

## **A Relevance Theory Analysis of Fear Elicited Language in Selected Christian Hymns**

**Abayomi O. Ayansola Ph.D**

*Department of Languages and Literary Studies,  
Faculty of Humanities, Management and Social Sciences,  
Ahman Pategi University,  
Kwara State, Nigeria  
+234 8038451798  
abayopeayan@gmail.com*

### **Abstract**

*Beyond their functions as calls to the congregation to speak to one another and to join in praise, hymns are linguistic response to socio-cognitive emotion of fear which is often evoked by danger, sickness, death, life uncertainties, and death. Fear elicited response in hymns is propelled by God's awesomeness and His ability to attend to calamities which often defy human solution. This study, in its application of Sperber and Wilson's (1986) relevance theory to 12 hymns and relevant stanzas from "The Redeemed Hymnal", concluded that hymnal language are elicited by fear and are tacit request to God for shield from danger, sorrow and life after death among other calamities. This acknowledges the transcendental reality of God as opposed to human limitations and vulnerabilities, a revelation that illuminates the communicative functions of hymns.*

**Keywords:** *Hymns, relevance theory, emotions, religion, awe*

### **1.0 Introduction**

Theologians and philosophers have extensively explored the language of religion and the "epistemological status of propositions representing the transcendental 'reality' of God" (Ingold, 2014) while scholars with linguistic orientations have limited their investigation of religious language to acts of prayers, songs, invocations, prophecies, reference, and metaphor, as well as aspects of the language and generic structure of sermons

For instance, Awonuga and Chimuanya (2016:111) in reiterating the potency of language and its nexus to religion had observed that “nations have gone to war at the instance of religion, peace treaties have been contracted on the platform of religion – all made possible by language use in religious practices”. Whereas Taiwo (2007) had addressed the concept of tenor in religious discourse and sermons, Babatunde (2007) dwelt on speech act analysis of “religious speeches” and “a classical religion”, respectively.

However, the lack of empirical systematic linguistic analysis and description in some of these studies has informed Crystal’s (1981) pertinent observation that “there are next to no examples of the application of linguistic analytic frameworks to specific areas of religious language” which results in “ambiguous, out-of-date, naïve and curiously selective” results. Claims about linguistic instantiations of beliefs are often “supported by unanalysed direct quotations, which are intended to act as incontrovertible evidence of conclusions” (Ingold, 2014:86). Ingold (2014:87) further observed that many of the conclusions are valid only in the elucidation of the surface features of religious language but that they “neglect the underlying messages that construct and convey ideology to those for whom religious discourse is a primary source of meaning and ethical instruction”.

Granted that their subject-matter is multifarious, it is arguable that the theme of fear which runs through the majority of hymns has hardly been prioritised by scholars in various studies. As a departure, this study evaluates hymnal language of fear elicited response based on relevance theory and insights from the concept of emotions, this study draws attention to crucial linguistic resources of hymns not only as socio-cognitive emotional responses to the perception of God but also as the leeway from human’s vulnerability to earthly danger, pain and uncertainties. This is one of the communicative functions of hymns that consequently reiterate the transcendental reality of God.

Hymns are lubricants with which religious activities are engineered. Religion, the pathway to spiritual fulfilment, offers succour from myriad of issues that often confront mankind. This is acknowledged by Cappellen et al (2013:1) in their averment that “spirituality should be understood not only as a coping strategy” but as “an upward spiralling pathway to and from self-transcendent [appreciation of nature and wonders] positive emotions”.

Hymns convey psycho-spiritual propositions which represent the transcendental reality of God. In disregard to “whether the popular nature of the new songs strengthens the church or not” (Lester, 2015), hymns are different from the recently developed “Christian Popular Music” or pop in all its sub-genres (Ingalls, Mall, and Nekola, 2013) based on the latter’s reflection of popular culture. Not only are these songs “popular”, in the sense of widespread dissemination and use, but they are also “pop” in their reflection of “popular forms of a variety of non-worship music” (Lester, 2015).

Humans as mortals often seek supernatural solution to earthly troubles such as sickness, anxiety, wants, security, loneliness, death and afterlife! Cappellen et al (2013:1), therefore, see spirituality as implying “the process of overcoming adversity, being triggered by negative experiences, and providing positive outcomes”. Considering the limitation of science and human capacity, man’s reliance on the omnipotent God, as may be given expression in hymns, is understandable. Hymns are poetic songs which, in addition to being the instrument of praise and worship, often elicit fear-motivated language as well as take worshippers “to the presence of God anytime we sing them, even as we meditate on His wondrous works” (Adeboye, 1985: n.p.).

Hymns address varying themes and subject matter among which is praise. Functionally hymns spice and offer a “variety of behaviour in the act of worship” and relief from “liturgical gestures and bodily actions[such as] - standing, sitting, kneeling, processing and so on, or from speaking and listening - to the prayers, the bible readings, [...] sermon, the blessings, [and] the creedal affirmations” (Gibson, 1999:1). The reliefs that are provided by hymns from the monotony of religious rituals are applicable to that often sought from numerous earthly woes.

Sickness, old age, epidemics, natural disasters, death and the aftermath of death often make life uncertain, a situation that may elicit fear in mankind as well as propel Christians to sing hymns in prayer and anticipation of being shielded by God. Fear elicited expression may be implicitly or explicitly given expression in hymns. Hymnal language, however, requires minimum cognitive processing owing to mutual contextual beliefs and certain homogenous doctrinal practices that unify members of a congregation. This paper highlights hymnal language as a product of socio-cognitive experiences resulting in fear elicited responses. In so doing, hymns tacitly

acknowledge the transcendental reality of God and reinforce the vulnerability of man to the vagaries of life.

## **2.0 Research Questions**

Religion provides succour from myriad of issues like sickness, old age, epidemics, death and the aftermath of death which are unarguably topics that elicit fear in mankind and in response propels Christians to pray to God for protection through the instrumentation of hymns. Fear elicited language which may be im(ex)plicitly given expression in hymns being the objects of investigation in this paper makes certain questions pertinent. What are the elicitors of fear and the corresponding linguistic indications of man's affiliation to God? How are the sought reliefs enacted linguistically in hymns?

## **3.0 Data and Methodology**

There exists several compilations of hymns named after various Christian denominations such as Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Deeper Life, Cherubim and Seraphim, Redeemed Christian Church of God, and so on. Hymns were composed mostly by anonymous individuals as they feature across denominational compilations. The study, however, excerpted data from "The Redeemed Hymnal".

The compilation, which is an adaptation of hymns across several denominations, contains a total of 812 hymns which are predominantly "a call to the congregation to join in praise ..., a list of reasons to praise God ..., and a call to praise or statement of trust" (Adeboye, 1985: n.p.). For the purpose of this study, the figure was pruned to 13 hymns which contain fear elicited responses from which relevant stanzas were further excerpted.

Hymns are written in verse and stanzas but for the purpose of analysis, hymnal lines are separated by single slant (/) while stanzas are demarcated by double slants (//). The top-down qualitative analysis was hinged on Sperber and Wilson's (1995) relevance theory with insights fed into the study from the concept of emotion. The interpretation of data is, however, guided by the Christian faith and the understanding that "the hymnal is ... a companion to the Bible [and] ... plays a part in Christian life" (Adeboye, 1985: n.p.).

#### **4.0 Relevance Theory and Hymns**

Sperber and Wilson's (1986; 1995) relevance theory with insights from theoretical postulations on the phenomenon of emotion is adequate for the analysis of linguistic resources through which fear elicited responses are vented in hymns. Hymns are basically products of socio-cognitive experiences which are a reflection of the emotions of fear and the responses they elicit. The theory, therefore, features the interplay of relevance, cognition and emotion as the springboard on which the analysis of hymnal expressions may be hinged.

#### **4.1 Relevance Theory**

Relevance theory seeks to modify Grice's (1967) model of communication which makes a distinction between what is said and that which is implied. Whereas 'saying' is explicit and self-explanatory, the same cannot be said of the "implying" component. Grice advanced the proprietary of Co-operative Principle (CP) among interlocutors in making senses of their communicative engagements and prescribed a set of maxims (quality, quantity, manner and relevance) and inference that govern the recovery of implicatures or covert meaning in communication. The Gricean CP is based on certain conversational rules or maxims which specify how interlocutors are constrained and are guided by inference in rescuing meaning based on 'what is said' to 'what is implicated'.

Implicatures are classified in relevance theory on the basis of premise and conclusion. Implicated premises are regarded as contextual assumptions which the hearer is expected to recover, while implicated conclusions are contextual implications reinforced by implicated premises (Odebunmi, 2011). According to Wałaszewska and Piskorska, the "expectations laid on the role of inference in interpreting 'what is said' were rather modest and included ... assigning reference to referring expressions, deciding on a sense of an ambiguous expression, and fixing some variables associated with the deictic parameters of an utterance".

The limitation of the CP in interpreting 'what is said', "which can be taken as an indication that, indeed, the CP and maxims were seen as functional only in interpreting implicatures, or, at best, also in the 'said' layer of communication to the small extent to which inference played a role in it" (Wałaszewska and Piskorska) is the motivation for Relevance Theory (RT). Whereas RT

agrees that “communication involves inference and that communicated meaning can be explained in terms of speaker’s intentions”, it “redefined the role of inference and the status of principles governing inferential processes” (Wałaszewska and Piskorska, 2017). Sperber and Wilson (1986) give prominence to the spontaneous information processing by the human mind, thereby treating cognition as a crucial factor in the theory.

RT is based on the argument that inference is involuntarily performed on inputs (sights, sounds, utterances and memories) which become relevant when they link with an individual’s background information and assist the hearer in reaching relevant conclusions (Odebunmi, 2011). Similarly, the events which often result in the language of hymns are not only spontaneous but are in sync with the socio-cultural background of hymn users and Christians. Hence, Wałaszewska and Piskorska (2017) aver that “the underlying principles of the inferential processes is cognitive rather than being philosophical or governed by “rules of social conduct” with the conclusion that such requirements are met by the Communicative Principle of Relevance “which supports the relevance-based model of human communication on the strength of efficiency of information processing in real time”.

RT is built on the principle that every act of communication conveys the presumption of its own optimal relevance (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 158; Sperber and Wilson 1995, 260-261). Every utterance is, therefore, interpreted with the maximization of cognitive benefits while the required processing effort is minimal. As applicable to the Christian hymns and utterances in general, the hearer will spontaneously choose the possible interpretations that meets the two conditions: (1) it brings about large cognitive gains, which can be generally characterized as improvements in the representation of the world and (2) it requires such amount of effort that can be justified by these gains (Odebunmi, 2011).

Aspects of relevance and communication are in particular relevant to this paper for the attention that is given to ostensive-inferential communication and the presumption of optional relevance. Relevance and comprehension on the other hand focus on explicatures and implicatures. The ostensive-inferential communication model is an indication of how utterances “appear as cases of showing (ostensive) and how the speaker communicate by giving clues to the hearer

(inferential)” (Odebunmi, 2011). Consequently, RT emphasises both the informative intention and the communicative intention from the speaker to the hearer.

Whereas the informative intention attempts to make the speaker’s assumptions manifest to the hearer, the communicative intention targets the hearer’s recognition of the speaker’s informative intention. “Oh! God, I am doomed”, as illustrated in Odebunmi (2011), may be intended to draw the hearer’s attention to the speaker’s misfortune i.e. that he is doomed (explicature) and to invite the hearer’s sympathy (implicature). In this example by the speaker’s communicative intention is achieved if the hearer recognises the speaker is being doomed and sympathises with him/her.

The application of relevance theory and the notion that “when you communicate, your intention is to alter the cognitive environment of your addressees” (Sperber and Wilson 1986:46) to the analysis of fear and the responses it elicits in hymns is modified by the concept of doxa or popular belief among Christians and the understanding that hymns are addressed to God. The Bible presents a list of reasons to praise God and call on the congregation to join in His praise (Psalm 33: 1-19). The Bible further admonishes Christians to speak to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19). It may be concluded from the Bible, therefore, that God and man are co-hearers of hymns.

Humans may, however, be limited in their interpretation of implicit communication as may be constrained by hymnal surface and lexico-grammatical content. The immortal God understands not only implicit communication but knows man from the intent of heart. The synergy between syntax and semantics in sentence formation and their contribution to both the surface form and to the underlying meaning of a sentence or utterance is, therefore, crucial and involves cognitive processing since in addressing hymns to God, humans are privy to their message. This understanding reinforces the aptness of relevance theory to this study.

#### **4.2 Emotion, Cognition and Religion**

There is a consensus in psychology that emotional expressions can be rich communicative devices, hence Scarantino’s (2017) insistence that much could be learnt from the “tears of a grieving friend, the smiles of an affable stranger, or the slamming of a door by a disgruntled lover”. Hymns consist of implied emotional outbursts that are indicative of the experience of fear

and the corresponding responses to it. The interaction between language and emotion, however, goes beyond descriptive emotional words and are discernible “at many levels of structure, from the sound patterns of a language, to its lexicon and grammar, and beyond to how it appears in conversation and discourse” (Majid, 2012).

As suggested by Odebunmi (2011), emotion is a socio-cognitive state that “works on the rapport between physical activities and psychological rousing” as motivated by psychological act which often merges into certain actions taken by the individuals. Emotions are elicited by specific identifiable affective state such as anger, fear, happiness and excitement. It “is a dynamic and multifaceted construct that has a source, consists of an appraisal, and results in action tendencies” (Mentis et al, 2010:312). Hymnal responses are rooted in Mentis et al (2010) and Odebunmi’s (2011) averment that emotions are reactionary to overwhelming socio-cognitive experience including the fear of danger, sorrow among other earthly woes and the belief that God could offer relief from earthly scourge.

Oatley and Johnson-laird’s (1987) insistence that “emotions are cognitively based states which co-ordinate quasi-autonomous processes in the nervous system” is a validation of the connectedness of emotion and cognition to speech. In providing further insights in this regard, Leventhal and Scherer (1987) concluded that “Questions about the relationship of cognition to emotion, and how two initially independent systems become inseparably interrelated, are transformed when viewed within the context of the dynamic, multilevel emotion processing system”.

In the opinion of Majid (2012), language is intertwined with thought and is at the nexus of cognition and culture. Wilce (2009:3) had earlier submitted that “nearly every dimension of every language at least potentially encodes emotion”. Majid (2012) emphasised Cruse’s (1986) averment that linguistic forms are embedded with connotative meanings, “where emotion is not entailed but implied. Expressive meaning conveys the speaker’s feeling or attitude towards the content of the message, while the social meaning indicates something about the speaker’s social role and stance”.

In the application of emotion and cognition to spirituality, Saroglou, Buxant and Tilquin (2008) argued that both positive and negative emotional events and emotions can increase “religion and spirituality” with the implication of “some self-transcendence”. In their words:

Religiousness was to some extent affected by the positive emotions [e.g. humour] elicited [study], and spirituality was higher among participants who were exposed to the videos eliciting self-transcendent emotions (appreciation of nature and wonder at childbirth) but not among those exposed to humor. Both religiousness and spirituality may fit with the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, but the correspondence seems to be clearer for spirituality, a reality marked by universalism and openness to experience.

Spirituality, in its provision of positive outcomes, helps in the process of overcoming adversity which may be triggered by negative experiences. Cappellen et al (2013) had investigated whether spirituality may also be triggered by self-transcendent positive emotions, which are elicited by stimuli appraised as demonstrating higher good and beauty. The study revealed that self-transcendent positive emotions increased participants' spirituality and that “belief in life as meaningful” and “in the benevolence of others and the world” mediated the effect of these emotions on spirituality”. They concluded that spirituality should be understood not only as a coping strategy, but also as an upward spiralling pathway to and from self-transcendent positive emotions.

The works of nature: landscape, ocean, the galaxies, different species of animals, plants, the universe, works of art, intellectual epiphany, peoples and varieties of language all evoke intense emotional response. It has proved difficult for psychologists to agree on a description of this emotion, in part because the elicitors are so diverse, and the emotion's function unclear (Lazarus, 1991). The elicited response common to art, music, natural wonders, panoramic views, and other things of beauty is “awe” (Keltner and Haidt, 2003).

Awe has been described in sociology, philosophy, and religion, as the aesthetic response to political change, and religious transformation. Whereas Ekman posits that awe is a distinct emotion (1992), Lazarus describes it as an “ambiguous” state with emotional qualities, that

can be experienced as positive or negative depending on the situation (1991, p. 83). Awe (as synonymous with wonder of the works of God) is treated by Frijda (1986) as a passive, receptive mode of attention in the presence of something unexpected.

Emotion, in its positive or negative variants, may be vented in language. It is often the case that the works of God and His capacity in provision of solutions to life issues have elicited awe and positive emotion which is expressed through hymns. RCCG Hymn 26 reads:

Praise ye the Lord! 'Tis good to raise  
Your hearts and voices in His praise  
His nature and His works invite  
To make this duty our delight

He formed the stars, those heavenly flames,  
He counts their numbers, calls their names;  
His wisdom's vast, and knows no bound,  
A deep where all our thoughts are drowned.

Sing to the Lord! Exalt Him high,  
Who spreads His clouds along the sky;  
There He prepares the fruitful rain,  
Nor let the drops descend in vain

He makes the grass the hills adorn,  
And clothes the smiling fields with corn;  
The beasts with food His hands supply,  
And the young ravens when they cry (Stanza 1-4).

Awe elicited response in Hymn 26 is explicit and reiterates the transcendental reality of God, an experience that further propels the congregants to “fear” Him.

## **5.0 Discussion and Presentation of Data**

Hymnal language contains fear elicited responses and tacit request to God to shield the congregants from the uncertainties of danger, sorrows and life after death which also acknowledges the transcendental reality of God as well as reinforce human limitations and vulnerabilities to earthly woes and troubles being revelations that illuminate the communicative functions of hymns.

### **5.1 Language of Fear and Response to Danger**

Man is susceptible to all kinds of danger. Natural disaster, in the form of earthquake, tremor, mudslide or flood; arm-induced violence such as robbery, kidnapping, murder, rape or arson; and all forms of uncertainties, government policies inclusive severally pose danger to mankind. As exemplified below, hymns consist of language that is suggestive of man's exposure to danger and the acknowledgement of God's ability to offer protection from it.

Excerpts 1: From all the dangers of the night/ Jesus my Lord protects/ 'Am privilege to see this light/ I kneel to worship Thee// Jesus my Lord keep me today/ Protect me in Thy hands/ It is only those Thou keepest/ That are safe from danger (RCCG Hymn 3, Stanzas 1 – 2).

Excerpts 2: Holy Father, hear me/ Thou art my defender/ Be thou ever near me/ Loving, true, and tender (RCCG Hymn 2, Stanza 1).

The phenomenon of fear is indexed in numerous lexical items in the excerpts above. Night in excerpts 1 is synonymous with danger. Man is most vulnerable to danger while s/he retires to bed at night. Darkness provides cover for overt and covert activities that may undermine the existence of man as there is no guarantee that s/he would be alive at dawn without the protection from God, hence the affirmation in excerpts 1 above. In excerpts 2, God is affirmed as the defender in the face of danger. *Thou art my defender/ Be thou ever near me.*

Daylight, as reiterated in excerpts 3, is not immune to danger and to Satan's wiles:

Excerpts 3: Throughout the day, O Christ, in Thee,/ May ready help be found,/ To save our souls from Satan's wiles,/ Who still is hov'ring round (RCCG Hymn 7, Stanza 3).

The expression of fear and danger in excerpts 4 below is spiritual rather than physical. The reference to "tempest", "raging elements", "the horrors of night", "whirlwind and waters", etc are metaphorical in the description of the warfare and threat to the existence of mankind. The response to the danger of sin is highlighted as a complement to darkness in which "the godless" or, otherwise, men without virtues excel. God's light not only chase darkness and the horrors of night away, in mercy, He also surrounded the believer with Saints.

Excerpts 4: Praise to the Lord, who, when tempest their warfare are waging,/ Who, when the elements madly around thee are raging,/ Biddeth them cease,/ Turneth their fury to peace,/ Whirlwinds and waters assuaging.// Praise to the Lord, who, when darkness and sin is abounding/ Who, when the godless do triumph, all virtues confounding,/ Sheddeth His light,/ Chaseth the horrors of night,/ Saints with His mercy surrounding (RCCG Hymn 30, Stanza 1 and 4).

Hymns are unarguably the expression of danger elicited response in the form of praise to God the protector. Hymns also show emotional reaction to sorrow as exemplified below:

## **5.2 Language of Fear and Response to Sorrow**

Sorrow is an accompaniment to pain, sickness and numerous other earthly misfortunes. Sickness and sorrow may defy human solution in which case God's attention is sought inevitably. It is the fear of sorrow and the acknowledgement of divine intervention that are linguistically enacted in hymns.

Excerpts 5: Thou, who didst come to bring/On Thy redeeming wing/Healing and sight,/Health to the sick in mind,/ Sight top the inly blind,/Oh now, to all mankind/Let there be light (RCCG Hymn 85, Stanza 2)!

In excerpts 5, God's intervention in man's sorrowful state is reiterated in his "redeeming wing". He also gives "healing and sight" as well as "health to the sick". The omnipotent God would also reach out to those whose blindness is inward. This is an implicit acknowledgement of sorrow as

fallout of sin from which God is the saviour. These are deducible involuntary inference that are performed based on inputs of sights, sounds, utterances and memories which become relevant in alignment with the congregants' background information. Responses to fear are further enacted in the examples below:

Excerpts 6: Breathe Thy Holy Spirit/ Into every heart/ Bid the fears and sorrows/ From each soul depart (RCCG Hymn 16, Stanza 2).

Excerpts 7: Jesus! the name that charms our fears/ That bids our sorrows cease;/ 'Tis music in the sinner's ears,/ 'Tis life, and health, and peace.//He break the power of cancelled sin/ He set the pris'ner free/ His blood can make the foulest clean/ His blood availed for me (RCCG Hymn 23 Stanza 3 and 4).

Excerpts 8: When worn with sickness oft hast Thou/ With health renewed my face,/And when in sins and sorrows sunk,/ More to be feared than they (RCCG Hymn 35, Stanza 5).

In addition to His "redeeming wing", excerpts 6 reassures that God's breath in the form of the Holy Spirit would expel "the fears of sorrow" that is inherent in the heart. In excerpts 7, the name "Jesus" not only charms fears and cease sorrows, it is music in the ears of sinners, it is life and health as much as it gives freedom to the prisoner. In the same hymn, His blood possesses cleansing power for desiring individuals. Excerpts 7 and 8 contains implicit fear-eliciting language in acknowledgement that humanity is plagued with sin, sickness and sorrow. There is also a corresponding response that God in His various forms can dispel the inherent fear in mankind. Man's admission of fear is further discernible in excerpts 9.

Excerpts 9: Father of all to Thee,/ Our contrite hearts we raise/ Unstrung by sin and pain/ Long voiceless in Thy praise/ Breathe Thou the silent chords along/ Until they tremble into song.// Father of all to Thee,/ We breathe unuttered fears/ Deep hidden in our souls/ That have no voice but tears/ Take Thou our hand, and through the wild/ Lead gently on each trustful child (RCCG Hymn 82, Stanza 2 - 3).

Fear and tear are often elicited by sin and pain. They not only separate man from God but are also discouraging factors in the quest for worship. God who in excerpts 9 is acknowledged as “Father of all” would however give reprieve to the contrite sinner.

### **5.3 Language of Fear and Response to Life after Death**

There is a near consensus across religious divides on the inevitability of death and life after death. Christians’ sojourn on earth is believed to be temporal after which the soul would end with God in heaven or Satan in hell depending on God’s judgement (Hebrew 9 verse 27). The fear of afterlife, devoid of danger and sorrow that characterise the sojourn on earth, finds relevance in hymns. Hymns convey language that implies that earthly woes are for a while after which there will be a transition to a glorious life.

Hymns, as excerpted in 5-9, are expressive of the vivid picture of the beauty and splendour of the much anticipated life by Christian devotees.

Excerpts 10: We are lost amid the rapture of redeeming love/ Glory to God, Hallelujah/ We are rising on its pinions to the hills above/ ... // We are going to a palace that is built of gold/... / Where the King in all His splendour we shall soon behold/.../ (RCCG Hymn 13, stanza 2 -3).

Excerpts 11: The hill of Zion yields/ A thousand sacred sweets/ Before we reach the heav’nly fields,/ Before we reach the heav’nly fields/ Or walk the golden street/ Or walk the golden street. *We’re marching to Zion;/ Beautiful, beautiful Zion;/ We’re marching upward to Zion,/ The beautiful city of God* (RCCG Hymn 18, stanza 3).

Excerpts 12: Our years are like the shadows/ On sunny hills that lie,/ Or grasses in the meadows/ That blossom but to die:/ A sleep, a dream, a story/ By strangers quickly told,/ An unremaining glory/ Of things that soon are old.// Lord, crown our faith’s endeavour/ With beauty and with grace,/ Till, clothed in light for ever,/ We see thee face to face;/ A joy to language measures,/ A fountain brimming o’er,/ And endless flow of pleasures;/ An ocean without shore (RCCG Hymn 44, stanzas 2 and 4).

Excerpts 13: The heav'nly host are all astir/ The angels take up their harps/The saints all set with their voices/ To join the glorious worship/ Our God's day of rest has now come/ It is a most glorious day/ Heav'n is fill'd with joyful noises/How delightful their worship.// Let us join with the heav'nly throng, To praise God, He is our king,/Let us cleanse and prepare our hearts,/And sing with holy voices/Ours can only be a foretaste/Of their rest in heav'n above/Until we see the lord our God,/Whom we worship face to face (RCCG Hymn 19, stanzas 1 and 2).

Some of the linguistic items that are descriptive of the anticipated heavenly home are italicised below:

Excerpts 10: (we are lost in) the rapture of redeeming love ... *the hills above ... a palace that is built of gold ... the King in all His splendour ...*

Excerpts 11: *The hill of Zion ... the heav'nly fields/ ... the golden street,;/ Beautiful, beautiful Zion;/ We're marching upward to Zion,/ The beautiful city of God*

Excerpts 12: *A fountain brimming o'er/ And endless flow of pleasures/ A joy to language measures,/ An ocean without shore*

The metaphors of “golden street”, “hill of Zion”, and so on, are expressive of underlying fear of the *status-quo* (a life that is prone to diseases, fear, and terror) and the elicited responses as is informed by the nostalgia for the paradise after.

The choice of tense in the description of Christian eternal abode contrasts with and highlights the abysmal condition of life on earth. The future tense in hymns importantly underscores the eagerness and anticipation with which a pleasant place of rest is sought by mortals. Future tense markers in hymns are in the form of progressive “-ing” and the modal verb, “shall”: “We are rising on ...” (5), “We are going to ...” (10), “We shall soon behold ...” (10), “We're marching upward to Zion” (11).

In some cases, the future is presupposed, pragmatic or ellipted as italicised: “*Till, clothed in light for ever*” (12), “*We see thee face to face*” (12), “*Let us join with the heav'nly throng*” (13), “Ours

can only be a *foretaste*/Of their rest in heav'n above/*Until* we see the lord our God" (13). "*Before* we reach ..." (11).

The implicit fear of life after death is relative. Whereas the congregants long for the positive side of eternity, there exists another side of eternity which is reserved for the evildoer. The suffering on earth as well as the consciousness of heaven and hell is an elicitor informs the preference for one, rather the other, so obvious.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

This study has presented hymnal communicative functions and language as socio-cognitive emotional responses which are elicited by the fear of earthly calamities which often befall mankind. Fear elicited languages were indexed in the form of lexical choices, phrases and metaphors that expressed the emotion of fear. Responses in hymns are tacit or implied request to God to shield the congregants from earthly danger, sorrows and life after death in an acknowledgment of the transcendental reality of God as opposed to human limitations and vulnerabilities. This study presented fear and response as cognitively-driven. This affirms the argument that inference is activated by inputs (sights, sounds, utterances and memories) which become relevant when linked with language user's background information.

## **References**

- Adeboye, E.A. 1985. "Foreword". In "The Redeemed Hymnal". S.A. Ayodele and Otunaya J. Adesoye (Eds). Lagos: Johnny-Jes Limited.
- Awonuga, C and L. Chimuanya. 2016. An investigation of the syntactic devices in selected Nigerian preachers' Sermons. In *Journal of English Scholars Association of Nigeria*. Vol. 18.1. Pp. 110-125. 2016.
- Babatunde, S. Timothy. 2007. A speech act analysis of christian religious speeches. In *Style in Religious Communication in Nigeria*. A. Odebunmi and A. O. Babajide (Eds.). pp 48-89.

- Cappellen Patty Van, Vassilis Saroglou, Caroline Iweins, Maria Piovesana & Barbara L. Fredrickson. 2013. Self-transcendent positive emotions increase spirituality through basic world assumptions, *Cognition and Emotion*, 27:8, 1378-1394, DOI: [10.1080/02699931.2013.787395](https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2013.787395)
- Crystal, David. 1981. "Generating theological language". In *Theolinguistics*. Jean-Pierre van Noppen (Ed.). Brussels: Vrije Universiteit Brussel. Pp. 266.
- Ekman, Paul. 1992. An argument for basic emotions, *Cognition and Emotion*, 6:3-4, 169-200, DOI: [10.1080/02699939208411068](https://doi.org/10.1080/02699939208411068)
- Frijda, N. H. 1986. *The emotions*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gibson, Colins. 1999. "The roles of hymns in worship". *Practical Dreamers Drop-in Centre. A keynote address at Ecumenical Hymn Conference Proceedings*. University of Melbourne. 24 September 1999 [www.dunedinmethodist.org.nz/archive/wshp/hymns.htm](http://www.dunedinmethodist.org.nz/archive/wshp/hymns.htm)
- Grice, H. P. 1967. *Logic and conversation*. In P. Grice (Ed.), (Tran.), *Studies in the ways of words* (22-40). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ingalls, Monique M., Andrew Mall, and Anna E. Nekola. 2013. "Christian Popular Music, USA." In *The Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology*, edited by J. R. Watson and Emma Hornby. Norwich: Canterbury Press. <http://www.hymnology.co.uk/c/christian-popular-music,-usa>.
- Keltner, Dacher and Jonathan Haidt. 2003. Approaching awe, a moral, spiritual, and aesthetic emotion, *Cognition and Emotion*, 17:2, 297-314, DOI: [10.1080/02699930302297](https://doi.org/10.1080/02699930302297)
- King James Bible (2020). *King James Bible*. Online. <https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org>
- Lazarus, R. S. 1991. Goal congruent (positive) and problematic emotions. In R. S. Lazarus (Ed.), *Emotion and adaptation*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lester Ruth. 2015. "How "Pop" Are the New Worship Songs?" Investigating the Levels of the New Cultural Influence on the Contemporary Worship Music. *Global Arts and Christian Faith*. Vol 3 No.1 [www.artsandchristianfaith.org](http://www.artsandchristianfaith.org)
- Leventhal, Howard and Klaus Scherer. 1987. The Relationship of Emotion to Cognition: A Functional Approach to a Semantic Controversy, *Cognition and Emotion*, 1:1, 3-28, DOI: [10.1080/02699938708408361](https://doi.org/10.1080/02699938708408361)
- Majid, Asifa. 2012. Current emotion research in the language sciences. *Emotion review*. Vol.4. No.4. Pp. 432-443. DOI: [10.1077/1754073912445827](https://doi.org/10.1077/1754073912445827)
- Mentis, Helena, Reddy, Madhu and Rossom, Mary. 2010. Invisible Emotion: Information and Interaction in an Emergency Room. *Proceedings of the Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW)*. New York: Association for Computer Machinery, 311–320.

- Oatley, Keith and P. N. Johnson-laird. 1987. Towards a Cognitive Theory of Emotions, Cognition and Emotion, 1:1, 29-50, DOI: [10.1080/02699938708408362](https://doi.org/10.1080/02699938708408362)
- Odebunmi, Akin. 2011. The baby dey chuk chuk. *Pragmatics and Society*. 3.1. John Benjamins Publishing Company. Pp 120-147.
- Richard, Ingold. 2014. "God, the Devil and You: A Systemic Functional Linguistic Analysis of the Language of Hillsong" *Literature and Aesthetics* 24 (1). Pp 85-
- Saroglou Vassilis, Coralie Buxant & Jonathan Tilquin (2008) Positive emotions as leading to religion and spirituality, *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 3:3, Pp 165-173, DOI: [10.1080/17439760801998737](https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760801998737)
- Scarantino, Andrea. 2017. How to do things with emotional expressions: The theory of affective pragmatics. *Psychological Inquiry*. 28: 2-3. Pp. 165-185. DOI: 10.1080/1047840X.2017.1328951
- Solomon, O.A. and G. Ibileye. 2016. The speech acts of a classical religion and national transformation. *Journal of English Scholars Association of Nigeria*. Vol. 18.1. Pp 138-150.
- Sperber, Dan and Wilson, Deirdre. 1986. *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, Second Edition, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Sperber, Dan and Wilson, Deirdre. 1995. *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, Second Edition, Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers. Pp. 2-9.
- Taiwo, Rotimi. 2007. Tenor in electronic media Christian discourse in Nigeria. In *Style in Religious Communication in Nigeria*. A. Odebunmi and A. O. Babajide (Eds.). Pp 90-106.
- The Redeemed Christian Church of God. 1985. "The Redeemed Hymnal". S.A. Ayodele and Otunaya J. Adesoye (Compilers). Lagos: Johnny-Jes Limited.
- Walaszewska, Ewa and Agnieszka Pikorska. 2017. "Introduction". In *Application of relevance theory: From discourse to morphemes*. Pikorska Agnieszka and Ewa Walaszewska (Eds.). Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishers.
- Wilce, J.M. 2009. *Language and emotion*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.