital role in the Chewa traditional religion is that it strengthens moral behaviors through the establishment of a correlation between the ability of the

[245] Matthews Schoffeelers, *Religion and the Dramatization of Life: Spirit Beliefs and Rituals in Southern and Central Malawi*, (Lilongwe: Kachere Series, 2000), 13.
[246] Mbiti, 28.
[247] Yoshida, 206.

individual to act in accordance with the moral standard and the ensuing consequence experienced as spiritual, moral, religious and social.[248] Songs performed during initiation ceremonies emphasize on the values like respect, obedience, sexual restraints and honesty.[249] Furthermore, these values are reinforced through music which is believed to be witnessed and judged by the ancestors.[250] The belief that the ancestors are present during the music rituals encourages conformity to the norms, as improper behavior is believed to disrupt the harmony and invite misfortune.[251] In this way music shapes behavior not through coercion but through religious accountability.

2.3.3.3.3 Music and the embodiment of Spiritual Knowledge

Chewa religious wisdom and world view is learned through the lived experiences, tradition and communal practices. The drumming, the rhythm and the singing embed spiritual meaning into physical action.[252] Through the repeated performances the participants learn to internalize the beliefs. Additionally, since spiritual knowledge is embodied rather than written music ensures continuity of the religious values across generation. Those initiated, do not simply learn about the ancestors but experience the ancestral presence through the music and the body movement which deepens spiritual awareness.[253]

[248] Mtuta, Online Source. (Accessed 17/04/2026)
[249] Kings M. Phiri, *Chewa History in Central Malawi and the Use of Oral Tradition,* (New York: University of Wisconsin, 1975), 42.
[250] Phiri, 43.
[251] Mbiti, 49.
[252] John Miller Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility: Aesthetics and Social Actions in African Musical Idioms,* (New York: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 92.
[253] Chernoff, 93.

2.3.3.3.4 Music and Spiritual Transformation.

Among the *Chewa* traditional religion, music facilitates spiritual transformation by guiding the participants into altered state of awareness that enhance sensitivity to the sacred.[254] The music, singing and the participation of the people fosters emotional openness, humility and reverence, qualities necessary for spiritual maturity among the *Chewa* religious life. In the rituals of healing music helps to restore spiritual balance between the individual and the ancestors.[255] This process strengthens ethical self-reflection and commitment to proper conduct thereby linking spiritual healing with behavior reform. [256]

Integrative Reflection

The contributions of St Augustine of Hippo, John Paul II, the African theologians Nyamiti and Mbiti and the musical practices of Judaism, Islam and the *Chewa* traditional religion, reveal a shared view that music when understood as a spiritual practice, becomes a formative discipline that shapes the inner life, moral conduct and the communal behavior of those who perform and listen to it.

For the choir members in particular, music is not just an aesthetic activity but a way of life that trains the heart, body and the will towards spiritual maturity.

St. Augustine is so mindful about transformative music which inspires and elevates the soul that it should not dominate the soul through pleasure alone, but rather there should be discipline, intentionality and humility among the choir members. Singing the sacred music for Augustine, demands an ordered heart in which the person's emotions save faith. This aspect highlights how

[254] Gelfand, 37.
[255] Gelfand, 37.
[256] Gelfand, 38.

the choir members are formed through attentiveness, reverence and ethical self-control as they take part in the liturgical worship.

Pope John Paul II sees music as a prayer and an expression of divine beauty. As such the choir members do not just become performers but ministers who embody prayer through singing. The music practices, cooperation and their dedication to excel, becomes spiritual virtues cultivated through training.

Nyamiti's stress on relationality and mediation resonated well with the communal nature of the choral singing. The choir members act as religious mediators between the worshipping community and the divine. Music act as mediator between human and spiritual realms in the African thinking. For Mbiti, African spirituality is communal and lived rather than abstract. As such the choir members are formed through their participation. In this way singing became spiritual and helps the members to cultivate, solidarity, respect and shared moral accountability.

In the Judaism perspective of music, the cantors' role demand moral integrity and purity shaping the behavior of those entrusted with singing. While in Islam, those that sing is trained to be humble, obedient and spiritually attentive. In a way these religious traditions underscore the fact that sacred music require seriousness and inward formation for those involved.

The *Chewa* traditional religion offers a compelling parallel. The ritual music in initiation, healing and ancestral ceremonies form behavior through communal participation. The performers are expected to have moral discipline because music is believed to evoke spiritual presence. This view highlights the responsibility of the choir members whose behavior in and outside the choir performance reflects the sacred nature of their role.

In conclusion, in the Christian theology, the African thought and other world religions including the Chewa traditional religion, music is at the center of religious life and spiritual formation, shaping the behavior through discipline, communal responsibility and moral awareness. For the choir members, music forms character, spirituality and skills. It trains cooperation, patience reverence and ethical integrity transforming singing into a spirituality that is lived. As such music becomes not only as an act of worship but a formative path to transformation and deeper evangelization.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CHURCH'S TEACHING ON MUSIC AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Introduction

Music has always played an important role in worship for the people of God as spiritual practice that is aimed to shape the beliefs character and communal identity. Within the catholic tradition sacred music is more than an artistic ornamentation. It is the means through which faith is taught, proclaimed, interiorized, lived and preserved.

For the choir members, their participation in the sacred liturgy becomes a spiritual discipline that influences attitude, behavior and moral attitude. Through the Psalms and the canticles, the choir members are formed in humility, trust in God, gratitude and hope. Text such as Psalm 52: 6-9, Psalm 32: 1-5 and Psalm 3: 1-3 reveal how music becomes a response to God's mercy, protection and forgiveness, shaping the inner life of the believer. In the same way the canticles from Luke's Gospel; *Magnificat* (Luke 1:68-79), *Benedictus* (Luke 1:46-55) and *Nunc Dimittis* (Like 2:29-32), present music as proclamation of the salvation that transforms the singer into a witness of God's saving work.

In the light of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC 112-121), the study explores music as a spiritual practice that forms the behavior and the spirituality of the choir members. By examining the selected Psalms and Canticles including the conciliar teachings, the study aims at showing that music, not only enhances the liturgical celebration but also nurtures discipline, prayerful and moral responsible ministers of songs within the church.

3.1 Sacred Scriptures

Sacred Scriptures, as the principle source of revelation, are the foundation of Christian life because the Word of God is the supreme rule of her faith, her support and vigor, food for the soul, a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life.[257] It is from the word of God that the church and the whole Christian community find sources of worship and spiritual life through the experiences of God and the people of Israel as a chosen race (Deut7:6). That is why it is referred to as the revealed *logos* of God (Jn1:14). In this regard, the Scriptures cannot be considered historical in its entirety but rather a living and active word of God (Heb4:12).

Singing or chanting of the Scriptures has been the tradition of the church. Matthew 26:30 presents an example where Jesus and His disciples had sung a solemn hymn. So when the scriptures are sung or chanted in a liturgical set up, they help the faithful to open up and align their hearts to God. In this way, the faithful move towards the full and active participation[258] in God's saving mysteries.

When the choir members sing these Biblical text, be it the Psalms or the canticles or any other biblical verse, share the long tradition of singing the biblical text but also, they are helped to shape their own interior disposition as well as the spiritual behavior of the liturgy.

3.1.1. Old Testament: The Transforming Power of the Psalms.

3.1.1.1. Background of Psalm 52.

Psalm 52 is traditionally attributed to King David and reflects a historical situation recorded in the first book of Samuel 21-22. It is connected with the betrayal of David by Doeg the Edomite who reported to King Saul that David had visited priests at Nob. This report led to the killing of the

[257] Vatican II Council, *Dei Verbum,* 21 (1965), 762; AAS 58 (1966) 823.
[258] Vatican II Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium,* 14 (1963), 8; AAS 56 (1963) 98.

priests and became the background of David's reflection on the power of evil speech and the justice of God.

Rowland E. Murphy explains that Psalm 52 reflects the moral contrast between the wicked and the righteous. Murphy observes that the Psalm criticizes the misuse of speech and the pride of those who rely on evil for personal gains. He states: "The psalm denounces the destructive power of deceitful speech and contrasts the temporary success of the wicked with the enduring security of the one who trusts in the steadfast love of God."[259]

Similarly, Raymond E. Brown, highlights the experiential nature of the psalm in Israel's religious life. According to Brown, the psalm arose from concrete experience of the people of Israel and express their struggles, fear and confidence in God's saving power.[260]

The psalm concludes with the image of the righteous person as a green olive tree in the house of God (Ps 52: 8), symbolizing stability, growth and continual trust in God's love. This imagery highlights the spiritual flourishing that results from faithfulness to God.

From the perspective of the Biblical scholars, Psalm 52 teaches that while evil and deceit may appear powerful for a time, those who trust in God remain spiritually secure.

3.1.1.1.1. Moral Discernment and Communal Learning (Ps. 52: 6-7)

The verses emphasize on the moral ethos and instructions through communal observation. Thus, it says: "The righteous shall see and fear and shall laugh at him, saying, see the man who would not make God his refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches and sought refuge in his wealth" (Ps. 52: 6-7). The verses present righteousness not as a virtue so private but a way of life that can

[259] Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature,* (New York: William B. Eardmans Publishing Company, 2002). 134
[260] Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Old Testament,* (New York: Double Day, 1997), 511.

be discerned publicly, the word "fear" implies the reverent recognition of God's moral governance rather than fear in the negative sense.[261] The verses show then the ethical formation as having a communitarian aspect in which a behavior is observed, evaluated and internalized.

The choir members hold a spiritual, catechetical, visible and audible role in the liturgy and therefore, stand out as role models of morals. Their humility, reverence and discipline or lack thereof, communicate values to the congregation. John Goldingay, notes: "Psalms assume worship to a communal act that shapes collective identity and ethical awareness."[262] Through this way, music becomes a medium through which behavior is modelled and learned.

Musicam Sacram indicates:

> Beside musical formation, suitable liturgical and spiritual formation, must also be given to the members of the choir, in such a way that the proper performance of the liturgical role will not only enhance the beauty of the celebration …. but will bring spiritual benefit to the choir members themselves.[263]

This implies that sacred music is geared towards the spiritual renewal, religious advocacy, sanctification of the faithful and that those who minister through music should also be properly trained not only artistically but also spiritually. It implies that music ministry carries a moral responsibility. In that understanding Psalm 52:6 and 7, supports the claim by presenting the visible conduct of the choir members into the liturgy as formative for the community.

3.1.1.1.2. Spiritual Rootedness and Stability in God's Presence (Ps. 52: 8)

In this verse, there is a contrasting image of stability and rootedness. It says, "I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the steadfast love of God for ever and ever" (Ps 52: 8).

[261] Walter Bruggemann, *The Message of the Psalm: Theological Commentary,* (New York: Augsburg Publishing house, 1984), 99.
[262] John Goldingay, *Psalms, Volume 2,* (New York: Baker Academic, 2007), 142.
[263] Vatican II Ecumenical Council, *Music Sacram,* 24, (1976), 5; AAS 59 (1976) 317.

The olive tree in the Biblical interpretations has been a symbol of "longevity, (Psalm 89:20), fruitfulness and vitality (Psalm 128:3, Hosea 14:6,) and blessings and favor" (Duet 8:8, Gen 8:11). The symbolism of the olive tree expresses stability of being present in God's house rather than from wealth or power. The righteous flourish because they are rooted in God.

The verse suggests that participation in the sacred music, plays a formative role in the lives of the choir members. This engagement functions as a means of moral and spiritual formation. Through such participation, sacred music fosters in them maturity, witnessing and ethical stability. This means that the choir members, through regular training and singing during the liturgy, over time, ought to be formed in habits of patience, fidelity and cooperation. John Paul II in his *Chirograph on Sacred Music*, which was written to commemorate the 100th anniversary of *Tra le Sollecitudini*, notes that those who serve through the sacred music, participates in the church's mission of glorification of God, sanctification and edification of the faithful, and are called to lives that correspond to the holiness of their ministry.[264] It is clearly that Psalm 52:8, is in line with the teaching of John Paul II by showing worship as a place where character is cultivated through being rooted in God's steadfast love.

3.1.1.1.3. Perpetual Praise and Habitual Formation (Ps. 52: 9)

Verse 9 talks about commitment to an enduring praise. "I will thank thee forever because thou hast done it, I will proclaim thy name, for it is good in the presence of the godly" (Ps 52:9). The praise of God is presented as a communal endeavor and not as an occasional act. Walter Brueggemann and William H Bellinger argue: "Repeated acts of thanks giving function as a ritual that shape

[264] John Paul II, "*Chirograph of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II for the Centenary of the Motu Proprio Tra le Sollecitudini"* in https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/2003/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_20031203_musica-sacra.html. (Accessed 05/01/2026).

identity and behavior over time."[265] *The General Instruction to the Roman Missal* describes the choir as fulling their liturgical ministry by fostering the active participation of the faithful by means of the singing (GIRM 1022).[266] By engaging in the regular singing of the prayers, the choir internalize the values they proclaim. In this way, music becomes a means for religious and ethical formation guiding not only what is sung but how the singer lives.

Therefore, Psalm 52: 6-9, presents singing during the liturgy as an integrated formative process where moral awareness, spiritual stability and ethical habits are nurtured through singing or praise. In case of the choir members, the verses confirm firmly that music or singing in the choir is not just an artistic contribution but a spiritual activity aimed at shaping the behavior of the members themselves. As such, the members are shaped not only by what they believe but what they sing and embody within the community they sing.

3.1.1.2. Background to Psalm 32

This Psalm is recognized in the Christian tradition as one of the penitential Psalms, expressing repentance and the joy that comes from God's forgiveness. The Psalm reflects the experience of sin, confession, and restoration in the relationship between God and the believer. Within the Catholic tradition, it is often used in prayers and liturgy to express contrition and reconciliation with God.

According to Mitchell J. Dahood, the Psalm has a wisdom character because it teaches an important lesson about the consequences of sin and the blessings of divine forgiveness.[267] Dahood

[265] Water Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger, *Psalms, (*London: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 206.
[266] Gerard Moore (edit), *General Instruction to the Roman Missal,* Vatican City: St. Paul Publication, 2002.
[267] Mitchell J. Dahood, *Psalms 1: 1-5,* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 194.

notes that the psalm begins with a proclamation of happiness for the one whose transgression is forgiven (Ps. 32:1).

Joseph Ratzinger emphasize the spiritual importance of the psalm in Christian Prayer stating: "In the Psalm32 the whole drama of human existence thus sin, suffering, repentance and praise, is brought before God and transformed into prayer."[268] Psalm 32 therefore, becomes a powerful expression of repentance and trust in divine mercy.

The Psalm therefore, emphasizes the spiritual transformation that occur through repentance and divine forgiveness. The message is significant for Christian worship and spirituality since singing or praying such psalms enable Christians to reflect their relationship with God and experience spiritual renewal.

3.1.1.2.1. Blessedness and Moral Transparence (Ps. 32: 1-2)

The Psalm is considered to be penitential, reflecting the experience of sin, confession and restoration, presenting happiness as state of being reconciled with God. That is why the opening verses declare blessedness of forgiveness. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is not deceit" (Ps 32:1-2). Within the text there is repetition of the word 'Blessed.' This underscores the fact that true happiness emanates from moral integrity and a restoration of the relationship with God. John Goldingay notes: "The blessedness is not mere juridical, but relational, describing a life aligned with God."[269] True happiness arises from reconciliation with God and moral transparency. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* also notes that penance is not a mere momentary act but rather an orientation of one's whole life (CCC 1431). This then means that when sacred music is

[268] Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity,* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 44.
[269] John Goldingay, *The Psalm Volume 1,* (New York: Baker Academic, 2006), 451.

ground in such penance, it becomes an authentic expression of worship rather than a superficial performance.

The verses confront choir members with a potential temptation within the ministry that is the ability to separate artistic brilliance from spiritual and moral integrity. Artistic brilliance can lead to musical Jesuophony or musical vocaliosis. Singing about forgiveness while living with unresolved issues or conflicts creates a conflict between the singing and life. The case of the formative event stands out as an example. Psalm 32 dares the division by presenting integrity as the basis to blessedness. When the choirs sing, they are formed in their conviction that effective and sacred ministry flow from an honest heart. In true liturgy, singing should have three pillared integrated bridge; Cardiacentric which is heart centered, Pneumacentric which is soul centered and Vitacentric which is life centered.[270] *Catechism* stipulates that sacred songs expresses the prayer of the heart attuned to God and contributed to the glory of God and sanctification of the faithful (CCC 1157).

3.1.1.2.2. The Cost of Silence and Inner Disintegration (Ps. 32: 3-4)

The Psalmist shifts from blessedness in the foregoing verse to showing the consequence of silence. Thus, the Psalmist says: "While I kept silence, my body wasted away, through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer" (Ps. 32: 3-4). According Goldingay silence here does not imply contemplative stillness but refusal to admit wrongdoing.[271] It expresses how destructive can suppressed guilt be impacting both the body and the soul. When the verses are sung, they give voice to human

[270] Clement Majawa, "Inculturated Singing during Liturgy as a Spiritual Roadmap to doing Grassroot Theology in Africa." A Paper Presented at International Seminar entitled, Lituturgy, Church Music and Incuturation in Missionary Evangelization in Africa and Global Contexts, Dimesse Spirituality Center, Nairobi, 14th November, 2009.
[271] John Goldingay, *The Psalm Volume 1,* (New York: Baker Academic, 2006), 452.

vulnerability and inner struggle thereby allowing the faithful to articulate experiences that are often concealed.

Pope Benedict XVI gives a valuable insight into the dynamics of interior purification and transformation: "Trains the human person in truthfulness by bringing inner disorders into the light of God's presence."[272] Through this spiritual roadmap, liturgical music is meant to restore harmony between the inner life and the outward expression.[273] Therefore, verses 3 and 4, is a call to discipline for the choir members to fight against hypocrisy and self-deception.

This insight has significant pastoral implication on the choir members who are often in close-knit parishes where interpersonal tension, rivalries and misunderstanding can easily arise from highly contested deanery choir festivals and other choir competitions. Psalm 32 uncovers the cost of unresolved conflict, reminding the choir members that silence in the face of wrongdoing leads to spiritual dryness. Thus, singing the Psalm 32, warns the choir members on the dangers of avoidance, negligence and the importance of saying the truth.

3.1.1.2.3. Confession, Restoration and Communal Accountability (Ps. 32: 5)

"Then I acknowledged my sin to you and I did not hide my iniquity….and you forgave the guilt of my sin" (Psalm 32:5). What is apparent is that there is a shift from silence to confession which effects restoration and freedom. Confession here is portrayed not as a humiliation but as liberation[274] Pope Francis emphasizes: "Genuine ministry and evangelization flow from hearts

[272] Benedict XVI, *The Spirit of the Liturgy,* (New York: Ignatius Press, 2000), 35
[273] Benedict XVI, 54.
[274] James L. May, *The Psalm: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching,* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 238.

continually undergoing conversion and renewal."[275] According to him, ministry that lacks ongoing repentance risk becoming empty and self-referential.[276]

Singing Psalm 32:5, emphasizes in the choir members an understanding that music as part of their ministry requires sustained openness to the spirit of truth and God's mercy. By singing the Psalm one becomes responsive to an act of communal accountability and normalizes confession as an essential part of faithful service rather than a sign of weakness. "Then I acknowledge my sin to you"… (Lk 32:5). This acknowledgement promotes in the choir members a culture of reconciliation in which admitting one's wrong doing and seeking for pardon are seen as strengths that encourages communal trust.

St. Basil the great (330-379 AD), acknowledges the formative power of singing the Psalms. He notes that the church has a historical practice of singing especially the psalmody so that moral instruction are absorbed gently and effectively by the soul, the delight of melody he mingled with the doctrines so that by the pleasantness and softness of the sound heard, we must receive without perceiving it, the benefit of the word.[277] He compares the act of singing the Psalms with a wise physician who when giving bitter drug to drink, frequently smears the cup with honey.[278] For Basil music engages affections as such it let the ethical teachings to take root more deeply than spoken instructions alone. The Psalm, especially the movement from silence to confession and the joy as a result of restoration provide an opportunity for the choir members to train them emotionally and morally in shaping not what they believe but how they live.

[275] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, The Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's world, *Evangelii Gaudium,* 11, (2013), 10; AAS 105 (2013) 1024.
[276] *Evangelii Gaudium,* 12.
[277] Orthodox Christianity, "St. Basil's Homily on Psalm 1: On the Value of the Psalms" in https://orthochristian.com/45167.html. (Accessed 07/01/2026).
[278] Orthodox Christianity. Online Source. (Accessed 07/01/2026).

In conclusion, Psalm 32: 1-5, provides a deeper reflection in understanding music as a spiritual practice for shaping the behaviors of believers and non-believers *as a means of centripetal missionary evangelization*. Through its transition from concealed guilt, confessed sins and later restored joy, shows how the prayers disciplines the conscience, fosters moral honesty and nurturing the habit of repentance and renewal. Psalms reveals how sacred music can contribute to shaping the behavior by aligning the inward disposition with authentic worship.

3.1.1.3. Background to Psalm 1

Psalm 1 serves as an introduction to the entire book of the Psalms, presenting the fundamental contrast between the righteous and the wicked. Although the Psalm has none attributed to its authorship in its title, it has traditionally been associated with the wisdom tradition of Israel and functions as a guide for righteous living.

Mitchell J. Dahood, views the Psalm to have the character of wisdom literature emphasizing the importance of meditating on the law of the |Lord and living according God's teachings. Dahood explains: "The psalm portrays the righteous person as one who delights in the law of God and therefore experiences stability and blessings."[279]

Similarly, Roland Murphy notes that Psalm 1 introduces the central theme of the psalter by contrasting ways of life; the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked. He observes: "The psalms presents the righteous as one who meditates on the law of the Lord and whose life flourishes like a tree planted by the stream of water."[280]

[279] Dahood, 3.
[280] Murphy, 121.

3.1.1.3.1. Choice and Direction (Psalm 1:1)

The verse opens with "Blessed is the one who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the way of sinners nor sit in the seat of scoffers" (Ps 1:1). Reading through the verse there is a progression of an action which in telling moral character, is shaped by habitual association and practice.

The church also recognizes how liturgical ministry require consistency between life and service. It notes the ministers ought therefore, to discharge their offices with the sincere piety demanded by so exalted a ministry and rightly expected of them by God's people.[281] The taking of an active role in sacred music becomes a formative environment that counters behaviors and attitudes that are not in tandem with the values proclaimed in worship.

3.1.1.3.2. Delight in Gods Wisdom and Instructions (Psalm 1: 2)

The Psalm recognizes the engagement with God's instruction as a source of stability. "His delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Ps. 1: 2). The delight implies an interior attraction that goes beyond obligation. This type of understanding is in line with the teaching of the church that authentic participation in the liturgy must involve interior assimilation of what is celebrated. It says: "Sacred music is not an external ornament but an integral element of the liturgical action requiring those who sing to be inwardly engaged in prayer they express" [282] Through the repeated rehearsals and proclamation of scriptures the choirs take part in the meditative process that eventually shape their attitude and moral sensitivity.

[281] Vatican II Council, Sa*crosanctum conciluim, 24,* (1963), 11; AAS 56 (1963) 116.
[282] Vatican II Council, *Music Sacram,* 5, (1967), 81; AAS 59 (1967) 306.

3.1.1.3.3. Rootedness and Ethical Fruitfulness in Liturgical Practice (Psalm 1:3)

The verse comes with an imagery of a tree planted by the stream of water. It is so rooted and becomes fruitful because of its nearness to the source of water. "He is like tree planted by the stream of water, that yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither, whatever he does, prosper" (Lk 1:3). These are marks of a righteous person symbolizing spiritual nourishment, consistent fruitfulness and prosperity. All this because of delighting in God's law. *The Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* observes: "Repeated devotional and liturgical practices contribute to the gradual formation of Christian life and conduct."[283] It means for the choir members, their rootedness in God and the Church's music tradition should enable them to prosper and be fruitful as fruits of their formation. They need develop stability, patience even accountability as virtues that become evident both within and beyond the music setting.

In conclusion Psalm 1: 1-3 is a platform for the choir members to appreciate the biblical foundation of the church's teaching on music as spiritual practice that aims to shape their behaviors of discipline and rootedness in God's word. When this is appropriated with the liturgical life context, the Psalm its role of moral formation in the music ministry, calling members to lives of stability, discernment, fruitfulness and consistency with the value of worship.

3.1.2. The New Testament

Just as noted from the Old Testament, within the New Testament, music is also associated with a prayer, teaching and the *Cardiacentric* formation. Paul in his letter to the Colossians noted "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another….. and sing psalms and hymns

[283] Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, "Liturgy and Popular Piety in a Historical Pesrpective, 59," in *Directory of Popular Piety and Liturgical Principles and Guideline,* Vatican City, 2001. https://press.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20020513_vers-direttorio_en.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com. (Accessed 07/01/2026).

and spiritual songs" (Col 3:16). In the New Testament singing or music is didactic[284] and transformative[285]. It can be used to communicate theological teachings that cultivate emotion and can direct the moral behaviors. In this way, music cannot be separated from formation of the character and spirituality. The choir members therefore, as they take part in their performances and trainings, they also undergo formation that help them to shape the inner life in line with the Christian values.

3.1.2.1. Canticles

In the Christian tradition, canticles are primarily drawn from both the Old and the New Testament and are sung or recited as part of the Church's official prayer. According to the *General Instruction to the Liturgy of the Hours,* canticles are scriptural songs taken from the books other than the Psalms and used in the liturgy as expressions of praise, thanksgiving or supplication. (GILH 136).

3.1.2.1.1 Background to the Benedictus (Lk 1:68-79)

*The Benedictu*s is Zachariah's song of praise after the birth of John the Baptist and is recorded in the Gospel of Luke 1: 68-79. The name *Benedictus* comes from the opening Latin word "*Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel" "*Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel" (Lk1:68). The canticle is a hymn of praise to God for the fulfillment of His promise and the coming of salvation.

Raymond Brown looks at the *Benedictus* as a reflection of the hope of Israel for redemption and presents the birth of John the Baptist as part of God's plan of salvation preparing the way for the Messiah. Brown explains: "The canticle combines themes of thanksgiving, prophecy and divine covenant, highlighting God's faithfulness to His promise."[286]

[284] Didactic means serves as medium of teaching the faith.
[285] Transformative refers to the inner change that music produces in a person.
[286] Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke,* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 187.

Additionally, Joseph Ratzinger underscores the liturgical and spiritual significance of the *Benedictus* in Christian prayer. He notes: "The Church has taken up this hymn of Zachariah into her daily prayer, recognizing in it the praise of God for the salvation that has dawned in Christ."[287] For this reason, the *Benedictus* is recited every morning in the Liturgy of the Hours, particularly during Morning Prayer.

The canticles therefore celebrate God's salving action in history and acknowledging the mission of John the Baptist as the one who prepares the way for Christ. Within Christian worship, the *Benedictus* continues to serve as a hymn of praise and thanksgiving that strengthens the faith and spirituality of believers.

3.1.2.1.1.1. Gratitude and Praise (Lk 1:68-69)

The opening verses of the canticle express a profound praise and gratitude for God's saving action, stating: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and rendered His people and redeemed them" (Lk1:68-69). The choir members singing these words are drawn to enter into the thanksgiving attitude that shapes their inner disposition towards humility and devotion. The Church considers sacred music to lift up to God the mind of the faithful and help the faithful to express and strengthen devotion.[288]

Therefore, singing the Benedictus benefits one with reverential behavior. Consequently, the choir members realize that the singing is a participation in God's saving work.

[287] Ratzinger, 45.
[288] Vatican II Council, *Musicae, Sacrae,* 31, (1967), 80; AAS 59 (1967) 313.

3.1.2.1.1.2. A Reflection on God's Faithfulness (Lk 1:70-73)

The Canticle highlights God's faithfulness across generation, saying: "As he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his Holy covenant" (Lk1:70-72). The choirs, by chanting these verses they are brought into the church's historical memory and identity, connecting their ministry with the promises of God. "So have the Fathers of the church and the Roman Pontiffs who in more recent times, led by St. Pius X, have explained more precisely the ministerial function exercised by sacred music in the service of the Lord."[289] These words for the choir members act as religious catechism, helping them to internalize and remember the truth of the faith.

3.1.2.1.1.3. Ethical and Moral Formation (Lk 1:74-75)

"That we being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life" (Lk1:74-75). These verses aim to inculcate holiness, righteousness and moral responsibility in the choir members showing that worship through singing is not separate from the conduct. The choir members who proclaim these words repeatedly learn that singing is an expression of the ethical commitment. The sacred text are intended to form both mind and behavior shaping the virtues of discipline and integrity.

3.1.2.1.1.4. Mission and Pastoral Identity (Lk 1:76-79)

"For you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people" (Lk1:76-77). The final verses of the canticle highlight the pastoral dimensions of the canticle. Singing these verses promotes a sense of mission, giving courage to the choir members enabling

[289] Vatican II Council, *Musicae, Sacrae,* 112, (1967), 31; AAS 59 (1967) 303.

them to see their ministry as guiding others towards God. The church stresses that music should engage the faithful in an active participation forming singers as agents of peace, charity and witness.[290] The choir members internalize the virtues of cooperation, patience and attentiveness during liturgical service.

The *Benedictus* shows that the sacred text is important to spiritual formation and behavior. The praise and gratitude, God's faithfulness, ethical instruction and pastoral mission accord the choir members with spiritual and moral content to help them shape their lives. By singing the canticle repeatedly allows the faithful to internalize the values, transforming them into attitudes and virtues for communal responsibility. As such sacred music becomes not just an art but pedagogy[291] of faith and conduct (*Vitacentric*). With that in mind the *Benedictus* stands out as an example of how text of liturgical music functions as a spiritual practice that aims to form the outward and inner life of the choir members.

3.1.2.1.2. Background to the Magnificat (Lk 1:46-55)

The *Magnificat* is a canticle of praise proclaimed by Mary during her visit to Elizabeth. It is found in the Gospel of Luke. The hymn expresses Mary's gratitude and praise to God for His saving action and faithfulness to His promise. The name *Magnificat* is taken from the Latin phrase "*Magnificat anima mea Dominum*." Meaning "My Soul Magnifies the Lord" (Lk1:46).

Commenting on the *Magnifict,* Scott Hahn notes that the Song of Mary is reflecting the fulfillment of God's covenantal promise to Israel and highlights God's mercy towards the humble. Hahn

[290] Pius X, *Musicae Sacrae,* 7, (1955), 5; AAS 48 (1956) 19.
[291] *Pedagogy* is a theory and practice of learning. Music becomes part of a practice of forming a believer intellectually, spiritually and morally.

explains: Mary's song proclaims that God remains faithful to His covenant and lifts up the lowly who trust in Him."[292]

John L. McKenzie observes that the *Magnificat* echoes themes form the Old Testament particularly the prayer of Hannah in the First Book of Samuel 2:1-10. McKenzie observes: "The hymn celebrates God's justice by showing how He reverses human expectations, bringing down powerful and raising the humble."[293]

Therefore the Magnificat expresses both thanksgiving and the prophetic hope, celebrating God's saving power and His fidelity to his people. For this reason the song of Mary is included in the Liturgy of the Hours especially the Evening Prayer.

3.1.2.1.2.1. An Interior Praise and Prayer (Lk 1:46-47)

The beginning of the Magnificat expresses an interior movement of praise. It shows that the authentic sacred songs originates within the depth of the human person. "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Lk1:46-47). The verses clearly pinpoint praise emanating from the heart before being expressed vocally. The thought is in line with the psalmist insistence that "true praise flows from the heart" (Ps103:1), supporting the fact that music in worship cannot be separated from personal prayer. In that way singing becomes an act of contemplation and devotion.

St Augustine of Hippo (354-430) supports the idea that sacred song is an interior prayer. He notes: "Singing is what a lover does."[294] It implies that the act of singing is an expression of profound emotion and affection. In the same way, a song intensifies prayer when it arises from genuine

[292] Scott Hahn, *Catholic Bible Dictionary,* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 584.
[293] John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible,* (New York: Bruce Publishing Company, 1965), 542.
[294] St Augustine, *The Sermons: The Works of St Augustine,* (New York: New City Press, 1994), 266.

devotion. The Magnificat, therefore, by basing praise on the soul's joy in God, guides the singers to integrate their technical excellence with spiritual attentiveness.

3.1.2.1.2.2. Humility and Servanthood (Lk 1:48)

Humility is a character attributed to Mary as depicted from the song: "He has looked upon the lowliness of his servant" (Lk1:48). The sacred music revealed in the canticle shows that it is rooted in the humble service rather than self-assertion. The humility aligns Mary with the *anawim*, the poor and the lowly who seek refuge in the name of the Lord (Zeph 3:12). For the choir members, the Magnificat gives special identity that is not to be identified as the center of attention but a servant through whom God is glorified. St Gregory the Great (540-604 AD) in his orientations teaches: "The flock, which follows the voice and manner of the shepherd, may learn how to walk better through example than through words."[295] He advises those that minister in the liturgy that their actions should always correspond with what they proclaim. The Magnificat promotes humility through disciplining the self and promoting obedience in the choir members.

3.1.2.1.2.3. Proclamation of God's Saving Action (Lk 1:51-52)

The Magnificat stands out as a revelation of God's saving action in the history of humanity. Mary reckons the wonderful mighty deeds of God: "He has shown strength with his arm….he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly" (Lk 1:51-52). This way of looking at the canticle, puts sacred music within the prophetic tradition of Israel where music is accompanied by the proclamation of God's justice and mercy. The songs of Moses and the Israelites after being saved from the pursuance of the Egyptians (Ex. 15:1-21) and the song of praise to the Adonai, of Hannah in (1Sam. 2:1-11) stand as examples. Having that in mind, then the Magnificat cannot be

[295] St. Gregory the Great, *The Book of Pastoral Rule: Book Summary*, https://www.beunitedinchrist.com/wp-content/uploads/BS.Gregory-1.pdf. (Accessed 13/01/2026).

perceived as a mere lyric of praise but rather a theological confession sung out loudly. When the choir members sing the magnificat with their full voice, they became part of the church's teaching mission, join in the Paul's exhortation "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly…sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness" (Col 3:16).

3.1.2.1.2.4. Communal and Ecclesial Character of the Magnificat (Lk 1:50-51)

Although the Magnifcat came as a result of Mary's personal encounter with God, it quickly went beyond an individual speaking of the mercy of God, "from generation to generation" (Lk1:50). The encounter turned to be ecclesial[296] and communal because of its pivotal moment in the salvation history that initiated the incarnation affecting the entire human race rather than an individual. For this reason the church adopted the prayer, making it a central part of the vespers in the liturgy of the hours. There, was that assurance of its daily recitation and singing. With its usage in the liturgy, it shows that sacred music is not just a private act but an activity of the Church expressing its collective nature at prayer. When the choir members sing, they do not sing for themselves but on behalf and with the entire assembly.

3.1.2.1.2.5. The Formative Spiritual Power of Sacred Music (Lk 1:53)

The Magnificat presents sacred music as having the transformative power. Mary announces God as one "who filled the hungry with good things" (Lk1:53), revealing that God satisfies spiritual longing and brings about inner renewal. When the canticle is sung over and over again and the singer internalizes it, the song then opens the singer to the transformative grace. St Athanasius (296-373 AD) in one of his letters notes that the Psalms with the biblical canticles enable the believer to recognize and reorder "all the movement of the soul, all its changes, its ups and downs,

[296] *Sacrocanctum Concilium, 26.*

its failures and recoveries."[297] This then means that for the choir members, music is a path for on-going dialogue, shaping desires, cultivating virtues and deepening communion with God.

The contribution of the Magnificat to the church's teaching on music as a spiritual practice is enormous revealing sacred songs as interior prayer, humble service, prophetic proclamation, communal worship and transformative discipline. The canticle which stands as a model tends to inform the choir members not only musically but also spiritually, inviting them to align their voice, heart and life in the praise of God. With the *Magnificat* sacred music becomes an indispensable tool of formation shaping the behavior and spirituality of the choir members.

3.1.2.1.3. Background to the Nunc Dimittis (Lk 2:29-32)

The *Nunc Dimittis* is a hymn of thanksgiving found in the Gospel of Luke 2: 29-32 and is associated with the presentation of the child Jesus in the Temple of Jerusalem. The canticle is spoken by Simeon, a righteous and devout man who had been promised by the Holy Spirit he would not die before seeing the Messiah. Upon seeing the infant Jesus, Simeon praises God for the fulfillment of this promise. The title of the canticle comes from the opening Latin word "*Nunc Dimittis servum tuum, Domine."* Meaning "now you dismiss your servant Lord" (Lk2:29).

According to Scott Hahn, the *Nunc Dimittis* highlight the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation through Christ. Hahn explains: "The canticle proclaims Jesus as the light of salvation not only for Israel but also for all nations, showing the universal scope of God's redemptive work."[298]

The *Nunc Dimittis* was incorporated in the Church's Liturgy of the Hours where it is prayed daily at Night Prayer.

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[297] St. Athanasius, *Athanasius Letter to Marcellinus,* in https://thepocketscroll.wordpress.com/tag/letter-to-marcellinus/. (Accessed 14/01/2026).
[298] Hahn, 624.

3.1.2.1.3.1. Sacred Music Obedient Listening and Discernment (Lk 2:29)

The beginning of the canticle clearly shows obedience. "According to thy word," (Lk2:29) is thus the response of Simeon to God. The sacred song comes out of Simeon not as a result of emotions but being patiently attentive to the divine promise. And since "the Holy Spirit was upon him," (Lk2:25) Simeon waited faithfully. And the song is the fruit of long discernment.

On the perspective of the choir members the *Nunc Dimittis* stressed that sacred music is rooted in listening before singing. For the choir members Simeon's posture of obedience should be mirrored through their discipline of learning, rehearsing and even the participation in the liturgical worship. Scriptures link listening with authentic worship, so faith comes from what is heard (Rom10:17), so the canticle reinforces music as a response to God's initiative rather human invention.

3.1.2.1.3.2. Luke 2:29 Music as an Expression of Interior Peace

"You may let your servant go in peace" (Lk.2:29). The peace signifies fulfilment rather than cessation.[299] It implies Simeon's peace as the serenity that comes as a result of encountering Christ. Simeon's readiness to depart indicates the peace that comes as a result of recognizing Christ as the fulfilment of the salvific plan of God. Jesus affirms that true peace is a special gift rooted in communion with Him when he said to his disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (Jn14:27).

The church holds that the liturgy is the medium through which the Church entreats peace and unity for herself and for the whole human family[300] especially when expressed through music. The Church acknowledges that through the liturgy men are sanctified.[301] Sacred music becomes the

[299] Vern Steiner, "Nunc Dimittis," *Emmaus Institute of Biblical Studies*, 2 February 2021. https://emmausinstitute.net/now-dismiss-nunc-dimittis-your-servant-in-peace-o-lord/#:~:text=I%20uttered%20these%20words%20because,1;%2060:1). (Accessed 13/01/2026).
[300] GITRM, 82.
[301] Vatican II Council, Sa*crosanctum conciluim*, 07, (1963), 05; AAS 56 (1963) 98.

means through which this sanctifying peace is received interiorly. St Augustine's "our hearts are restless until the rest in you,"[302] implies that Simeon peace flows from having nothing left to desire after encountering Christ. Singing the *Nunc Dimittis* fosters in the choir members inner peace, reconciliation and harmony with God and with the worshipping community.

3.1.2.1.3.3. Readiness to Surrender One's Life to God (Lk. 2:29)

The *Nunc Dimittis* highlights an expression of readiness to surrender one's life in the hands of God. In the words of Simeon "now lettest thou thy servant depart" (Lk.2:29) means Simeon had been watching for the coming of the Lord's anointed and now as a faithful watchman he is being dismissed from his post by his master.[303] It signifies willing and obedient acceptance of death, even to the point of death. This resonates with the prayer of the Psalmist "into thy hand I commit my spirit" (Ps31:5). These words reflect the spirit of surrender to the will of God. This was also echoed by Jesus during His Crucification "Father into thy hands I commit my spirit" (Lk24:46). Therefore, Simeon canticle stands as a model of faith where trust in God overcome fear and uncertainty.

Christian maturity and discipleship requires this giving up one's life to God. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* holds: "Through Baptism a Christian has already died with Christ, in order to live a new life" (CCC 1010) or as Paul says: "If we have died with him, we shall also live with him" (2Tim2:11). It means Christian death can only be understood in the Paschal mysteries of Christ, thus His suffering, death and resurrection. With this understanding death becomes a final act of trust to God. This teaching is complemented by *Sacrosanctum Concilium* which affirms the liturgy as directing the faithful towards their ultimate with God and serves as fore taste of the heavenly

[302] St. Augustine, *Confessions,(*Henry Chadwick, Transl) (New York: Oxford University Press). 329.
[303] The New Interpreters' Bible Commentary, Volume IX, Luke and John, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1995), 70.

liturgy[304] In this regard then liturgy forms the worshipping community as well as the choir members for the same surrender that will be required at the end of life and Simeon becomes a model of such surrender.

All in all, *Nunc Dimittis* expresses fulfilment, peace and surrendering. Through the prayer of Simeon, the church tries to assists its faithful in realizing the right fulfilment is only realized through the encounter with Christ. With this encounter, peace flows from trusting God's promises and readiness to give God ones life. This becomes a sign of mature faith. The singing of the *Nunc Dimittis* does not only form the faithful but also the choir members, helping them to approach their ministry with humility, obedience and trust. It also helps them to realize that sacred music is a prayer that shapes their spiritual life and behavior, leading them to a deeper union with God.

3.2. *The Sacrosanctum Concilium* 112-121 and Its Contribution to Music

3.2.1. The Early Church Teaching on Music

From the early centuries of Christianity, music is one of the integral roles in the Church's liturgical worship. Traditional songs and the psalms were inherited from the Jewish liturgical practice by the early Christians. The New Testament itself encourages Christians to praise God through songs as noted in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (5: 19) also to Colossians (3:16), where Christians are being urged to sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs in thanksgiving to God.

The early Fathers of the church also saw the spiritual power of music in Christian prayer. St Augustine of Hippo reflected on the emotional and spiritual impact of sacred music and came to the acknowledgement that indeed singing the sacred text could move the human heart more

[304] Vatican II Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium,* 8 (1963), 5; AAS 56 (1963) 98.

profoundly than the spoken word. He therefore considered music as a powerful means of drawing believers closer to God and strengthening their devotions.[305]

St. Ambrose of Milan also contributed the development of the hymnody. He introduced congregational singing in the Western church and composed hymns that encouraged believers to profess their faith through songs. According to his work: "This helped to establish the tradition of hymnal singing as an integral part of Christian worship."[306]

Early fathers teaching demonstrated that sacred music was never understood as an artistic demonstration rather it was regarded as a spiritual practice that nurtures faith, strengthens communal worship and help to deepen the relationship between believers and God.

3.2.2. Development of the Church's Tradition on Sacred Music.

The church, throughout history, has continued to refine its understanding of sacred music. During the Medieval period, the Gregorian chant[307] became the principle musical form used in the Roman Liturgy. The music was valued for its simplicity, sacred character and ability to foster contemplative atmosphere during the liturgical worship.

In the modern era, the church issued several official documents to guide the proper music utilization during the liturgy. Important contribution was made by Piux X through the *Motu Proprio Tra le Sollecitudini.* The document where Pope emphasizes: "Sacred music must possess

[305] St. Augustine, 174.
[306] St. Ambrose of Milan, *Hymns,* Transl. John Mason Naele, (London: Joseph Masters, 1962). 9.
[307] Liturgical Music of the Catholic Church used to accompany the text of the Mass and the Canonical hours or the Divine Office.

holiness, artistic excellence and universality."[308] He insists that music should serve the liturgy and help the faithful participate more fully in prayer.

Later on, Pope Pius XII developed further the church teaching on music in the Encyclical *Musicae Sacrae Disciplina.* This document stressed that sacred music has the capacity to elevate faithful thoughts and inspire deeper integration during the liturgical worship.[309]

These teachings prepared the way for the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council by reaffirming the pastoral and spiritual value of sacred music in the life of the church.

3.2.3. The Teaching of Sacrosanctum Concilium 112-121

A significant development in the church's teaching on sacred music occurred during the Second Vatican Council. Being among important document produced by the council was the *Sacrosanctum Concilum* which was made by Pope Paul VI on 4th December, 1963.

Within the context of the Second Vatican Council's liturgical reused, sacred music was given a central and indispensable role in the church's worship. This is affirmed in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* which states: "The music traditional of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value greater even than that of any other art."[310] Such statement shows the church's recognition that music is important in expressing prayer and promoting the importance of liturgy.

The study also emphasizes importance of choirs during the liturgy. While promoting active participation of the assembly, it acknowledges that the choirs help to lead and support the singing

[308] Pius X, *Tra le Sollecitudini: Motu Proprio on Sacred Music,* 2, (1903) in https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius10/tra-le-sollecitudini.htm. (Accessed 11/03/2026).
[309] Pius XII, *Musicae Sacrae*, 14. (1955), 21; AAS 59 (1956) 9.
[310] *Sacrosanctum Concilium,* 112.

of the faithful. Through their ministry, choir members contribute to the solemnity and spiritual richness of the liturgical celebration.[311]

One of the liturgical scholars Joseph Gelineau, explains that the reforms of the council aimed to restore the original purpose of sacred music as a form of communal prayer rather than a mere artistic performance. According to Gelineau: "Music should serve the liturgy by enabling the faithful to participate more deeply in the mysteries being celebrated."[312]

3.2.4. Post-Vatican II Developments

Following the Second Vatican Council, the Church issued additional instructions to clarify and implement the teaching of *Sacrosanctum Concilium.* One of those documents is *Musicam Sacram stated by* the Sacred Congregation of Rite.

The document explained further the role of sacred music in the liturgy and emphasized that singing is a natural way of expressing prayer. It encouraged the participation of the entire congregation while affirming the special role of choir in enhancing the beauty and the solemnity of the liturgy.[313]

Musicam Sacram also highlights the pastoral importance of sacred music, stating that liturgical music should lead the faithful to a deeper experience of worship and help them express their faith more fully. In this way sacred music becomes an essential element of the church's spiritual life.

[311] *Sacrosanctum Concilium,* 14
[312] Joseph Gelineau, *Voices and Instruments in Christian Worship: Principles Laws and Application,* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1964), 23.
[313] *Musicam Sacram,* 7.

3.2.5. Transforming Power of Sacred Music for Choir Members

The teaching of the church on music reveals that music as a spiritual practice that can transform the lives of believers. This is especially true for the choir members who regularly participates in the musical ministry of the church.

According to theologian Edward Foley: "Liturgical music allows the faithful to encounter God through prayers and communal worship."[314] When the choir members sing the sacred text, they internalize the message of the liturgy and deepen their understanding of the Christian faith. Through constant engagement with sacred music the choir members develop a stronger sense of devotion and commitment to the Church. Their participation in the liturgical singing becomes a form of spiritual formation that nurtures their faith and strengthens their relationship with God.

Thus, sacred music serves not only the liturgy but also the spiritual growth of those who sing it. By participating in the music life of the church, choir members experience a transformation of their spirituality and become more deeply involved in the mission of the Christian community.

3.2.6. Sacred Responsibility of Choir members in Christian Community

The ministry of the choir members in the Christian community is sacred and ecclesial responsibility rooted in the church's liturgical life. Sacred music forms part of the church's prayer and worship fostering active participation among the faithful. As taught in the *Sacrosanctum Concilium,* the music tradition of the church is of great value,[315] highlights the importance of choir ministry within the liturgy.

[314] Edward Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music: Music of Pre-Constantinian Christianity,* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1996), 101.
[315] *Sacrosanctum Concilium,* 112.

First, the choir members are called to teach, inspire, engage, motivate and lead the community through hymns and sacred songs and dance. Their role is both musical and pedagogical helping the faithful to internalize the word of God and participate more fully in worship. This is further emphasized in *Musicam Sacram* which states: "Music should encourage the active participation of the people."[316] Thus, choir members act as leader of communal prayer.

Secondly, choir members help the community to integrate spirituality of the liturgy with daily life through their witness, harmony and maturity in faith. The *General Instruction to Liturgy of the Hours* explains that liturgical prayers extend into and sanctify daily human activities.[317] Through their commitment and discipline, choir members model a lived spirituality that connects worship with every day Christian living.

Finally, choir members play a role in missionary evangelization, through shared music, witness and catechesis. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* notes that the church exists in order to evangelize.[318] Sacred music becomes a powerful tool for proclaiming the gospel and catechizing the faithful. In this way choir members serve not only within the liturgy but also as missionary witnesses in the wider community.

Integrative Reflection

Having examined the biblical foundations of sacred music, the liturgical tradition of the church, and the teaching of the magisterium, it becomes clear that music occupies a central role in Christian spirituality. From the Scriptures through the liturgical reforms of the church, sacred music emerges as profound spiritual practice that mediates prayer, formation and encounter with God.

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[316] *Musicam Sacram,* 5.
[317] The General Instructions to the Liturgy of the Hours, English Translation, England and Wales 1974. 5
[318] Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, On proclaiming the Gospel, *Evanglii Nuntiandi,* 14 (8 December 1975), 9; AAS 68 (1976) 7.

The reflection begins with the witness of scriptures. In the Old Testament, the Psalms show that music and song were essential expression of faith in the life of the Israelites. Texts such as Ps 52:6-9, 32: 1-5, and 1:1-3, demonstrate how believers used song to express their trust in God, repentance for sin and confidence in divine protection. Music was not just for praise in these psalms, it was also for a response to life events – joy, experience of God's mercy and a response to life struggles. Singing helped believers connect their life with God and communicate their sincerest feelings to God.

The biblical tradition continues in the New Testament through the canticles that form part of the Christian prayer; the Benedictus, Magnificat and the Nunc Dimittis. The songs in this section demonstrate the way that music took its place in those spaces of healing presence of God, manifested in Jesus Christ. They express themes of gratitude, humility, hope and fulfillment of God’s promise. In the liturgical life of the church these songs still influence the prayer of the faithful primarily in the Liturgy of the Hours, making sacred music a very rich aspect of the church's spiritual liturgy.

On its biblical base a process of rich musical tradition within the church throughout history emerges. From the beginning, Christians saw how important music was to the gathering of believers for prayer and to communicating the faith. This insight was slowly reflected and gradually turned into the organised liturgical forms like chants, or the hymnody. Later the magisterium explicitly expressed the meaning of sacred music, in the constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium during the Second Vatican Council. The document states that sacred music is "indispensable to the solemn liturgy" and "helpful to its beauty" and that music should enhance the faithful's participation in worship.

The council further highlighted the holiness, artistic excellence and universality of sacred music. Such qualities will ensure that music employed in the liturgy will continue in that same spirit – to glorify God and to sanctify the faithful. The council's post-Vatican II changes prompted for a greater extension of the people. However, using vernacular languages and inculturation of music in different cultural context, helped the sacred music to be more accessible and still with essential spiritual and liturgical character.

Music of the sacred has a special meaning for the singers especially. Choir-Musicking does NOT simply mean going to the choir, but it is a ministry within the Church. Go to rehearsals and services day in, day out and undergo spiritual formation. Humility, cooperation and commitment are achieved through discipline in learning and performance of sacred music. In parallel, when sacred text is repeated many times, the message of scriptures and of the liturgy "sticks" into the hearts of those who are singing.

Moreover, sacred music has a transforming power for the choir members. Choirists have the opportunity to be mediators of the voice of the worshipping community through active involvement in the musical expression of the church's prayer. Their service helps the faithful to enter more deeply into the mystery of the liturgy. Meanwhile, the choir members gain deeper insight into God's presence as they look into the meanings and beauty of the music which they perform.

Faced with scriptures, tradition and teaching of Sacrosanctum Concilium, the student of the liturgy is brought to a realization of the spiritually potent nature of sacred music. It allows believers to pray, meditate on God’s word and participate active in the mystery of the liturgy. With the members of the choir in particular, sacred music is a way of spiritual development and a ministry of service, not only for the singer but for the entire worshipping community.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROMOTION OF MUSIC AS A LITURGICAL PRACTICE FOR SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Introduction

The section summarizes the results of this study, deducted from the discussions in the first, second and third chapters. In addition, it is analysing the outcomes that were given by researchers from the research questionnaire administered to the choirs within the Deanery of Mpiri.

The study of Spiritual Theology reveals that the values acquired cannot just remain philosophical, theological or human based experience of the choirs. There is need to go beyond these dimensions and move toward a more practical and lived application of spirituality. This chapter responds to this need by both providing the results but also providing suggestions in the hope that spiritual values are better integrated into the daily life and ministry of the choirs. The recommendations will assist choir members, choir leaders and pastoral agents to develop an experiential and transformative spirituality.

Moreover, the chapter utilizes the thoughts of theologians, anthropologists, Judaism and the Chewa traditional religion and the teaching by the Church on music and choirs. As a result of this interdisciplinary and contextual engagement concrete pastoral and spiritual prescriptions are given, especially with regard to formation, liturgical involvement and community life and moral responsibility, thereby fostering a more comprehensive and inculturated choir ministry.

4.1. Research Findings on Music as a Liturgical Tool for Spiritual Transformation

4.1.1. Contextual Nature of Choir Spirituality and Participation

These findings show that choir spirituality in Mpiri deanery is embedded in the lived realities of choir members as opposed to being abstract or doctrinal in nature, choir spirituality does not exist in isolation but rather develops in real, historical, cultural and socio-economic contexts.[319] Choir member's share out what they believe/what they feel would be their life experiences in the day to day things such as communal life, struggles and aspirations. Their ministry is relational, dynamic and to the context. Choir therefore is not just an instrument of the liturgy, but also a means of living one's faith in a particular socio-cultural environment.

4.1.2. Cultural Influence and Liturgical Inculturation

The study is great emphasis on the significance of cultural heritage to the life of the choir as well as the liturgical music within the context of the communities of the Yao and the Lomwe. Ceremonious and communal singing and oral transmission of these customs enhance choir involvement, unity, harmony and active participation. As a result of this cultural base, an inculturation process has taken place, where the local music is incorporated into the Catholic worship.[320]

The results also indicated that this inculturation is not always theologically and liturgically well-led and is, in part, informal. This means that cultural inputs can at times produce inconsistencies and in-depthness in the expression of the doctrine, even though this aids engagement and identity. In conclusion, it calls for inculturation to be more structured, both in respect of cultural authenticity and the theological integrity.

[319] Mbiti, 106.
[320] *Sacrosanctum Concilium, 37.*

4.1.3. Religious Pluralism and Identity Formation

Because choir Spirit is affected by the people's religion, mainly Muslims in Mpiri deanery, most Christians live in pluralistic religious environment. In this context, the choir is not just a liturgical choir, but a tangible representation of Catholic identity. Choir involvement helps foster a sense of belonging to the choir among its members and also helps reinforce their faith in a context of a minority.[321]

Concurrently, the interreligious environment poses challenges, including from time to time, tension arising from issues of identity and cultural expression. Choirs in themselves are a source of challenges for peaceful coexistence, yet they help promote respect, and provide a positive public witness. This way, the choir can be a place of identity creation and means of social harmony.

4.1.4. Socio-Economic Hardships: Choir Participation and Community Solidarity

Socio-economic conditions prove significant in the participation of the choir. Access to basic items like choir materials like uniform, musical instruments, transportation, among others is a problem due to poverty in Mpiri deanery, thus hindering children's participation in various activities during the liturgy or festival.

Yet, such adversity also gives rise to a strong sense of solidarity amongst people. [322] Choirs can then be environments of offer and encouragement and belonging: the spiritual and the social are shared between individuals. Thus, they will not lose their spiritual inspiration as a result of dealing with difficulties of any kind; instead, interpersonal dependency and relationship and communal dependence will be improved.

[321] Nostra Aetate, 2.
[322] Mbiti, 108.

4.1.5. Lived Experience and Contextual Formation of Choirs

The findings point to the fact that theological reflection is not central for the participation in the choir but is rather determined by lived experiences, communal practices and cultural engagement in Mpiri deanery. The singing activities that Choir members are mainly engaged in are singing as part of church routine, and social belonging and communal identity formation. Therefore, their participation is experiential, rather than a doctrinal framework.

Their responses to the questions have for the most part indicated that they do not consider their texts sung to have a theological dimension or think of how the liturgical music is assisting them in their own Christian development. No, there is participation done by practice and repetition. Here it implies that the life of the choir is for the most part an experience of lived religion, of doing rather than saying including sounds and various modes of communal interaction.

This is in line with the anthropological understanding that religious life whose idea in fact precedes theological reflection.[323]Thus, the concept of faith in the context of a choir is embodied and contextualised, formed through social relations and cultural assumptions and frames of participation. “This experience however is not necessarily linked to conscious reflection which is the basis of spiritual formation and which in turn may only rarely be present.”

The study, thus, shows how intrinsically related Choir Spirituality is to lived experience but how there are no consistent structures for reflection in practice to strengthen the link between teaching, believing and living.

[323] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures,* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 87.

4.1.6. Formation in Church Teaching

This research shows how, as the Scriptures and the teaching of the Church assert, sacred music is a vital aspect of Christian worship and a pedagogical component. As the biblical tradition shows, singing is not only expressive; it is teaching and changing lives. In the Psalms and the New Testament Canticles we find music presented as a medium; within it, believer is formed with the goal of virtues like repentance, humility, gratitude, reliance on God and moral responsibility.

Within the liturgical tradition of the church, sacred music is understood as an integral part of worship ordered towards the glorification of God and sanctification of the faithful. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* affirms that music in the liturgy is not decorative but essential to active participation,[324] helping the faithful to enter more deeply into the mysteries being celebrated. In this sense, sacred music functions as a means of prayer, catechesis and spiritual formation.

From this theological perspective, participation in choir ministry is meant to be a process of interior transformation. Through repeated engagements with scriptural texts in song, choir members are expected to internalize the values they proclaim, allowing worship to shape both the spiritual life and moral conduct. As such, sacred music thus becomes a pathway through which faith is deepened and live more consciously.

However, this intended formative role presupposes intentional engagement, reflection and understanding. Without these elements, liturgical and theological richness of sacred music risks remaining external rather than becoming fully internalized in the life of the believer.

[324] *Sacrosanctum Concilium, 112.*

4.2. Recommendations for Contribution of Music as a Liturgical Tool for Spiritual Transformation

In light of the study results, several practical and contextual relevant recommendations are proposed to enhance the role of sacred music as a way for spiritual transformation of the choir members in Mpiri deanery.

4.2.1. Strengthening Structured Spiritual and liturgical Formation

There is need to establish structured spiritual formation programs for the choir members at parish, deanery and diocesan level. The findings reveal a significant gap between participation in music and conscious theological reflection. Many choir members engage actively in singing without fully understanding the spiritual and theological depth of the text they proclaim. Therefore, formation should move the members of the choir beyond the technical to include the teaching of sacred scriptures and the Church's teaching on sacred music. This can be achieved through regular workshops and seminars and retreats organized at parish and deanery level.

Such formation will help the choir members to develop a reflective approach to the ministry. If they know the meaning and purpose behind the songs being sung, they will be better equipped to grasp the message and have it had a greater impact on their spiritual life, building the choir experience into a conscious spiritual exercise.

4.2.2. Integrating of Prayer, Meditation and Scriptures in Choir Activities

Prayer times, Scripture reading and guided meditation should be planned in for choir practice. It was found that most of the activities in the choir lacked a spiritual element in favour of being mainly performance type of activities. Rehearsals frequently involve a lot of learning songs with little attention to the interior disposition needed for an effective engagement in the liturgy. Thus, it is necessary to include prayers, scripture reading and meditation into the choir activities.

The introduction of these prayer elements will assist the choir members to appreciate music not only as a performance, but as a means to engage in the liturgy in a prayerful manner. Guided meditation may help them learn more and get in closer contact with God. In time, they will develop a habit of remembering and concentrating, so that as they begin to sing more and more with devotion and sincerity, they will deepen their devotion, making their singing more sincere and powerful. The transition from performance to prayer will contribute greatly to enhancing the quality of spiritual life of the choir and congregation.

4.2.3. Provision of Liturgical and Doctrinal Formation

Increase the Liturgy education and Theology of choir members in their ministry in the liturgy. The results showed that some referents have not been able to face the proper organization of the liturgy and at the same time they neglected to choose music appropriately for each part of the order, resulting in the unappropriate use of music in parts of the liturgy, which is not in correspondence with the Church tradition.

Liturgical theory should therefore form a part of formation with basic information and analyses of the meaning of the Mass, and instruction as to the role of music in the various liturgical moments. This will assist the choir members to understand that their ministry is not an individual service, but part of the overall celebration of worship. It will also serve to generate great reverence, discipline and coherence in their participation. This will help to make worship more meaningful and enriching for the whole community.

4.2.4. Guided Inculturation on Sacred Music

The inculturation process, in sacred music has to be more systematic and accessible given the strong cultural influence among the members of the deanery of Mpiri. The study demonstrates how the local musical tradition contributes to a richer participation and cultural identity expression, but

sometimes with inconsistencies with the norms of the Church due to failure of the necessary liturgical and theological guidance.

This can be realised through works of collaboration between the clergy and the liturgists, and the experienced musicians who can assess and advise in the development of local pieces. The clear guidelines will look to the integration of cultural expression while leaving the form and content of the sacred liturgy intact. Therefore, appropriate inculturation will enrich the worship and strengthen the community's faith making the liturgy more meaningful and contextual.

4.2.5. Promotion of Sustainable Material and Logistical Support through Self-Reliance

Social-economic issues of the choir members greatly impacted their involvement in choir activities. Inadequate resources including uniform, equipment and transportation are provided, which hinder effective involvement. The use of external help may be necessary in the short term, but if used to the detriment of the long term, could have a detrimental impact on the sustainability of the choir ministry. Hence, the importance of supporting more independent solutions that allow the users of the choir to be self-responsible in the care of the material and logistics.

Choirs within Parishes/ Deaneries to build sustainable financial strategies through regular member's contribution, saving schemes, local small scale income generating activities etc via local initiatives/schemes. These activities can be supplemented by periodic fundraisings that do not rely on outside solicitation for funds. The choir, in doing this, not only receives and receives the support but is also an active participant in preserving their own ministry.

This will help to build a strong feeling of ownership, accountability and solidarity within the choir. It is also consistent with the Church's overall vision of a self-reliant church which drives participation, stewardship and responsible utilization of available resources. This combines

material assistance and communal action with commitment and allows choir members to become more focused on their spiritual and liturgical responsibilities and work more responsibly for the church whilst also developing in maturity and responsibility within the choir.

Integrative Reflection

The chapter has compiled core findings of the study, and attempted to knit in theological/pastoral considerations into this discernment for choir ministry in Mpiri deanery. As it unfolds, the study brims with a profound conflict between experience, on the one hand, and understanding, on the other; between practise and reflection, between performance and prayer, in the life of the choir. While often presented and valued, music is not always consciously realized as a transformative.

The result shows choir spirituality in Mpiri deanery has a very contextual and experiential character. It is a result of cultural norms, socio-economic and religious living together. Music here is embodied and experiential and it encompasses aspects of identity, unity and belonging. Incorporation of local cultural elements in liturgical music serves as a testimony to a real inculturation process, but at times it is rather informal and poorly led. This shows the richness in the liturgical and theological formation that must be maintained, as well as that which needs to be developed.

During the process a major deficiency in intentional reflection among the Choir's members within the context of sacred music and its spiritual theological significance is identified. Routine and function may often be more significant than the awareness that music is prayer and is a medium of divine encounter. This gap hampers the power of transformative power of sacred music to the extent that, at times, it may serve as a substitute for it, transforming it into more of a performance than a means of formation. But wherever the reflection and the personal contacts are present, music

undeniably gives an impetus to the spiritual living of an ecclesial community in terms of spiritual growth, moral development and increased ecclesial commitment.

One of the most important things that he found is that there is a double nature to choir participation. On the other hand, it brings to the foreground moral behaviour, unity among the people and their involvement in church life. On other hand, however, it features problems of insufficient formation, few opportunities to participate in group activities, and socio-economic hurdles which influence its stability and consistency. These problems are not inherent or inherent to the choir ministry per se but stem from a lack of guidance system, communication system and support system.

The chapter reaffirms that sacred music is not something secondary to the liturgy, but rather is a part integral with Christian worship and one that can transform. It's a medium where Scripture is made internal, faith is expressed and the believer is slowly conformed to the message being proclaimed. Because music is at the convergence of doctrine, experience and practice, and is so understood and intentionally cultivated, it is a privileged avenue of spiritual growth.

In light of these insights, the recommendations offered in this chapter, aim to bridge the gap between theological ideas and pastoral practice. They need a paradigm overhaul from a wholly performance-driven to a more comprehensive and developmental choir ministry. One that combines spiritual development, liturgical awareness and sensitivity, responsible involvement and citizenship. Such an action would acknowledge the choir is not just a group of people doing a bit of worshiping, but a community of disciples who are called into a common vocation.

Ultimately, sacred music must be formed, challenged through reflective experiences, and nurtured through supportive relationships, communities, and structures before it can enable transformation. If these elements are present then music is more than just music, it is prayer, formation and mission.

In this manner choir ministry in Mpiri deanery can transform into an interactive and worshipping area where not only is faith strung into songs but it is also lived in daily life, leading to personal conversion and its renewal in the church.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The study aimed at exploring the role of liturgical/musical practice in the transforming of members of the choir of Mpiri deanery in Mangochi Diocese based on the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, especially the Sacrosanctum Concilium. The research in all four chapters has shown that sacred music is not an artistic or cultural event, but it is a theological and formative event which affects one's life personally and the life of the community ecclesially.

Chapter one provides an historical background of the study by appraising the socio-cultural, religious and economic needs of Mpiri deanery. The exploration led to the discovery that music is related closely and integral to the social and liturgical life of the people in which it serves as an important mode for expression, identification and participation. It also identified significant pastoral struggles, such as giving not very much training, socio-economic frustrations and a functional/competitive approach to choir activity rather than a spiritual calling.

Music was discussed in terms of theological and anthropological experience as the human and spiritual experience in chapter two. It showed how music could be a tool to create the interior life of the human person in terms of emotions, memory and communal identity. Theologies of people like St Augustine, John Mbiti and Charles Nyamiti highlighted that music has an intrinsic connection with spirituality, morality and real life experience. Music has not been divorced from life in the African environment but an expression of one's faith and values as well as communal belonging.

In chapter three, the Biblical and Magisterial basis of sacred music was explored. It illustrated that the music, especially in the Psalms and Canticles, is the vehicle within which one can pray, one

can have a moral basis and one can have a meeting with God. The Sancrosanctum Concilium also reiterated and reinforced the teaching of the Vatican II that music plays a crucial role in the liturgy, ordered toward the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful. The music chapter highlighted again the importance of understanding and practicing music correctly, so that it can be used as a tool for believers to internalize the Word of God which will help them become holy.

The empirical results and theological reflection were synthesized in chapter four and showed that although the choir members actively engage in music, there is a big gap between practice and theological understanding. There is no reflection of the spiritual depth of music as it is always perceived in functional or emotional ways. However, the conclusions also indicated that when sacred music is intentionally formed, reflected and guided, its transformational power is great; enhancing faith, moral behaviour and a sense of belonging in the community.

Consequently, the study also argues that the transformative impact of sacred music is not a norm, but it requires the intentional formation, spiritual commitment and awareness of the liturgy. If choir ministry is done as a call to prayer, to study Scripture and Church teachings, it is a truly powerful means of personal conversion and communial renewal. On the other hand, just placed into terms of performance and competition, it becomes nothing more than athletic ability.

Given these results, the importance of a more comprehensive approach for choir ministry in Mpiri deanery, which incorporates theological formation, guided inculturation, participatory leadership and spiritually committed leadership is emphasized. In doing so, it will allow the choir members to live their faith, so there is consistency between liturgical expression and everyday life.

To conclude, the study has confirmed that sacred music is a significant connection point for people's faith, culture and practical Christian life. If formed and properly directed, it is more than artistic expression and a tool for formation and evangelization. Such a renewed understanding in Mpiri Deanery could help to enrich personal holiness and at the same time impact in a real, sustainable and meaningful way the work of the Church.

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APPENDICIES

APPENDIX I. QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Respondent,

My Name is Fr. Constantine Yanjanani Chipondeponde, a priest of the Catholic Diocese of Mangochi, currently conducting a research study titled *The Role of Music a Liturgical Practice for Transforming the Spirituality of the Choir Members in the Light of Sacrosanctum Concilium in Mpiri Deanery, Catholic Diocese of Mangochi.*

The questionnaire seeks to gather your views and experiences regarding the conduct, attitude behaviors and the spiritual experiences of the choir members in and outside the liturgical settings. Your responses are important as they contribute to the better understanding, formation and enriching the spirituality of the choir members in the Diocese of Mangochi.

Participation is voluntary, and you may skip any question you do not wish to answer. All the responses will be treated with highest confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes. Your honest and thoughtful answers will help ensure that the study reflects the lived realities and wisdom of the community.

Thank you in advance for taking time to contribute to this important exercise.

Name: Rev. Father Constantine Yanjanani Chipondeponde

Signature: _____

Date:…….

QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE CHOIR MEMBERS AND CHURCH LEADERS

Demographic Information

Name of the Choir or an Individual: _____

Age: (if applicable) _____

Name of the Out Church_____

Name of the Parish: _____

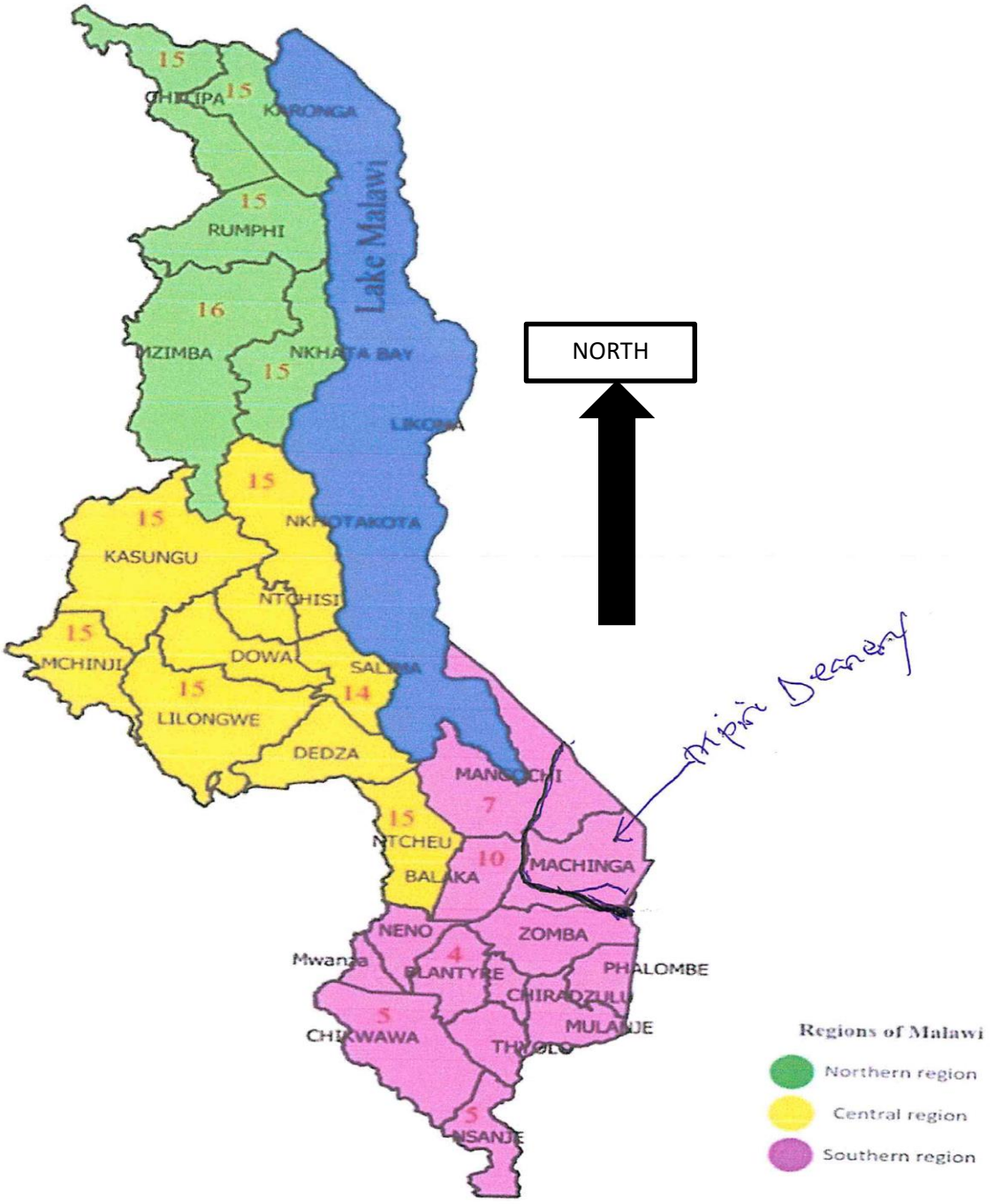
1. To what extend is the socio-economic and political situation affecting your Christian life within the deanery of Mpiri deanery.
2. How is your How do you feel your participation in the church choir has influenced your personal spiritual journey?
3. Does your singing in the choir deepen your understanding of faith? If yes in what way?
4. Has your involvement in the choir influenced the way you behave outside the church in terms of your personal conduct, relationship, or community involvement?
5. Do you feel a sense of responsibility as a choir member, not just in terms of singing but how you love your life as a Christian?
6. Have you noticed any change in your attitude towards prayer, scripture reading, confession or other aspects of your faith since you joined the choir?
7. They have been reports that sometimes the choirs bring confusion at church or at the parish. What is your say on this?
8. Did you ever feel that being in the choir didn't help you feel close to God or that it was not meaningful? If yes can share when and why?

9. Do church leaders visit you to see your progress

Questionnaire to Church leaders

1. What is the intended role of choir in the liturgical service at your parish? How do you see their participation contributing to the spiritual growth of the congregation?
2. Are there any challenging gaps that you have observed in how choir members engage with liturgical practices? Do you think they fully grasp the spiritual implication of their role?
3. What steps if any are you taking to address these challenges and help the choir members to deepen their spiritual development.
4. Is it true that sometimes the choirs cause problems in various churches or parishes?

APPENDIX II: MAP OF MALAWI SHOWING MPIRI DEANERY



Source: Online

APPENDIX III: MANGOCHI DIOCESE AND MPIRI DEANERY
SOURCE: April 2017 – 2022STRATEGIC PLAN

