

Songs That Merge with Prayer: The Theological Meaning of QUI Bene Cantat, Bis Orat in the Formation of Faith at the Solafide Sereh Christian Church

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Abstract

This study examines the theological meaning of the expression qui bene cantat, bis orat in worship singing practices and its contribution to the formation of the faith of the GKI Solafide Sereh congregation due to shifts in contemporary church music practices that have the potential to place singing more as an aesthetic expression than as a prayer that is experienced theologically. This study uses a qualitative approach with a contextual theology paradigm. Data was collected through participatory observation in worship services, in-depth interviews with liturgical ministers and congregants, and analysis of the lyrics of hymns used in worship services. The analysis was conducted using a theological-hermeneutical approach, viewing singing as a locus theologicus, or a space where faith is experienced and lived out. The results of the study indicate that hymns are understood by the congregation as a form of personal and communal prayer that brings about an experience of closeness to God, especially when supported by theological lyrics that are relevant to life experiences. Hymns function as an affective, relational, and transformative medium that shapes individual faith while strengthening communal faith identity. This study concludes that in the context of GKI Solafide Sereh, singing with sincerity not only deepens prayer, but also shapes a living and sustainable faith in the practice of church life.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The practice of singing as a form of worship has deep historical and scriptural roots. In both the Old and New Testaments, there are numerous references to singing praises to God, indicating its long-standing importance in religious traditions (Marek & Lisiecki, 2024). The act of singing can help regulate emotions, providing a therapeutic outlet for expressing and processing feelings. This can be particularly beneficial in a religious context, where the goal is often to achieve a state of spiritual peace and connection (Klein, 2013).

The expression “Qui bene cantat, bis orat” has lived in the spirituality of the Church throughout history and is often associated with St. Augustine, although it is not found explicitly in his works. However, Augustine's thinking emphasises that singing in worship is not only praising, but also doing so with joy and love. Good liturgical music is believed to lift the hearts of the congregation and unite them with the heavenly liturgy, thereby deepening their experience of faith (Nyandiwa, 2024). St. Augustine also stated, “Singing is for those who love,” emphasising that singing is an expression of love for God (Nyandiwa,

2024). This phrase is not merely a poetic expression, but a theological affirmation that music and prayer are two faces of the same breath of faith.

Singing can amplify the act of praying, making it more profound and heartfelt (Wald-Fuhrmann et al., 2020). This emotional engagement can make the act of praying through song feel more powerful and effective (Klein, 2013). Singing together in a religious setting can create a sense of unity and shared purpose among the congregation. This communal aspect of singing is seen as a way to strengthen the bonds between worshippers and enhance their collective spiritual experience (Wald-Fuhrmann et al., 2020).

In the context of GKI Solafide Sereh, singing is not merely a liturgical accompaniment, but a theological space where faith is lived, deepened, and realised communally. Singing becomes a form of vocal prayer—a dialogue between the human soul and God that transcends the limits of words. However, amid the modernisation of church music and shifts in worship styles, a fundamental question arises: does singing still function as prayer, or has it shifted to become merely an aesthetic expression and spiritual entertainment?

This issue stems from changes in contemporary church music culture. Many congregations are now exposed to popular music trends that influence the way they sing and worship. On the one hand, modern music styles bring a new spirit, enlivening worship with a fresh and emotional feel. However, on the other hand, there are concerns that the theological substance and sacredness of singing are being marginalised by a performative orientation. In the context of GKI Solafide Sereh, this reality is evident in the dynamics of congregational singing, which sometimes emphasises vocal harmony over the depth of prayer. This phenomenon opens up space for deep reflection: how is the theological meaning of “*Qui bene cantat, bis orat*” lived out in the formation of the faith of today's congregation?

The issue in this study focuses on singing in worship at GKI Solafide Sereh, which is understood and experienced as a form of prayer, the theological meaning contained in the practice of congregational singing according to the perspective of “*Qui bene cantat, bis orat*” and how singing contributes to the formation of personal and communal faith in church life. This research occupies the intersection between liturgical theology, church music, and contemporary spirituality. A number of previous studies, such as the works of Sulistiadi, Wald-Telaumbanua & Salurante, and Kasanang, have reviewed the function of singing in building spiritual experience and liturgical togetherness (Kasanang, 2025; Sulistiadi, 2025; Telaumbanua & Salurante, 2025). However, most of these studies focus on the context of Western churches.

The novelty of this research lies in its attempt to articulate the meaning of “*Qui bene cantat, bis orat*” in the local context of Papua, particularly in the GKI Solafide Sereh congregation. Another novelty of this research is its approach, which combines theological and psychosocial dimensions. Singing is not only understood as an act of faith, but also as a means of forming communal identity and spiritual well-being within the congregation. Amidst the tide of globalisation that often erodes community unity, church singing serves as a glue that restores a sense of togetherness and strengthens spiritual solidarity. This study confirms that singing is not only “praying twice,” but also “building twice,” namely building faith and building community.

This research is expected to make an important contribution to enriching the wealth of church music and theology in Indonesia, particularly in the context of Protestant churches in Papua. Furthermore, the results are expected to reaffirm the awareness that in every song sung with faith, humans are speaking with God and in that echo, the Church finds its true identity: the body of Christ singing, praying, and living in one love.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research approach uses qualitative methods with a contextual theology paradigm. Data will be collected through participatory observation in worship services, interviews with liturgical ministers and congregations, and analysis of the songs used in worship services. The analysis will be conducted using a theological-hermeneutic approach, namely by reading the songs as texts of faith that reflect the religious experiences of the congregation.

This approach places singing as the locus theologicus, a space where theology is lived and experienced, not merely taught. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation during worship services, and analysis of the lyrics of hymns used by the congregation of GKI Solafide Sereh. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the experience of faith lived through singing as a form of prayer.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Singing in Worship as a Form of Prayer

Singing in worship is predominantly understood not merely as a musical activity, but as a spiritual experience equivalent to prayer. Almost all informants emphasised that singing brings a sense of calm, joy, and closeness to God. However, it is important to note that the quality of this experience is greatly influenced by the inner readiness of the congregation. Singing can feel like a mere liturgical routine if it is not accompanied by readiness of heart.

The interpretation of songs as prayers is relational and existential, depending on the spiritual disposition of the congregation. Context-sensitive singers emphasise that music and songs must reflect the congregation's "existential" struggles, joys, lamentations and gratitude in order to truly become a space for prayer, not merely a filler for the atmosphere (Calitz, 2017). The selection of songs, the manner of delivery, and the place of worship and thanksgiving facilitate the right disposition of the heart (Bulakh, 2025).

Lyrics are the most decisive element, compared to melody or other musical aspects. Theological, reflective lyrics that are relevant to the life of faith enable the congregation to personalise the songs as an inner expression to God. The atmosphere of worship and the readiness of the heart serve as supporting factors, not the main determinants. These findings confirm that in the context of GKI Solafide Sereh, the verbal-theological dimension of singing is more dominant than the aesthetic-musical dimension.

There are certain moments when singing brings about an intense experience of closeness with God. These moments often arise during confession, praise and worship, and when the lyrics of the song directly touch on personal struggles in life. Closeness to God is experienced affectively through feelings of peace, relief, joy, and inner energy flowing. This shows that singing functions as a mediative medium that bridges concrete life experiences with divine reality. The selection of songs is prepared so that worship truly becomes a medium for the congregation's encounter with God, not a mechanistic ritual (Cristina Batilmurik, 2025).

In John 4:23–24, it is explained that “true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.” In Jesus’ dialogue with the Samaritan woman, the focus of worship is shifted from location and outward form to the quality of relationship and inner truth. Worshiping “in spirit and truth” means that worship, including singing, must arise from the depths of an open spirit and a lived-out truth of faith. Worship that is formalistic and mechanical. The selection of songs, therefore, needs to be directed towards texts that enable the congregation to experience spiritual honesty and the truth of faith, so that singing becomes a living prayer and not an empty repetition.

The primary function of singing is to bring God's presence, not to teach doctrine. In church practice, singing brings and sharpens awareness of God's presence (doxological-relational function) (Fanggidae et al., 2024). However, certain liturgical elements such as confession of sins, forgiveness of sins, profession of faith, and call to worship are considered very helpful in deepening one's faith. Deepening one's faith through singing is more affective and spiritual than didactic.

The transformative dimension of singing in the spiritual life of the congregation. Many informants acknowledged that certain songs changed the way they viewed God, themselves, and their daily lives. Songs such as Psalm 133, ‘My Heart Believes,’ ‘‘God is My Shepherd,’’ and ‘‘Faithful Helper’’ became concrete references for their faith experiences. Singing not only strengthened them emotionally, but also shaped their attitudes towards life, family relationships, and steadfastness in facing struggles.

The understanding and appreciation of singing as prayer in worship at GKI Solafide Sereh can be described in this concept:

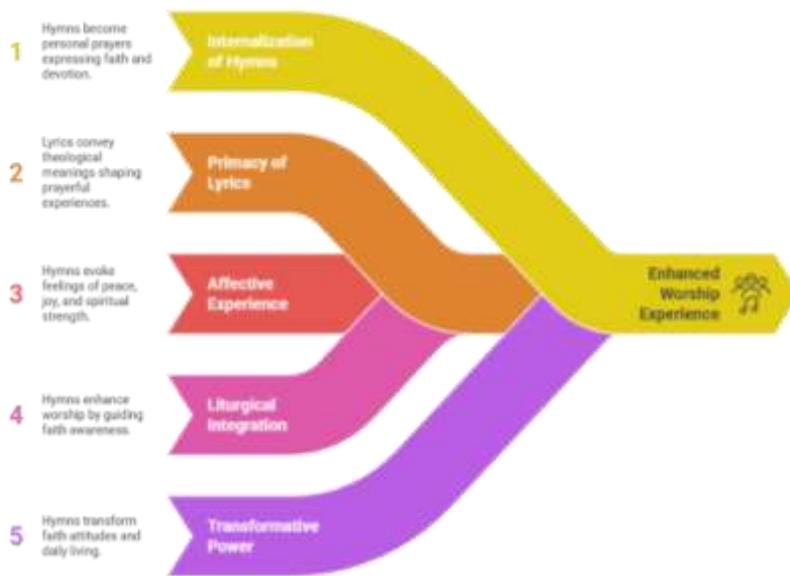


Figure 1. The appreciation of singing as prayer in worship

Internalization of hymns as prayer. Singing is understood as personal and communal prayer. Singing becomes a means for the congregation to express their hearts collectively without losing personal depth. Prayer is no longer limited to spoken words, but also to lyrics sung together. In this context, singing functions as the living and dynamic language of church prayer. The church not only ‘‘speaks’’ to God, but also ‘‘sings’’ to Him.

Primacy of lyrics as a theological medium. Song lyrics serve as theological texts that articulate faith, confession of sins, hope, and praise. When lyrics are profound and contextual, congregations are able to internalise messages of faith on an existential level. Songs become a means of grounded theological reflection, rather than merely symbolic repetition. The quality of lyrics has direct implications for the quality of congregational prayer (Hutasoit, 2023; Sinaga, 2025).

Affective experience of the divine presence. Singing creates a space for inner encounter with God. The experience of God’s closeness does not always occur through sermons or spoken prayers, but rather through songs that touch the congregation's life experiences. In singing, the congregation experiences forgiveness, comfort, and

strengthening of faith. Singing becomes a spiritual locus where faith is experienced, not just understood. This is where singing functions as a transformative spiritual practice.

Integration of hymns within the liturgical structure. The placement of hymns at specific liturgical moments functions to prepare, guide, and deepen the congregation's faith awareness throughout the worship service. The close relationship between singing and liturgical structure. Songs placed at strategic moments of worship such as confession of sins, profession of faith, and preparation for the Word have a strong formative power on faith.

Singing helps the congregation to gradually organise their hearts and awareness of faith. Singing is not an additional element in the liturgy, but an integral part of the spiritual dynamics of worship. Liturgical music and singing are understood as symbols of faith that are "inseparable from the life of faith and daily life" and are an effective means for the faithful to express and experience the mystery of God (Dwiputra Malla & Pius Manik, 2023).

The transformative power of hymns in faith life. Hymns experienced as prayer contribute to the formation of attitudes, perseverance in faith, and how believers perceive God and live out their daily faith. The function of singing as a means of transforming faith life. Singing does not stop in the worship space, but resonates in the daily lives of the congregation.

Songs that are experienced as prayers shape attitudes of trust, steadfastness, and hope in facing the realities of life. The singing in worship at GKI Solafide Sereh can be understood as living prayers that are sung, experienced, and lived out. Singing becomes a theology that breathes in the practice of the congregation's faith.

3.2. Singing Contributes to the Formation of Faith

The experience of singing in worship is a living prayer experience. Singing brings a sense of peace, inner calm, relief, and spiritual joy, especially when done with a willing heart. Singing is not understood as a mere physical activity, but as an inner expression that directs oneself to God. However, some informants emphasised that this experience is highly dependent on one's state of heart and personal sincerity. The contribution of singing to faith begins with an individual's open spiritual disposition. Spiritual songs "warm" the words of prayer so that they touch the heart and make people more receptive to the word and inner repentance (Campeato, 2023).

The words or lyrics of a song are the main factor that makes a song understandable as a prayer. Lyrics are seen as a direct representation of praise, thanksgiving, confession of sins, and surrender to God. The melody and atmosphere of worship play a supporting role, but do not determine the meaning of the prayer itself. This shows that songs function as texts of faith that are internalised through repetition and contemplation. Songs become a means of faith formation through sung theological language. Church music combines emotionally touching melodies with lyrics that are 'embedded as knowledge in the mind', shaping the character and way of thinking of faith, both personally and communally (Moon, 2024)

Regarding the expression "those who sing well pray twice," informants interpreted it as an invitation to sing with sincerity, appreciation, and sincerity. Singing well is not understood in a technical musical sense, but rather in terms of the spiritual quality of congregational participation. Singing with feeling is considered to deepen the quality of prayer because it involves the heart, mind, and voice as a whole. Worship songs are understood as a confession of faith in God's work in daily life; songs become a pattern of gratitude and testimony, not merely a liturgical element (Patasik, 2022). In the

context of worship, this expression emphasises that singing is not a complement to prayer, but an intensive form of prayer. Singing contributes directly to the deepening of the congregation's faith practice.

Certain songs have a strong formative power on faith because they touch on the existential experiences of the congregation. Songs with themes of confession of sin, God's faithful love, hope, and surrender become very meaningful spiritually. These songs help them pray, reflect, and renew their relationship with God. In fact, some songs become references of faith that are remembered outside of worship. The results of the study show that songs contribute to the formation of individual and congregational faith in church life.

Table 1.1. Songs that contribute to the formation of individual and congregational faith in church life

No	Song Title (based on informant)	The Function of Spirituality	Contribution to the Formation of Faith	The Dimensions of Faith that are Formed
1	Nyanyian Rohani No. 137 – <i>“Sudah Kudapat Sayang Tuhan”</i>	Confession of sins and acceptance of grace	Cultivating awareness of God's love that remains present even though humans are sinful	Personal faith, humility, gratitude
2	Nyanyian Rohani No. 176 – <i>“Dunia Dalam Rawa Payah”</i>	Prayer for life's struggles	Strengthening faith amid difficult and challenging realities of life	Faith, hope and surrender
3	Nyanyian Rohani No. 55 – <i>“Hati Ku Beriman”</i>	Christological confession of faith	Strengthening faith in Jesus Christ and the meaning of His sacrifice	Doctrinal faith and personal commitment
4	<i>“Tuhan Adalah Gembalaku”</i>	Comfort and care	Forming complete trust in God as the guardian of life	Faith, trust and security
5	<i>“Hidup Ini Adalah Kesempatan”</i>	Reflections on life and the ethics of faith	Cultivating awareness of life as a gift and a responsibility of faith	Ethical faith and awareness of one's calling in life
6	<i>“Saya Mau Iring Yesus”</i>	Statement of faith commitment	Forming an attitude of obedience and decision to follow Christ	Faith, commitment and obedience
7	<i>“Tenanglah Kini Hatiku”</i>	Prayer for inner peace	Providing peace and inner strength in struggles	Emotional faith and inner strength
8	<i>“Kuperlukan Juruselamat (I Need a Savior)”</i>	Prayer for safety	Instilling an awareness of total dependence on Christ	Soteriological faith
9	<i>“Penolong Yang Setia”</i>	Prayer of hope	Developing a surrendered faith when facing dead ends	Faith, trust and hope

10	Mazmur 133 – “ <i>Sungguh Alangkah Baik dan Indahnnya</i> ”	Communal praise and brotherhood	Strengthening the congregation's faith in fellowship and unity in church life	Communal and ecclesial faith
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Table 1.1 shows that songs that contribute to the formation of faith are not neutral, but rather have theological, pastoral, and formative functions. Singing becomes a medium for the formation of faith because it works in three areas simultaneously: cognitive (understood faith), affective (experienced faith), and praxis (lived faith). Romans 12:1–2 explains, “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice... Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” This text emphasises that faith encompasses renewal of the mind (cognitive), surrender (affective), and transformation of life (praxis). Singing in worship serves as a means of simultaneously touching on all three aspects. Through lyrics, faith is understood; through appreciation, faith is felt; and through liturgical repetition, faith is directed to be lived out. Singing is not an additional element in worship, but rather a spiritual praxis that shapes the whole of the life of faith.

Another interesting finding is the role of singing in shaping faith, both personally and communally. Singing is understood as a means of shaping faith because it contains a theological pedagogical function that works subtly but deeply. Through lyrics, songs teach values of faith such as confession of sin, grace, hope, surrender, and obedience to God. Unlike discursive doctrinal teaching, singing conveys theology in symbolic, poetic, and repetitive language so that faith values are not only understood intellectually, but internalised in the memory and consciousness of the congregation.

The repetition of hymns in worship helps congregations to “learn” faith through their bodies and voices, ensuring that theology does not remain merely a concept, but rather a confession of faith that is spoken and experienced together. Hymns serve as living theological texts that shape the way congregations understand God, themselves, and the world.

Furthermore, singing organises spiritual emotions and builds awareness of God's presence in worship experiences. Emotions such as fear, gratitude, repentance, hope, and joy are not suppressed, but rather directed through song towards a right relationship with God. In this process, singing creates an affective space that allows the congregation to experience God's presence personally and communally.

Awareness of God's presence does not arise solely from emotional stimulation, but from an inner encounter facilitated by meaningful lyrics and sincere contemplation. Singing serves as a spiritual medium that integrates faith that is understood, felt, and lived out, thereby forming a mature faith that is deeply rooted in the daily lives of the congregation.



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Figure 2. Singing's Role in Faith Development

In the context of the congregation, singing together creates a sense of community and collective faith identity. Songs that nurture faith are characterised by a balance between cognitive (theological content) and emotive (heart-moving) elements in their lyrics and melody (Bulakh, 2025; Tnsing et al., 2015). Singing not only shapes individual faith, but also strengthens relationships between congregations as the body of Christ. Singing serves as a practice of faith that is both personal and ecclesial.

4. CONCLUSION

Singing in worship at GKI Solafide Sereh is understood and experienced by the congregation as a form of prayer that is alive and theologically meaningful. Singing is not merely understood as a musical activity or a complementary element of liturgy, but as a relational medium that enables an inner encounter between the congregation and God. The experience of singing brings a sense of peace, joy, comfort, and closeness to God, especially when done with a willing heart and sincere appreciation.

The lyrics of the songs have proven to be the most decisive element in making singing a form of prayer, as they function as a language of faith that expresses confession of sin, gratitude, hope, and surrender. In certain liturgical moments such as confession, profession of faith, and praise, singing becomes a meditative space that bridges the concrete life experiences of the congregation with divine reality, so that faith is not only understood, but also experienced affectively and existentially.

Furthermore, singing contributes significantly to the formation of individual and congregational faith in church life. Singing shapes faith personally through the internalisation of theological values, the processing of spiritual emotions, and the strengthening of faith dispositions in facing life's struggles. Communal singing fosters a sense of togetherness, collective faith identity, and awareness as the body of Christ worshipping in one voice and one hope.

Certain songs that are experienced as prayers serve as a reference point for faith that continues to live outside the worship space, influencing the way the congregation views God, themselves, and their daily lives. The theological meaning of *qui bene cantat, bis orat* in the context of GKI Solafide Sereh is realised in a tangible way: songs that are sung with sincerity not only deepen prayer, but also shape a faith that is alive, growing, and bearing fruit in the practice of church life.

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