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The Theology of Music in African Spiritualities: a Post-COVID-19 Lens to Psalm 121 through *Jerusalema*

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Abstract

This paper examines the theology of music within African spiritualities through a post-Covid-19 perspective, centring on Psalm 121 in dialogue with the song *Jerusalema* by Master KG featuring Nomcebo. Music, as a theological tool, offers transformative possibilities for encountering God during times of emptiness and despair. In particular, *Jerusalema* emerged as a global anthem of hope during the Covid-19 pandemic, symbolising resilience and life affirmation. By dancing to its beat across cultures, people worldwide experienced joy amidst suffering. This study proposes that the theology of music has the power to renew spiritualities, creating space for experiencing God in both absence and fullness. It also highlights how African music more broadly, fosters ongoing conversations on sustaining hope through spiritual practices. Through a post-pandemic hermeneutical lens, this paper puts the biblical song of ascent in Psalm 121 in dialogue with *Jerusalema* to offer a prophetic vision of renewed hope and flourishing in pain and suffering.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has left a profound impact on global societies, especially in Africa. A report by The World Bank Group (2024) shows that “poorer countries are contending with a deeper, longer-lasting crisis that has increased global poverty and is reversing recent trends of shrinking

inequality.” Many African countries are still contenting with the impact of Covid-19 in terms of gender relations, socio-economic impacts, mental and physical health, and spiritual well-being (Amable, 2022:18). Covid-19 disrupted the livelihood of many Africa families exacerbating the level of gender-based violence and poverty. D. Juma (2022:205) notes how many African countries will struggle with the impact of Covid-19 for a very long time.

Covid-19 is a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. It first emerged in late 2019 and spread globally, leading to widespread illness and death. Symptoms include fever, cough, and difficulty breathing, with severe cases causing pneumonia and, in some cases, death. Ways of preventing Covid-19 include wearing masks to reduce transmission, social distancing to limit contact between individuals, hand washing, sanitising to kill the virus on hands, vaccination to build immunity and reduce severity of illness, and quarantine of those exposed to or infected with the virus (Luthra 2021). In many African countries, preventive measures such as lockdowns, curfews, and movement restrictions severely disrupted economic activities, especially in the informal sector. According to Kassegn & Endris (2021:1), during the outbreak of Covid-19 the “East Africa region in particular faced an unprecedented triple socio-economic threat caused by the combined effects of Covid-19 pandemic, the upsurge of desert locusts, and severe floods.” Many lost jobs and income sources, particularly in tourism, agriculture, and small businesses. School closures also affected education, and limited access to healthcare worsened existing inequalities, straining many African families.

At the unprecedented time of isolation, suffering, and uncertainty, many people turned to music as a source of comfort and hope. During the early days of Covid-19, widespread misinformation and the severity of the pandemic led to profound desperation. With cases of Covid-19 and fatalities caused by it mounting rapidly worldwide, especially in countries like Italy and Iran, African nations also took swift action, following World Health Organisation (WHO) guidance to manage the crisis. In 11 March 2020, the WHO (2021:3) requested that “all countries to adopt a ‘Whole-of-Government, Whole-of-Society’ approach built around a comprehensive strategy to prevent infections, save lives, and minimise the impact”. Amidst this anxiety, Master KG’s *Jeruselema*, featuring Nomcebo, resonated across Africa, inviting people from diverse languages and cultures to join in its unifying rhythm. Although many did not

understand the lyrics, the beat of the song alone inspired dance and rekindled a sense of shared humanity. Africa's rich spiritual heritage has long been expressed through music and dance. African spiritualities naturally find their voice in storytelling and song as a way of transmitting wisdom. F. Juma (2022:1-2) notes that, even though "the oral tradition is a global phenomenon," "songs and music formed an integral part of the African oral tradition, which caused the two to be interrelated." Throughout history, African-descended communities have turned to music to reimagine spirituality, perceive God, and interpret the world.

In African spiritualities music has always played a pivotal role, acting as a conduit for divine connection and communal healing. It offers a means to express both celebration and lament. In African spiritualities music provides a bridge between earthly suffering and spiritual transcendence. As Classen (2021:3) observes, "music may require translation and interpretation since the categories of musical aesthetics differ from culture or social group to the next," yet "music by itself is easily appreciated and understood across all linguistic, social, ethnic, and historical boundaries".

This paper explores the theology of music within African spiritualities by placing Psalm 121 in dialogue with *Jerusalem*. Psalm 121 is a biblical text that speaks of divine protection, ascent, and trust in God's care. Using a post-Covid-19 hermeneutical lens, this paper aims to examine how music serves as an artistic expression and as a powerful theological tool that helps people encounter God in moments of emptiness and uncertainty. The main aim of engaging Psalm 121 with the cultural and theological resonances of *Jerusalem* is to propose that music has the power to renew spiritual practices and offer a prophetic hope in the face of suffering. *Jerusalem's* global reach, particularly during a time of crisis, reveals the potential of African music to foster spiritual renewal and inspire resilience.

According to Chukwunonso, Nosike, Odey & Chike (2024:19), "music and dance are integral to African Christian worship and are often used to convey theological themes, narrate the Christian story, and facilitate communal participation in worship." In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the theology of music opens up new possibilities for rethinking divine presence and absence, encouraging believers to look toward the future with hope and

anticipation. Framing music and African spiritualities within the Covid-19 context establishes Psalm 121 and *Jerusalem* as key resources for theological reflection. In this way one sees the power of music in African spiritualities and the transformative role of music in times of despair.

A post-Covid-19 hermeneutical lens to Psalms 121 through *Jerusalem*

A post-Covid-19 hermeneutical lens is a framework for interpreting texts, events, or cultural expressions by taking into account the unique challenges, experiences, and reflections that emerged from the global Covid-19 pandemic. This lens recognises the profound impact the pandemic had on societies, particularly in relation to themes of loss, isolation, suffering, and the search for hope. When applied to theological reflections, such a lens highlights how individuals and communities sought meaning, resilience, and divine presence in the midst of a crisis that disrupted normal life on a global scale. A post-Covid-19 hermeneutical lens is a perspective of reading the Bible that aims at enabling readers the opportunity to put God at the centre while interpreting music and the songs sung during pain and grieve in a theological way.

A post-Covid-19 hermeneutical lens to Psalm 121 through *Jerusalem* utilises trauma theory as a constructive strand for reflecting on a situation of despair and speechlessness. In providing a brief overview of the history of trauma studies, Groenewald (2018:88) acknowledges that “trauma has been common practice in several fields, which has since only a few years ago, been used by biblical scholars as an important tool to interpret biblical texts.” Rambo (2010:3) states, “Trauma is suffering that remains because in the aftermath of trauma, death and life no longer stand in opposition, instead death haunts life.” Because the impact of Covid-19 remains with us, a post-Covid-19 hermeneutical lens to Psalm 121 through *Jerusalem* utilises trauma theory to show ways in which God’s people around the world were able to come to terms with what was happening as a collective whole in community and in solidarity with each other. Ilo (2012:48) states, “Every true religion must make people feel at home with themselves and connected to others spiritually and temporally.” Theology, arising from people’s lived experiences, also informs the creation of music, which never occurs in isolation. Similarly, a post-Covid-19 interpretation of *Jerusalem* reflects on the experience of finding God’s

presence during the pandemic, offering people renewed spirituality amid their struggles with the long lasting impacts Covid-19.

In the context of Psalm 121, a post-Covid-19 hermeneutical lens invites us to revisit the biblical text with fresh eyes, mindful of the heightened sense of vulnerability and uncertainty that defined the pandemic era. Psalm 121, traditionally seen as a song of ascent expressing trust in God's protection and guidance, takes on new dimensions when viewed through the pandemic's realities. Ancient Israelite pilgrims journeying to Jerusalem, particularly during major festivals, traditionally sang Psalm 121, part of a collection of Psalms known as the "Songs of Ascent" (Pss. 120-134). The "ascent" refers to the physical and spiritual journey up to the temple on Mount Zion, a place believed to be uniquely close to God's presence (Dowley, 2023:37). Psalm 121, expressing deep trust in God's protection, would have offered reassurance during a trek that involved many risks, including steep terrain, harsh weather, and potential threats from robbers or wild animals.

Adamo & Olusegun (2022:1) observe that "Psalm 121 is generally popular in practice yet scholars still have problems concerning the place of origin and the unity of the text since the text does not mention a particular place of origin." According to Adamo & Olusegun,(2022:1), "there are also some questions about the unity of the text and their literary-critical problems, especially in verses 4 and 7." Nevertheless, of relevance to this discussion is the fact that Psalm 121 is historically understood as a prayer or blessing that emphasises God's watchfulness. Verses 2-3 say, "My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. He who watches over you will not slumber" (NIV, here and throughout). Psalm 121 highlights themes of security, with imagery suggesting that God is a vigilant, constant guardian who provides relief from harm and discomfort (verses 5-8). When viewed through the lens of the Covid-19 pandemic, Psalm 121 resonates with new significance, as globally people seek assurance in the face of an invisible threat affecting their lives. This song of ascent can therefore be reinterpreted as a source of comfort and resilience to affirm God's unwavering presence and care amid the unpredictability and trials of the pandemic.

For those who faced sickness, death, and anxiety during the crisis, the psalm's assurance "I lift up my eyes to the hills from where will my help come?" (verse

1) echoes a deep yearning for divine intervention and comfort in moments of distress. The psalm's theme of protection—"The Lord will keep you from all evil" (verse 7) offers an opportunity for conversations about how people reconcile faith with widespread suffering. This perspective creates a challenge and an invitation to deepen theological understandings of God's presence in hardship.

Thomaskutty (2021:1) notes, that "the Covid-19 pandemic situation persuades a reader of the fourth gospel to interpret the Scripture in new light." In the same spirit, applying a post-Covid-19 hermeneutical lens to Psalm 121 endeavours to show Africa the presence of God even in the midst of despair, thus affording her a renewed sense of spirituality after the impact of Covid-19. It allows for one in an African setting to remain spiritually connected to God while processing trauma from a safe distance. Through a post-Covid-19 lens, Psalm 121 is re-interpreted through *Jerusalema* to offer post-Covid-19 African readership an opportunity to identify how God speaks to the sorrows of life thereby allowing life to flourish again. In times of pain and suffering, some people have learned that the only path to happiness on this earth is submitting humbly before God, to realise that God looks at our entire lives and never allows anything to happen in our life that is not ultimately for our good (Smith, 2015:157).

Thus, a post-Covid-19 hermeneutical lens to Psalm 121 through *Jerusalema* is arguably a hermeneutics of contemplative silence in the midst of pain and despair during pandemics (Petersen, 2021:171). The song *Jerusalema*, which became an anthem of hope during the pandemic, can be interpreted as a cultural and spiritual response to the global crisis. With its upbeat rhythm and spiritual lyrics, the song speaks to the longing for a place of safety and divine belonging, themes that resonated deeply with those seeking solace in uncertain times. Through a post-Covid-19 hermeneutical lens, *Jerusalema* is also not merely a song of celebration; it becomes a form of embodied theology, a space where people could find hope and could dance and rejoice even in the midst of profound sorrow and loss. Thompson, Nutor & Johnson (2021:9) points out that "music plays an integral role in the culture of many Africans, while song lyrics during Covid-19 helped to identify Covid-19 as a global social crisis calling the attention of people to the importance of prevention." It is from this perspective that one sees how a post-Covid-19

hermeneutical lens encourages a dialogue between Psalm 121 and *Jerusalem*, allowing the biblical text and the contemporary song to speak to each other in ways that reveal new insights about faith, resilience, and communal joy in the face of adversity. Both texts point toward divine assurance, but when viewed together through a post-pandemic lens, they highlight the evolving ways people experience and express spirituality during crises. *Jerusalem*, with its African roots, calls attention to the communal and celebratory aspects of spiritual resilience, while Psalm 121 reminds us of the ancient and enduring promises of divine care.

The Song Jerusalem and the Psalm 121 Alongside Each Other:

English translation of <i>Jerusalem</i> (Master KG)	Psalm 121 - A song of ascents
<p>*Jerusalem, my home, Save me! Join me, Don't leave me here! x2</p> <p>*My place is not here, My kingdom is not here, Save me, Come with me!</p> <p>*Save, save, save me, Do not leave me here! Save me, save me, save me, Do not leave me here!</p> <p>*My place is not here, My kingdom is not here, Save me, Come with</p> <p>*Save, save, save me, Do not leave me here! Save me, save me, save me, Do not leave me here!</p>	<p>¹I lift up my eyes to the mountains— where does my help come from? ²My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.</p> <p>³He will not let your foot slip— he who watches over you will not slumber; ⁴indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.</p> <p>⁵The Lord watches over you— the Lord is your shade at your right hand; ⁶the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.</p> <p>⁷The Lord will keep you from all harm— he will watch over your life; ⁸the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.</p>

The Background of the Song *Jerusalem*

The song *Jerusalem* by South African DJ Master KG and vocalist Nomcebo became a global sensation following its release in late 2019, resonating deeply with listeners for its blend of upbeat disco-house rhythms and gospel-inspired lyrics. Rooted in Christian spirituality, the song invokes Jerusalem as a symbolic, sacred home. As the song's popularity soared during the Covid-19 pandemic, it inspired the #JerusalemDanceChallenge, uniting fans worldwide in shared hope and resilience amid lockdowns. A remix by Nigerian artist Burna Boy added Afrobeat elements, highlighting African unity and propelling the song to top charts across Europe (Rufaro 2020). By winning Song of the Year at the African Entertainment Awards in the USA, *Jerusalem* underscored its impact as an uplifting anthem during global hardship.

Jerusalem invokes themes of divine restoration and hope, resonating with the biblical narrative of Nehemiah who, upon learning about the broken walls of Jerusalem, prayed and developed a plan to restore the city's glory:

Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work. (Neh. 2:17-18)

In this passage, Nehemiah rallies the people of Jerusalem to rebuild the city's walls, symbolising both physical restoration and spiritual renewal. His call to action and his reference to God's grace underscore a collective hope in divine intervention, similar to how *Jerusalem* reflects themes of restoration and the divine promise of a hopeful future. Although the song predates the Covid-19 pandemic and postdates Nehemiah, it found a new meaning for audiences under lockdown, reminiscent of Nehemiah's vision for Jerusalem as a place of peace and restoration. Theologically, *Jerusalem* echoes the promise of abundant life found in John 10:10, transforming it into a modern "song of ascent" as people worldwide found solace and spiritual hope through it. In this context, *Jerusalem* became a symbolic expression of hope, inspiring resilience

and unity in the face of uncertainty and inviting listeners to envision restoration in the midst of global disruption.

The song *Jerusalema* resonates powerfully in a world grappling with the aftermath of lockdowns, offering a form of musical theology that speaks deeply to individual and communal pain. According to Claassens (2017:611), “new understandings of God emerge within communities under duress, offering hope amid despair.” *Jerusalema* encapsulates this concept, a teaching from Africa to the world of a renewed way of faith by inspiring fresh expressions of spirituality.

Amid the spiritual derailment experienced by many during the Covid-19 pandemic, *Jerusalema* emerged as a source of renewed hope, revitalising the African spirit and sharing the energy of African spirituality with the world. At a time when many felt abandoned, *Jerusalema* became, as Shoki (2020) describes it, “a divine gift a reminder that God remains watchful and faithful,” echoing the reassurance of Psalm 121, which affirms that v 3-4 affirming that God “will not let your foot slip,” for “he who watches over you will neither slumber nor sleep” (verses 3-4).

The Covid-19 crisis, which disrupted traditional African mourning rites, left many families praying for God’s presence and deliverance from despair (Daniels, 2012:4). When viewed alongside Psalm 121, *Jerusalema* emerges as a song of ascent, theologically grounded and scripturally aligned, drawing people in pain closer to God. Music thus becomes a unique spiritual language that unites the faithful with God in ways only understood by the heart and spirit (Gombrich, 2008:89). As James 4:8 suggests, in times of struggle, drawing near to God leads to God drawing near in return.

Ultimately, the post-Covid-19 hermeneutical lens opens up possibilities for rethinking how spiritual practices, such as music and prayer, can shape theological reflections on suffering, hope, and recovery. It suggests that the global crisis of Covid-19 has reshaped the way we encounter God, emphasising that even in moments of profound absence where many felt isolated or abandoned there is room for renewed spiritual depth and communal flourishing. By examining Psalm 121 and *Jerusalema* through this lens, this paper explores how scripture and music can offer prophetic visions

of hope, enabling believers to reclaim a sense of divine presence in the aftermath of global disruption.

Music and Theology in African Spiritualities

African spiritualities refer to the diverse, dynamic, and deeply rooted belief systems, practices, and worldviews shaped by the religious traditions, cultural values, and communal experiences of African peoples. For Chiorazzi (2015), “African spirituality simply acknowledges that beliefs and practices touch on and inform every facet of human life.” An understanding of life as interconnected and holistic characterises African spiritualities, where the material and spiritual realms are seen as intricately woven together. Central to African spiritualities is the belief in the active presence of the divine in everyday life, manifest through ancestors, nature, and communal relationships (Chiorazzi 2015). This is a collective rather than the individual aspect, with a focus on communal well-being, harmony with the natural environment, and a balance between the spiritual and physical worlds. In African societies, spirituality weaves into African religious identity, prompting the question of who Africans believe God to be in times of illness and healing. The African sense of spirituality finds its fullest expression in communal worship, with people gathering in large numbers at churches, mosques, temples, and shrines (Ilo, 2012:48). A spiritual African feels a sense of belonging when in the company of others, seeking to fill the void of spiritual emptiness that surfaces especially during moments of pain and sorrow.

When Covid-19 spread across Africa, this collective faith was put to the test. As restrictions on gatherings tightened, many religious leaders feared the loss of followers and funding, while citizens found themselves unable to gather to seek God’s intervention. Expressing her concern, Betty Ochan, leader of the opposition in Uganda’s national assembly, stated, “The devil is taking dominance. If people do not worship God together, they are spiritually derailed” (Muhumuza, 2020).

In African spiritualities, music plays a profound role as a medium for expressing and experiencing the divine. Ayorinde & Ajose (2022:12) argue that, “while music is linked with spirituality, music does not solely facilitate spirituality by itself. Instead, spirituality in music can be understood through the social life

and experience of music bearers, instruments and musicians.” Music is a theological tool that bridges the gap between the seen and unseen, the present and the ancestral. In Africa spiritualities, music is rooted in rituals, ceremonies, worship, and everyday communal life, functioning as a vehicle for communicating with the spiritual realm, invoking divine presence, and facilitating communal solidarity. Whether in traditional religious settings or contemporary African Christian practices, music is a vital expression of faith and a means through which to mediate spiritual experiences. In African spiritualities, music carries theological significance that goes beyond doctrinal expressions to embody the lived experiences of faith (Ayorinde & Ajoye, 2022:6).

Theology in this perspective becomes a theological act, engaging the whole person in terms of body, mind, and spirit in the encounter with the divine. This understanding of music as theology is deeply rooted in African cosmology, where sound, rhythm, and movement are channels for divine communication and human response. Through song, drumming, and dance, communities articulate their relationship with God, the ancestors, and the spiritual forces that govern life. According to Chanan (1999:47), “the musical language is a function of the real space in which the music is generated.”

In African Christian contexts, believers often read the Bible in ways that allow them to embody its characters, reinterpreting the stories to reflect their own lived experiences. During the Covid-19 pandemic, this transformative approach extended to the songs and theologies that emerged, capturing emotions, ideas, and perspectives rooted in an African worldview of pain and suffering. These songs, composed and sung in alignment with God’s will, offered hope and reshaped the ways in which African Christians expressed their spirituality.

Wright (2003:47) argues that “the theology of music is an outward expression of an inner spiritual dimension within each person, a way of giving honour and respect to something which is of value and worth.” Amidst a world overwhelmed by confusion, pain, and despair, African Christian communities used music to comfort those in distress, communicating hope. Through this theology of music, individuals could experience God’s presence even in songs sung in unfamiliar languages. The spirit of God stirred God’s people to dance

with hope, inspiring visions of a renewed Jerusalem even within African landscapes.

The theology of music presents music as vibrant lived theology that empowers African Christians, renewing their spirit, mind, and soul in ways distinct from those without such hope. Biblically grounded music can indeed relieve mental suffering and foster hope amidst adversity. Gouk (2020:88) suggests that “one of the most important functions of ‘music’ is as a vehicle for altering spiritual states beyond the visible realm.” In this light, Psalm 121 interpreted through the song *Jerusalema*, become a beacon of hope during pandemics, reflecting African roots and offering a profound space for theological reflection. This theology of music teaches that embracing both life’s highs and lows means recognising hope and opportunities amid despair. Psalm 121, with its reminder that “help” comes solely from Yahweh, the creator of heaven and earth, resonates with the message of *Jerusalema*, echoing an enduring, divine strength in the face of trials. In African Christian theology, music bridges traditional African religious expressions with Christian faith. Hymns, choruses, and spiritual songs infuse with African rhythms and melodies, making them resonate with local cultural contexts. Many African Christians for example, interpret Psalms like Psalms 121 as songs of both lament and praise, much like the traditional songs that express communal joys, sorrows, and petitions to the divine (Adamo & Olusegun, 2022:2-4). Music, therefore, provides a theological framework through which people can grapple with existential questions, express hope, and affirm life even in times of suffering.

The role of Music in African spiritualities, particularly in times of crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic, further exemplifies its theological potency. During the pandemic, songs like *Jerusalema* by Master KG featuring Nomcebo captured the collective consciousness of people across Africa and beyond, offering a moment of spiritual ascension in a time of uncertainty. *Jerusalema* became more than a song. It was a theological response to the global crisis a message of resilience, hope, and the human longing for divine intervention. Music and theology in African spiritualities is one of the very valuable non-traditional sources of African theology in contextual and intercultural theology. According to Adam & Boafo (2022:280), “African Christian Theology focuses highly on two domains, the Christian message in the gospel and the culture of African Christians.” Through this lens, African spiritualities recognise that music is a

vital component of how theology is lived, experienced, and expressed. This way, music in African spiritualities renews hope, restore balance, and create spaces for spiritual encounters that reaffirm life in its fullness.

Implications for Future Theological Reflections and Spiritual Practices

The exploration of music as a theological vehicle in African spiritualities has profound implications for future theological reflections and spiritual practices. Theology is the study of the nature of God and religious belief. Badham (1996:101) defines theology as a “literally thinking about God.” Musical theology therefore refers to hymns and songs with rich, meaningful text that speaks to who God is and what we believe. Moody (2021:4) observes “that music itself can be theology naturally depends on the way one defines theology.”

In a post-Covid-19 context, where songs like *Jerusalema* resonated deeply, the role of music in conveying resilience, communal hope, and divine connection is evident. A discussion by The Metro Records (2024) on sacred resilience as a spiritual legacy from Africa to black America’s streets observed: “Cultural expressions like storytelling, music, and dance connect individuals through shared experiences of faith, resilience, and hope.” This experience suggests that theology in African contexts can and should embrace music as a worship tool and an interpretive lens through which individuals and communities encounter God and express their spirituality in times of joy and crisis.

As a pilgrimage of faith, Psalm 121 and the song *Jerusalema* enable those in pain to travel through pain spiritually into a future that is full of hope. In Psalm 121, the psalmist is yet to reach the appointed place of worshipping God. Yet, through hope in the sustainer of life, the psalmist lifts their eyes towards a mountain that seems distant. While the mountains are far, the psalmist has the assurance that God is not far. Thus, in the theology of music it is possible to see how singers are able to understand that God’s people do not need to be out of trouble or void of pain to trust in God and to worship God through songs of praise (Parrish & Parrish 2011:129). In the theology of music, God’s people learn how to envision that they are under God’s protective care with the assurance that God is watching over all on the journey through pain. Moving

forward, theological discourse could benefit from a closer integration of musicology and theology, recognising musical expressions as central to understanding how faith is lived, experienced, and practiced.

Incorporating music as a focal point in African spiritual practices also challenges traditional boundaries between sacred and secular spaces. Songs like *Jerusalema*, which transcended religious settings and gained international appeal, indicate that African spiritualities engage the divine in all aspects of life. This challenges theologians to consider spirituality as woven through daily life, where the sacred is encountered in culturally significant spaces and moments that speak to shared human experiences. Africa is notoriously religious. However, the impact of Covid-19 exposed how unprepared the very religious setting was to handle mental health, domestic violence, gender-based violence, sexual violence, socio-economic struggles, and the anxiety of those who lost hope and were struggling with the reality of what to eat, to drink, and to wear (Munyao, Muutuki, Musembi & Kaunga 2022).

In the song, *Jerusalema* God's people were able to sing their anxieties to God as they envisioned the beautiful city of Jerusalem where there is no sorrow, pain and death as in Psalm 121. Thus, the connection between Psalm 121 and the song *Jerusalema* significantly informs the concept of envisioning hope in pain. In this way, music enables God's people to come to terms with the reality of God's ways. "'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways,' says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9). While God's ways are hidden from human beings, Psalm 121, a song of ascent, seen through *Jerusalema* reassures God's people that God has everything under control at a time when life may be completely destabilised and threatened. It is from this perspective that one sees how the theology of music can display a renewal of spiritualities regardless of time and space (Begbie, 2000:26).

Theological reflections should therefore prioritise an inclusive view of spirituality, one that acknowledges how popular culture and local art forms serve as contemporary expressions of ancient spiritual truths. The theology of music has a unique capacity to renew spiritualities, transcending time and space through the shared human experience of sound and worship. In fact, for

Harmon (2016:50), “the theology of music is an embodiment of the mystery we celebrate and a liturgical theology.” That is why Psalm 121, an ancient song of ascent historically chanted by pilgrims, remains a powerful source of solace and strength for people today. Its melodic recitation or singing serves as a bridge between ancient Israelite worship and contemporary faith practices, helping believers connect deeply with their faith and find resilience in challenging times. Similarly, the modern African song *Jerusalema*, originally sung in *isiZulu*, became a global anthem of hope and community, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. The song, despite its specific cultural and linguistic roots, resonated universally, transcending geographic and linguistic boundaries to become a form of prayer and a unifying symbol of resilience across diverse faith communities. Through such songs, the theology of music brings a renewed sense of spirituality to individuals and communities, reminding them that faith and hope are both timeless and borderless.

Finally, future theological reflections should explore the power of music to foster healing and community restoration, especially in a world marked by crises. The Covid-19 pandemic revealed the potential of music to provide solace, unity, and hope, making it a valuable medium for addressing collective trauma and promoting emotional resilience. An interpretation of Psalm 121 through the lens of *Jerusalema* builds upon the progress in exploring biblical texts through intertextuality readings. Intertextuality shapes the meaning of a text through another text by a deliberate composition or by the audience’s perception of links between related works (Kaźmierczak, 2019:12-15). For Plank (1997:152) intertextuality “calls for a reader to pay attention to the way any given text may comment upon, appropriate, and in effect rewrite another text.” By analysing Psalm 121 alongside *Jerusalema*, one sees how music that resonates with people’s emotions in times of pain, grief, and despair can offer deeper insight. Kim (2022:238) asserts that “the gist of intertextuality is concerned with how different entities, such as the author, the borrowed text, the new text, and its reader, which have different social, cultural, and textual contexts, dialogue to produce meaning.” Although Psalm 121, a song of ascent, and *Jerusalema* emerge from different contexts, times, and spaces, they speak meaningfully to a world still dealing with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Together, they demonstrate how musical theology allows richly meaningful songs to address individual and communal pain, offering spiritual resonance in times of collective struggle. By engaging music as a central element in spiritual

practices, faith communities can create worship experiences that are responsive to current realities, integrating themes of lament, hope, and joy that resonate with the lived experiences of people. In African spiritual contexts, this approach not only deepens theological engagement but also affirms the role of music as an enduring channel through which faith adapts to and transforms the challenges of the modern world.

Conclusion

The theology of music in African spiritualities, especially viewed through the post-Covid-19 experience of songs like *Jerusalema* and texts like Psalm 121, underscores three key aspects that have significant implications for future theological engagement. First, music in African contexts functions as a lived theology, seamlessly blending culture and spirituality in ways that foster resilience, hope, and communal identity. This dynamic relationship between faith and music suggests that African theology must continue to embrace musical expressions as essential for meaningful faith experiences. Second, the blending of sacred and secular music underscores a vital theological shift where spirituality transcends religious confines, allowing God to be encountered in the rhythms of everyday life. This inclusive approach invites African theologians to recognise and elevate the cultural forms that shape spiritual understanding. Finally, the healing and unifying power of music, especially in times of crisis, calls for a theology that is actively responsive to current realities, using music to address collective challenges, foster communal support, and affirm life's fullness. This way, one envisions a profound capacity for music to embody African spiritualities, providing a resilient and inclusive framework for theological reflection and practice in an ever-evolving world.

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