

The Relevance of Singing the *Te Deum Laudamus* in the Postmodern Era

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Abstract

This paper investigates the relevance of singing and performing the *Te Deum Laudamus* in the postmodern Christian era, especially in view of changing enactments and perceptions of the purpose of the hymn. The *Te Deum* has been used in various ways in church history, sung as a confession of praise and regularly used since the time of St Benedict during Matins (morning service). While the Reformers were critical of the late medieval worship, they did not query incorporating the *Te Deum* into their liturgies, because it brought meaning to the glorification of a benevolent God. This explains its use also by most Christian churches in their liturgies in the postmodern era. However, the pertinent question remains: Is the *Te Deum* still applicable to the postmodern church, which is characterised by secularism, charismatic sermons, and commercialised worship. The question is instigated by events and conceptions of the universe from the era of Gregorianism to Darwinism. In answering this question, the paper highlights the history of the *Te Deum* and its application within the church, and seeks to find out whether the hymn addresses the present needs of Christians, which have been affected by postmodernism. The paper contends that the *Te Deum* is still relevant and contributes to the glorification of God's mission (*missio Dei*).

Keywords: *missio Dei*; church; salvation; redemption; postmodern; *Te Deum Laudamus*

Background

The *Te Deum* had a powerful and remedial effect on people during the medieval era. It was believed that people were cured of terminal diseases during the singing of the hymn, while others regained their sight on hearing it. Some were said to have been arisen or awakened from the dead as the hymn was sung. According to Koziol (2001, 354) in a



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book titled *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology*, Thomas Head recounts a narrative about a girl who collapsed as if she was dead, but she was instantly healed by the saint. In the process of healing, vespers were called and were sung, followed by the singing of the *Te Deum*. As the hymn was sung, the girl immediately recovered and delivered a holy testimony that she was saved, not by telling her story, but by showing herself as she joined the saint through Flanders.

Besides, it is believed that the *Te Deum*, being an effective healing balm to believers or Christians, was also a source of solace to them during tribulations and tumults. This was evident during the merciless massacre of Christians in China, when saints were killed because of their faith. The hymn instilled more faith and inculcated the spirit of determination for living in the grace of God after serving Him selflessly. They embraced death by their persecutors with courage and saw death as a victory. They faced death courageously, bravely, and with integrity, trusting faithfully that there is life after death and that a triumphant and victorious reception in heaven is awaiting them, where they will become martyrs with their Redeemer. This can be inferred to the faith which Mother Mary of the Passion schooled to the surviving nuns in the monastery when the martyrs were killed. She directed the nuns to intone the *Te Deum* as a sign of re-echoing that what they were going through was not in vain. The singing was also to mark the beginning and the celebration of the first martyrs (Clarke 2011, 137).

Lusk (n.d.) emphasises the powerfulness of the *Te Deum* and its mysteries and alludes to it as one of the most sung hymns in the history of Christendom. Its full title, “*Te Deum Laudamus*,” means “*We Praise you God*” and comes from the first line of the hymn. The origins of the *Te Deum* are shrouded in the blanket of mystery that covers much of the early Christian history. It is alleged that it was composed by Ambrose and Augustine (the church fathers) during the latter’s baptism by the former in the ninth century. Consequently, most scholars have traced the hymn back to Niceta, the fourth century Bishop of Romesiana in Dacia (Eastern Serbia) in the fifth century. While much cannot be said of Niceta’s life and career, it is evident that he was an apologist of Nicene orthodoxy in the Trinitarian and Christological debates of his time. This orthodoxy becomes vividly clear in the triumphant, joyous and reverent tone of the *Te Deum*. Despite the exposure of the *Te Deum* as triumphant, the authorship is still uncertain because Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers in the fourth century, and Hilary of Arles in the fifth century, were also considered possible authors (Kim 2015, 14).

Kim (2015) adds that the *Te Deum* displays equal sections devoted to the Father and the Son, and half-clause to the Holy Spirit, followed by litany which addresses the Arian controversy over the nature of Christ in the fourth century. Much of the text is composed of traditional statements of belief; unlike most hymns, it is prose. The melody of the *Te Deum* is derived from various pre-Gregorian and Gregorian chants, which were named after Gregory I during his papacy (590–604). It was codified by Charlemagne, King of Franks in (768–814), who imposed the Gregorian chants upon his kingdom in place of

the Gallican chant which was another monophonic, or unison liturgical music of the Roman Catholic Church, that was in common use in melodic styles.

In brief, Kim (2015, 1) describes the *Te Deum* as one of the best-known examples of Gregorian chant. Its simple, repetitive melody and text, praising God and seeking God's mercy, have inspired many composers. In the twentieth century, several representatives of French organ music produced masterpieces based on the *Te Deum*, including Charles Tournemire, Jean Langlais, Marcel Dupré, and Jeanne Demessieux, all of whom won the Premier Prix in organ at the Conservatory and held positions at Roman Catholic Churches in Paris. At the end of the twentieth century, another *Te Deum* setting for organ was composed by Naji Hakim, who brought the Gregorian paraphrasing techniques to their pinnacle.

According to Kim (2015, 82), the infusion of the organ and different themes in the *Te Deum* by Naji Hakim brought about a vibrant, compassionate implication to the hymn. It also stimulated the spiritual emotions, which is why the hymn was sung with vigour and humbleness with everything directed to praising God. Hakim's *Te Deum* includes the two main themes of the *Te Deum* chant, praising God and seeking His mercy. The praise theme is illustrated through dense textures, full organ registrations, and rapid *tempi*. The supplication theme is expressed with soft dynamics and slow tempo. In that piece, the bright and majestic mood of the praise theme is more emphasised than the supplication theme; the overall dynamics are *ff* and *fff*, and *tempi* are quite fast (Kim 2015). Hakim uses slower tempo and soft registrations only in section 4, which is based on the supplication theme.

One of the organists and music director, Shiela Bristow (2018) points out that traditionally, the *Te Deum* has been used at the end of Matins in the monastic daily office, and for special occasions. Huge settings for chorus, soloists and orchestra have been composed for sacred and secular occasions such as a royal coronation, the election of a pope, or a declaration of peace. In the Book of Common Prayer, the *Te Deum* is one of the canticles for Morning Prayer and is also authorised as a substitute for the *Gloria in Excelsis* on Easter, Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, and Saints' Days.

In concurring with the above, Mcnamara (2018) mentions that there were incidents when the hymn was used in societal circles of the political sphere, mostly in Catholic and Protestant countries and partly in Protestant countries like Sweden. This was experienced during the traditional church service in Catholic Luxemburg as it celebrated the grand duke's official birthday. In some Latin American countries, it was sung during the inauguration of the new president during his presence at the capital's cathedral with the country's bishops (Mcnamara 2018). There is the story of a debate among the canons of Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris. In August 1944, General Charles De Gaulle entered a newly liberated Paris and desired to visit the cathedral. The canons at first planned to sing the *Te Deum* in his presence. However, some scrupulous prelates pointed out that according to tradition, only the legitimate head of state could be honoured by a *Te Deum*,

and it was not clear that the general, as chairman of the provisional government of the French Republic, was at that time the legitimate head of state (Mcnamara 2018). In the end, the general's visit was honoured by the canons singing the *Magnificat*—a special collection of scripture readings, psalms, and hymns that constitute what is known as the prayer of the church.

According to Zenith Staff (2012), from Latin, the *Te Deum* was translated into English. Numerous English translations have been made. The latest version was prepared from a manuscript version dated 909 through the International Consultation on English Texts by the Ecumenical committee of scholars. It was published in *The Liturgy of the Hours*—also known as the Divine Office or the Work of God (*Opus Dei*), as the daily prayer of the church, marking the hours of each day and sanctifying the day with prayer. *The Liturgy of the Hours* is characterised by a meditative dialogue on the mystery of Christ, using scripture and prayer in 1975. It was set polyphonically by the British composers Henry Purcell, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Benjamin Britten. They were followed by the likes of George Frederic Handel, Hector Berlioz, Zoltan Kodaly, Anton Bruckner and Antonin Dvorak. The names are a reflection that the *Te Deum* has gone through the hands of many people, implying numerous translations in melody and prose.

Although it went through translation by the various composers, it did not lose its intended context and content. It follows the outline of the Apostle Creed; is Trinitarian in structure with sections affirming belief in God the Father, Jesus Christ His Son and the Holy, mixing a poetic vision of the heavenly liturgy with its declaration of faith. It also includes some verses from the Psalms, e.g. Psalm 25:2: “O my God, I trust in You; Let me not be ashamed; Let not my enemies triumph over me.”

According to Bhaldrathe (2016, 469), the *Te Deum* is a traditional morning prayer. This is due to its consistency in origin that is experienced by the Celtic; a variety of ritual forms used in churches of ancient Britain and Ireland; also in monasteries in France Germany, Switzerland and Italy founded by St Columbanus (550–615) and his disciples' rite, which is confirmed by Gallican and Ambrosian rites. The later tradition sees it assigned to the Vigils in the Benedictine and Roman Rites, which are comparatively late. It is remarkable that it includes such an explicit reference to the confession of Thomas, as mentioned in John 20:28: “And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and My God!’.”

What needs to be appreciated is that the historical liturgical form embedded in the *Te Deum* has kept Christians of all times focused on the big doctrines that all Christians in all times believed. If not so, there is a risk that the hymn becomes sectarian rather than Catholic in character. Through the hymn Christians—even if they wander off—are kept in check by the *Te Deum*, which brings them back to the touchstones and cornerstones of their faith. Also, because the *Te Deum* has a strong commitment to central Christian tenets such as Trinity, the Incarnation, the Virginal Conception, and the Resurrection, it assists to conserve orthodoxy from one generation to another. By singing the hymn

together, there is reinforcement of the commitment to historic Christian faith; and that serves as a relay to the coming generations.

The Composition of the *Te Deum*

The *Te Deum* comprises five sections from this paper's perspective, which differs from that of other scholars due to its opinionating on the *missio Dei* in totality. These sections, from the paper's contention, are always intertwined and bring forth the glory of God—and that needs to be celebrated. It is the blueprint of Christian praise. It is comprehensive, running the full gamut from Christian doctrine to Christian experience; from creation by the Father's word to consummation at the Son's final coming; from God's accomplishment of salvation in Christ to his application of salvation. It is majestic and reverent. That can allude to how it is being sung and the dignity as well as the solemnity bestowed on it. It is joyful and triumphant. It brings worshippers on earth and the heavenly chorus together. It is masculine and militaristic. The selflessness and realness which it displays during singing, purports the greatness of the Triune Creator and the Redeemer.

Section One

The grandeur of the first section is praise directed to God alone through the utterance of: "Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God of Sabaoth" (meaning armies). Hence Kim (2015, 15) endorses and upholds that the "Angels," "Cherubim," and "Seraphim" in verses 1–4 represent the invisible church in heaven, and the "Apostles," "Prophets," and "Martyrs" in verses 7–10 the invisible church on earth. Praising hymns by invisible and visible churches can be found in the Bible, especially the book of Psalms. For example, in Psalm 148, heavenly and earthly creatures praise God. The structure of Psalm 148 is like that of section 1 of the *Te Deum*. The first half of Psalm 148 consists of a praising hymn by heavenly features, the second half by earthly creatures. From Hakim's assertion (cited in Kim 2015), this paper aligns itself with the argument that the first part of the *Te Deum* brings forth the communion of saints; those who are dead and those who are alive, meaning the triumphant church in heaven and the militant church on earth is singing in one voice to bring glorification and deification to the Creator.

Furthermore, they display martyrdom that the past and the present church is living example of the victorious God. According to Letsosa (2005, 1), worship is when Christians on earth and martyrs in heaven come together and experience contact before the face of the living God. It is through liturgical expressions like the *Te Deum* that Christians and martyrs bring thanksgiving, praise, worship, and prayers to God as the Creator, acknowledging His mercies which they do not deserve, due to their sinful nature. It brings them closer to God, conversing to Him through the *Te Deum* and thereby communicating with God, whereby the two parties of the covenant (humanity and God) come together. God, being the First Party, the initiative comes out of Him. He calls them His people (second party) to meet with Him, but the two parties meet each other in the reciprocity of love and unity. Therefore, the paper concludes that the activity

is one of response, which is brought about by God, who takes the initiative as the First Party. Because God is the First Party and the Creator, God deserves all the praise from humanity. Humanity should appreciate that there is a God who created them from dust; and that creation was from the love of God, not from them.

Drawing from the paper's inference, the *Te Deum* reminds humanity to praise God as all the earth worships God: the angels call out; the spirit of just humanity made perfect (apostles, prophets, and martyrs) worships the Lord; and to this cosmic assembly, the militant church on earth adds His praise. The *Te Deum* reminds Christians that when they worship God, they are never alone. Christians are articulating creation praises and joining their voices with the heavenly choir. That is why they express it as follows in Ps 24:1–2: "... the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof: the world, and all they that dwell therein."

We praise Thee, O God; we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord

All earth doth worship Thee; the Father everlasting.

For Thee all angels cry aloud; the heavens and all the powers therein

To Thee cherubim and seraphim continually do cry,

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Sabaoth [armies]

Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of Thy glory

The glorious company of the apostle praises Thee;

The goodly fellowship of the prophets' praises Thee;

The noble army of martyrs praise Thee;

The holy Church throughout all the world doth acknowledge Thee ...

Section Two

The second section is centred on the mystery of the Trinity. The hymn's pivotal line reads:

The Father, of an infinite majesty; Thine adorable, true and only Son; also the Holy Ghost, the Comforter.

Like the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds, the *Te Deum* has a threefold Trinitarian character. The first part focuses on the Father as Creator and Lord, the second part on the Son as Redeemer and King, and the third part (implicitly) focuses on the Spirit as Sanctifier and Preserver (Kim 2015, 18).

Christians should never tire from singing this hymn because they will never fully grasp its depth. God is revealed to what He is and His deeds. The Oneness of God in three is clearly articulated and demonstrated. The hymn gives validity to the Trinity and majestically as bestowed to the owner of the *missio Dei*. (Kim 2015, 18)

Furthermore, the section illustrates the Trinitarian nature of the *missio Dei*. Marumo (2013, 31), emphasises that the doctrine of the Trinity is crucial for Christianity. This doctrine is concerned with who God is, His nature, how He works and how He is to be encountered in worship. The eternal Trinity implies that there are three persons; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who have a harmonious relationship, meaning a *koinonia* relationship/fellowship which must be evident in the church and Christians as an agent of unity.

From the above understanding or notion, the church is Trinitarian and Christians are Trinitarian-grounded. To demonstrate this grounding, Grudem (2010, 232) uses the analogy of John 1:1:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

To bring forth a clearer understanding of the inclusiveness of all three Persons of the Trinity, Grudem (2010, 237) refers to the Trinitarian expression in Mathew 28:18, “baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,” which shows that all Persons of the Trinity are equal in *koinonia* and in unity.

The Father, of an infinite majesty;

Thine adorable, true and only Son;

Also the Holy Ghost, the Comforter.

Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ.

Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.

Section Three

In the third section, the *Te Deum* re-narrates the Gospel, the story of the birth, death, and resurrection of the incarnate Son of God. He is the everlasting Son who humbled himself to be born of a virgin. From this statement, the paper argues that Jesus Christ, God’s son had to be free from sinful nature passed on to all human beings because of Adam. Because Jesus was born of woman, he was a human being; but as the Son of God, Jesus was born without a trace of human sin. Jesus is fully human and fully divine. Jesus was born through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus overpowered the sharp curse and pain of death in his resurrection. Thenceforth, this paper contends that through the cross and resurrection, Jesus brings Christians to a central point in the redemptive plan's line of history. The cross is central to every dimension of the mission of God (*missio Dei*). Just as the Exodus redemption led to the creation of the covenant people in the Old Testament Israel, so the Easter redemption (the cross) led to the eschatological gift of the Holy Spirit and the Pentecost and the birth of the church, meaning that God has a mission for the church in the world. One of the attributes of that mission is to save souls. That is why His resurrection opens the heavens for all believers. And when we sing the Gospel, we are expressing the *missio Dei*, because the death and resurrection were God's acts of salvation for humanity. It further expresses the kingdom as yet to come.

He sits at the right hand of God in glory. Mark 16:19 puts it as follows: "... when the Lord Jesus had finished talking to them, He was taken up into heaven and sat down in the place of honour at God's right hand." The sitting on the right hand signifies the completion of His saving mission, His authority as God, and His coronation as King. Sitting on the throne makes a judge who will come back and judge the world. This is clearly articulated in the Apostle Creed wherein it is explicit that Jesus went to heaven to be a judge. This notion is supported by a letter of Paul to the Ephesians 1:20–23, that explains His role as the judge. God raised Him from death and set Him on a throne in deep heaven, in charge of running the universe, everything from galaxies to governments; no name, and no power is exempt from His rule. And not just for the time being, but forever. He oversees it all, has the authority on everything. At the centre of all this, Christ rules the church.

When Thou tookest upon thee to deliver man,

Thou didst humble Thyself to be born of a Virgin.

When Thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death,

Thou didst open the kingdom of Heaven to all believers.

Thou sittest at the right hand of God, in the Glory of the Father.

We believe that Thou shalt come to be the judge;

We, therefore, pray Thee,

Help Thy servants whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood.

Make them be numbered with Thy saints in glory everlasting.

Section Four

The fourth section is a prayer to God to have mercy upon the believers. Christians acknowledge their sinful nature, and that they have no more to fight sin, they need God to bear with them and safeguard them from the chains of sin. God, who died for them on the cross, is capable of protecting them. They acknowledge that they are powerless to save themselves—only God can save them. This acknowledgement serves to illustrate that through *missio Dei*, God’s kingdom will reign forever. It further acknowledges that the kingdom of God will be there forever and ever. As they acknowledge their sinfulness, they are desirous to be children of God and they know God is Holy, so they align themselves with Ps 51:2: “Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin.” They must be counted among the saints. They plea to God to preserve Christians and work in them day by day, so that they might remain ever faithful to their Lord and Saviour. Through the Spirit, Christ blesses believers, governs them, and lifts them up. As believers, they plead with God to keep them from sin each day—especially the sin of *apostasy*, which is the rejection or alienation of Christians who become excluded from God’s mercy and grace because they are afraid to be excluded from God’s mercy, meaning they do not want to be confounded. God has promised victory against confoundedness.

O Lord save Thy people and bless Thine heritage;

Govern them and lift them up forever.

Day by day we magnify Thee and worship Thy name ever, world without end.

Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin.

Section Five

The fifth section is a petition. After asking for God’s protection from sin, Christians believe that they can approach God for mercy and pledge assurance that they trust in God. They further approach God to be merciful because He is the only God they trust, and they are trusting God to look at them in a merciful way. It is worth mentioning that the name “Lord” appears in this section three times. This paper contends that they seal their petition in a Trinitarian custom, meaning they invite the Three Persons of the Trinity to be merciful and let them not be confounded. They put their trust in God as the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and hope that will ensue till eternity.

O Lord, have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us.

O Lord, let Thy mercy be upon us, as our trust is in Thee;

O Lord in Thee have trusted, let me never be confounded.

From the hagiographies and the composition of the *Te Deum*, this paper acknowledges the influence which the hymn has manifested in many people, to the extent that most of them have been converted to Christianity. This conversion resulted in church growth. The other fact which is contributory to the influence of the *Te Deum*, is how it went through many hands of musicians and Christians who ensured that the *Te Deum* is sung profoundly and with vigour. The translation of the *Te Deum* into other languages means its influence has touched other nations and the Word of God has been spread. The infusion of the organ instrument by Naji Hakim was the best accolade to the *Te Deum*; to bring the message and content through the orchestra. The *Te Deum* was sung through many periods, from reformation, renaissance and the awakening period. During all these times the *Te Deum* was taken seriously as the hymn of the church that was bringing glorification to God. It has always been seen as the *missio Dei* in action. However, when science, reason, relativism, pluralism and faith came into being, it affected the way the *Te Deum* was looked at especially during the postmodern period.

The *Te Deum*: Opportunities in the Postmodern Era

Even in a postmodern era, the *Te Deum* has been recognised and some innovations were done to keep it alive. According to Arvo Part (2015)—one of the leading composers of our times, who has an influence in the postmodern scene through the combination of his voice with the contemporary elements of archaicism—early music, especially choral music, has managed to do the same to the *Te Deum*. This has led to its recording by Peter Dykstra; the Chor des Bayerischen Rundfunks and the Munchner Rundfunkorchester have recorded a version recently with appropriate additional pieces (BR Classics 900511), and it is to this we turn today. The *Te Deum* is for three choirs, prepared piano, string orchestra, and tape. The works were written between 1985 and 2001, a peak in the development of his mature style, and meshed together for an impressively unified expression.

In an effort to keep the *Te Deum* active, the Lutheran Church designed a bi-monthly magazine named *Trinity Te Deum*, official newsletter for the Trinity Lutheran Church. The purpose of this newsletter was to discuss pertinent issues on God and the Bible and to spread the message of “We praise God.” The Lutheran Church is eager and persistent in advocating and understanding the *Te Deum*. One parishioner, Rachel Keseman, shared the following experience from the conference held by the Lutheran church:

This year I had the privilege to listen and learn from my father, Pastor Bruce Keseman, as well as Pastor William Cwirla on the meaning of *Te Deum*, which is short for *Te Deum Laudamus*, meaning “You, O God, We Praise.” Our praises are not *me Deum*, meaning praising ourselves, but *Te Deum*, meaning the focus is on You [God]. We offer praise, but it all starts with God’s gifts to us ... The world around us is filled with sin and hate, disaster, temptations, and horrible events, but none of that should scare us. Even living *Te Deum* lives of praise in this hostile world should not frighten us, because we can hold on tightly to God’s promise that we and all believers will spend eternity with Him forever in Heaven. (Keseman 2015)

From the above testimony, it is apparent that the singing of the *Te Deum* brings change and is still effective in the postmodern era and it can still work the same miracle it did during pre-postmodernism. This testimony illustrates that God loves his creation and is prepared to go an extra mile to save humanity. However, after acknowledging the impact of the *Te Deum*, this paper maintains that there are still challenges that the *Te Deum* faces in the turbulent postmodern times.

The *Te Deum*: Challenges in the Postmodern Era

The postmodern era has been influenced by pluralism and dualism, which is a two-sided option. By this, the paper means that perceptions are circumstantial and go with what is trending at the time. A Christian in the postmodern period tends to believe that pluralism, which plays an important part in the postmodern era, is only applicable when there are norms that are acceptable to the public in which they find themselves. The same can be said about dualism, which is two-sided in the way that it cannot have a firm stand on things which it faces; the circumstances or worldview of the day influences the decision to be taken at that moment.

It should be noted that the hard postmodernist scholars engage in a philosophical shift away from the nature of truth. They argue that truth is relative to the factors of time, culture and individual situation. Therefore, they, maintain that the understanding of eternal principles is influenced by the above factors. The soft postmodernist scholars tend to deny the ability of man to come to the certainty of truth and eternal principles (Patton 2005).

This relates to the view of Lutheran preacher and theologian, Michael Williams (2001), who places the blame for this two-sided approach at the door of relativism, which embodies dualism and pluralism. He argues:

According to the relativism of postmodernism, something is true when or because it is believed to be true by someone, not because it is true. That sounds like everything is relative; nothing is absolute. But not quite. Something is absolute in the relativist view of the world: The self. While postmodernism affirms the subjectivity of all-knowing and moral value, it rejects the notion that the human is subject to anything outside of itself.

Williams (2001) further articulates that postmodernist relativism rejects all authorities; this includes even the Word of God which is perceived as an authority of the Christian. It believes that it is always right, and nobody can change that. That is why he maintains: “The apparent humility and tolerance of postmodern relativism hide the hidden hubris of human autonomy, for the postmodern claim is that humans themselves are the determiners of truth and meaning. In a significant sense, we are the makers, the creators of reality.”

The notion that postmodernism is a law unto itself, it is evident in that it does not take the tenets of Christianity seriously. In fact, they are regarded as a source of mirth. One

of the tenets of Christianity is the singing of the *Te Deum*, which postmodernism sees as a fallacy and maintains that it does not bring meaning to real life issues that are realistic and reasonable. In this context, faith fades away and reason takes over. When reason takes over, dualism and pluralism are effective.

The above can be matched to what Darwinism (the theory of the evolution of species by natural selection advanced by Charles Darwin) is to the postmodern world. According to Bergman (2001, i), there are documents which saw the devastating impact of Darwinism on Christianity. Many scientists have admitted that the acceptance of Darwinism has convinced large numbers of people that the Genesis account of creation is erroneous and that this has caused the whole house of theistic cards to tumble. Furthermore, the acceptance of Darwinism has undermined the Christian morale because Darwinism advocates that humans (and all living things) are nothing more than an “accident” of history. It teaches that life is short and inconsequential; life has no ultimate purpose because there is no heaven, no hell or no after-life, and nothing we know about life requires the existence of a disembodied vital force or immaterial spirits.

Besides bringing hope, the postmodern Christian is faced with secularism. According to Beyers (2014, 2), postmodernism pursues a sceptical deconstruction of all systems of thought along a “hermeneutic of suspicion,” and this goes against what Christians stand for, which is the “hermeneutic of trust.” This means postmodernism abandons any security based on a single claim of truth. There are many truths implying that failing of certainty as truth becomes relational. This has changed the mindset of people—even Christians—because they live in a postmodern era wherein people live as if God does not exist. Faith as the transcendence is no longer logic and uncontested. Faith in God has become problematic. Those members of society who still believe, realise their choice to believe is just one choice amongst many, including the choice not to believe. Secularity has become the default option.

The Centre for Development and Enterprise (2008, 16) assumes that Pentecostalism anticipated great trials and tribulation before the Second Coming of Christ, although a subsequent prediction was that the faithful would be spared the worst consequences, which inferred those of the charismatic movements. In aligning herself with the statement from the centre, Evans Chama (2010) maintains that the *Te Deum* gives them blessing: “The African Synod II last October proudly marked the growing number of Africans in religious congregations, some who occupy important positions. There is a promising future as there are still many young people entering formation houses in Africa. For this, indeed, we can intone the *Te Deum* for such blessing. However, my query is: will the African Church continue this present picture of religious life?” Looking at Chama’s statement, it can be argued that in essence she focuses only on the opening line of the hymn, which states: “We praise Thee” and not on the whole hymn.

Based on the above discourse, this paper concludes that the *Te Deum* does have an influence in a postmodern Christian society and there is still evidence that most people

see the hymn as a hymn for the church and a hymn that glorifies God. However, there are other factors which influence how people perceive it, such as Darwinism, secularism, charismatic movements and reason, which all play a major part in weakening the role of the *Te Deum* in the postmodern era. Nonetheless, there are arguments which can assist in showing the relevance of the *Te Deum*, even in the postmodern era.

The Relevance of the *Te Deum*

According to Springer (1996, 36), Luther called the *Te Deum* a symbol, equating it to the Apostle Creed. This symbol of the *Te Deum* is called a Christian symbol because it sums up the entire Christian faith, not just one aspect of it, in very few words. It is comprehensive and compact due to its inclusiveness as a hymn of praise, confession of faith and petition for help. Like the cross, the *Te Deum* is profound yet simple—even children can sing it. Its profoundness is expounded when it addresses the greatest truth in utmost seriousness without being pompous or sentimental. These truths include, among others, that Jesus was born through a virgin and died so that we are saved and will rise again; fundamental beliefs which are rare treasures and cannot be lightly discarded.

Springer further adds that the Trinitarian character of the *Te Deum* exposes the relationship of the Son to the Father and to the Holy Spirit. Christ is the centre of the hymn, just as He is the centre of everything else, too. What He did to humanity—a saving act through the cross—is a great turning point of salvation history. His incarnation is the centre of time as it shows time in expressions such as BC (Before Christ) and AC (After Christ). Therefore, Christ is the centre of our individual Christian lives too.

With the above understanding, the *Te Deum* remains relevant in a postmodern era. The question is how? The *Te Deum* brings Christians together and explores their creation, expounding how God has been merciful enough to care for His own people. It further reiterates that the death of Christ on the cross was not a failing act, but a victorious act of saving and redemption. The grave did not swallow Christ, but Christ became a victor. The *Te Deum* has a powerful message to both non-Christians and Christians, in that it displays the love, the goodness, and the immanence as well as the transcendence of God who lived among His people; the God who shares their emotions.

In a postmodern era, there are people who need to hear God talking, and that is possible if they can grasp the meaning of the *Te Deum*. From the above examples and discussions, we have seen that science cannot reflect the glory of God. Even commercialised sermons do not reflect the glory of God. The solution for postmodern Christians or non-Christians is to find God and to participate in His *missio Dei*. In any circumstances, God can be glorified.

Conclusion

This study traced the origin of the *Te Deum*. It revealed how the song has undergone different transformations across the ages as well as its centrality in the meditative regional life of men in different parts of the world. It also accounts for the relevance of the song in contemporary times. Consequently, as the paper concludes, it draws from Potgieter and Van der Walt (2015, 250), who recommend the church to take cognisance of the following:

In brief, the advice to churches is to adopt a post-post-foundationalist orientation with regard to the dogmatic and doctrinal aspects of church and religious life, in other words, to restrict dogma and doctrine to a rather modest role in the background of believers' consciousness, and to allow the spiritual aspect of belief, i.e. those aspects of belief and faith that pertain to the relationship between believer and God, to be more prominent, in the foreground. This advice is based on the observation that modern-day believers tend to be less foundationalistic [modernistic] in their religious reflection and behaviour and to be rather more postmodernist [post-foundationalist] and even post-post-foundationalist.

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