



Intersection of African Indigenous and Christian Ethics in Fanny Crosby's Hymns: Yoruba Cultural Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study set within the context of Yoruba cultural perspective, explores the complex mantle of African indigenous and Christian ethics embedded in the hymns of Fanny Crosby (1820–1915). Bridging the gap in the literature that have analyzed Crosby's deep-rooted work in Christian theology, the authors argue that the ethical values and moral teachings epitomized in her hymns significantly resonates the indigenous ethics of the Yoruba people, one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. Through a qualitative analysis of four of Fanny Crosby's hymns, this study identifies thematic counterparts between Crosby's Christian ethics and the Yoruba concepts of "iteriba" (submission), "ojúàáńú" (mercy), "ifèniarajin" (commitment), and "ifè" (love) which form the philosophy of interpersonal relationships and community life of indigenous people. The methodology of the study combines ethnographic study with thematic and interpretive phenomenological analysis to evaluate the ethical connotation of the sampled hymns that agrees with Yoruba moral values. The findings opined that while Crosby's hymns communicate Christian ethical values, its translation to Yoruba language echoes the indigenous moral imperatives of indigenous people, thereby encouraging a cross-cultural ethical interaction. The study contributes to the broader discourse on intercultural theology and ethics and opens new avenues for investigating the influence of African indigenous thought on Christian practices.

Keywords: Fanny Crosby, Hymns, Christian ethics, Indigenous ethics, Yoruba culture

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INTRODUCTION

Fanny Crosby (1820–1915), a prolific female American hymnist (Boothe, 2011), has a world acclaimed of over 8,000 hymns for Christian worship to her credit (Albertson, 1992). Some of these hymns have been translated to vernacular languages for easy worship of indigenous groups, including Yoruba language of the southwestern people of Nigeria. The study of hymnody as a propeller of theological expression and ethical instruction (Bjorlin, 2014), provides a formidable background for the exploration of the convergence of cultural and spiritual beliefs. Church Hymns were considered viable medium of transferring essential biblical messages, as well ascertain pro-social virtues of caring for the poor who constituted most of its audience (Blumhofer, 2005).

The analysis of Fanny Crosby's hymns within the context of Yoruba cultural ideology, gives a captivating perception of the intersection between African indigenous and Christian ethics. Her hymns, characterized by deep spirituality and emotional expressiveness, consistently echoes the themes of faith, submission, mercy, commitment, and love of God towards humanity. These themes find a unique replication in the Yoruba concepts of "itẹ́ríba" (submission), "ojúNàánú" (mercy), "ifẹ́niarajin" (commitment), and "ifẹ́" (love), presenting a novel dimension of understanding the trans-cultural and ethical depth of Crosby's hymns. The authors through the interdisciplinary analytical tools of ethnomusicology, thematic analysis, and interpretive phenomenological analysis attempt to dissect the intersection of Crosby's hymnody with Yoruba ethical principles by focusing on the highlighted unique Yoruba cultural concepts. The study argues for the significance of the identical themes in the context of global Christianity and the sustainability of indigenous ethical values, emphasizing the interplay between universal religious principles and community cultural expressions that serves as a constant fount of theological and ethical creativity.

Literature Review

Hartly, (2023), on the viability of the retrospect analysis of Fanny Crosby's hymns from 'entertainment education perspective opined that Crosby as one of the Christian hymnists played a crucial role as persuasive collaborator of theological communication strategy. He concluded that Crosby's hymns are functional, accessible, and effective communication tool of revival in the 19th century. Fanny Crosby is referred to as the blind seer (Cohen, (2017), whose hymns is believed to potentially shine light into the darkened hope of her audience. The theme of love, mercy, submission, and commitment were

central to her creativity. The content of her song text were based on Christian ethics which are rooted in biblical principles that connect the saved soul with God, transforms him and affects his interaction with other human beings. Clyde, (2014) described Christian ethics as the culmination of individual and interpersonal relationships informed by the social structures of human beings living in a community for nourishment purposes. His description of honour (submission) as a biblical ethos, affirms the "principle of sphere sovereignty" (Ex 20:12) "Honour your father and your mother...." As well as respect for lawful authority (1 Pet 2:17). The biblical principle of love as recorded in (Matt 22:26–40; Mark 12:28–31; Luke 10:25–27; cf. Gal 5:14), is a commandment of wholehearted love for God and selfless love for humanity. Vitz in his study on the "Affective-Motivational aspects of the second love command" argued that Christ's second love command transcend the volitions and actions of being Christ-like in relating with divinity, it includes affective motivational dispositions of Christ-likeness towards human beings demonstrated from a merciful heart (Vitz, 2017). In Ficek, (2021, p.1), Cardinal Wyszyński's personality concept of social life was discoursed by the author as commitment and fidelity shaped by Christian ethics of love, mercy, and social justice that complements nature, forming "the good of the human person's goodness, both in the individual and social dimension". The Bible teaches that love should not be reduced to mere emotions, but rather should be seen as an indispensable attribute and consistent lifestyle. Carnell, 2007 describe "spiritual approach to God" as an experience that permeates human rational mind to his spiritual being. He attributed the supernatural encounter to the development and application of "knowledge by moral acceptance".

Fanny Crosby's hymn diligently transmits this Christian ethics and are translated to several languages across the world to bring the message of the gospel closer to indigenous people especially in Africa. This proved effective as the theme of the hymns align with African indigenous communal ideologies. From the African indigenous ethics perspective, the philosophy of communalism that esteems the well-being of the community over individual's feeling aligns with Christian ethics of fellowship as embedded in God's kind of love, mercy, submission, and commitment. For example, the biblically grounded Yoruba ethics that promotes the concepts of "itẹ́ríba" (submission), "ojúáánú" (mercy), "ifẹ́niarajin" (commitment), and "ifẹ́" (love) prioritize peaceful coexistence among indigenous people (Abioje, 2013). Yoruba cultural ethic has "itẹ́ríba" (submission) as an integral part of the Omolúábí concept of the Yoruba social life. It is otherwise translated as respect and honour. Yoruba children at early age are taught to respect

everyone especially the older ones (Fayemi,2009). Usually demonstrated by *idobalẹ* and *ikunlẹto* greet elders. “*Idoba lekii se iwa, sugbon o suwon*” meaning (while reverential greetings are nice, it cannot be misplaced for noteworthy character). More relevant is the reverence Yoruba people accord God as the *Olódùmarè* who is the “All in all” (Baëta, 1963; Bewaji, 1998). Yoruba concept of love though connected to the worship of *Osun* the “river goddess” (Omojola, 2011), its life application as well as commitment and mercy are expressed in the interpersonal relationship of people within the concept of *Iwa* and *Ebi* as opined by Jegede and Afatakpa, (2002).

It is on these background that this study argues that the translation of Fanny Crosby's hymns into Yoruba language come with its potential thematic and interpretive alignment with Yoruba socio-cultural ethics. The content of the translated texts in most cases are not direct interpretation of words but rather a deep interpretation of the inherent message of the hymn. The interpreters may have had a concern for cultural

understanding of the converted indigenes to ensure effective Christian worship.

The intersection of Christian and Yoruba cultural ethics

The shared principles and values between Christianity and Yoruba culture is informed by their emphasis on how people ought to interact with God and man. Submission to God and one another through collective worship is core to Crosby's hymns. For example, her hymns- "Blessed Assurance" and "I am Thine oh Lord" speaks to a shared faith and communal joy in Christ's salvation similar to Yoruba philosophy of commitment "ifèniarajin" and submission "itèrìba" to higher authority for the good of all. While her Hymn "Praise Him, Jesus Our Blessed Redeemer" tells of reciprocating God's love through fellowship and praise. The cry of the desperate humanity for mercy to the God of mercy and grace is epitomized in her song "Pass me not, Oh gentle saviour".

Song Examples and Discussions

Example 1

Blessed Assurance O Damiloju, Mo Ni Jesu

STANZAS	ENGLISH	YORUBA
1	Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine; Oh, what a foretaste of divine glory Heir of salvation, purchase of God, Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.	<i>Ó dá mi l'ójú t'èmini Jesúsù Itowo adun orun l'eyije Mo di ajogúnì gbàlà nlá Èjẹ̀ Rẹ̀ wẹ̀ mí, a tún mí bí.</i>
Chorus	This is my story, this is my song, Praising my Savior all the day long. This is my story, this is my song, Praising my Savior all the day long.	<i>Èyí n'ítàn à t'orin mi Ng'ó yin Olùgbàlà mi tíí Èyí n'ítàn à t'orin mi N'ó yin Olùgbàlà mi tíí</i>
2	Perfect submission, perfect delight, Visions of rapture now burst on my sight; Angels descending, bring from above Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.	<i>'Teríba pípe, ayò pípe, Mo ríran ògò ipadabò Rẹ̀ Àngèlì mú 'hìn sòkalẹ̀ wá Tí ifẹ̀ à t'aamú Rẹ̀ sí mí.</i>
3	Perfect submission, all is at rest, I in my Savior am happy and blest; Watching and waiting, looking above, Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.	<i>'Teríba pípe, isinmini Èmi 'nu Krístì, mod'eni ayò Mo f'ojú s'òná, fún bíbò Rẹ̀ Kí ore Rẹ̀ má fì mí sílẹ̀. Amín.</i>

Example 2

Praise Him, Jesus Our Blessed Redeemer

È yìn! è yìn! Jèsù Olurapàdàawa

STANZAS	ENGLISH	YORUBA
1	<p>Praise Him! praise Him! Jesus, our blessed Redeemer! Sing, ye saints! His wonderful love proclaim!</p> <p>Hail Him! hail Him! mightiest angels in glory; Strength and honor give to His holy name!</p> <p>Like a shepherd, Jesus will feed His people, In His arms He carries them all day long;</p> <p>O ye saints that live in the light of His presence, Praise Him! praise Him! ever in joyful song!</p>	<p><i>È yìn! è yìn! Jèsù Olurapàdàawa Kí ayé k'ókiki ìfẹ̀ Rẹ̀ nlá Fì ìyìn fun, èyin Àngẹ̀lì ológo F'olá at'ògof'Órukọ̀ Rẹ̀ nlá B'ólúságùntàn, Jèsù yó tó ọmọ̀ Rẹ̀ Apá Rẹ̀ ló ngbe wọn lojojumo</i></p>
2	<p>Praise Him! praise Him! Jesus, our blessed Redeemer,</p> <p>For our sins He suffered and bled and died; He, our Rock, our Hope of eternal salvation,</p> <p>Hail Him! Hail Him! Jesus, the Crucified; Loving Savior, meekly enduring sorrow,</p> <p>Crowned with thorns that cruelly pierced His brow;</p> <p>Once for us rejected, despised, and forsaken, Prince of Glory, ever triumphant now.</p>	<p><i>È yìn! è yìn! sọ̀ nípatitòbinlá Rẹ̀ È yìn! è yìn! pèlú orinayò.È yìn! è yìn! Jèsù Olurapàdàawa Fun èsẹ̀ wa, Ó t'èjẹ̀ sílẹ̀, Ó kú O'mniapataat'irẹ̀tí igbàlà wa Yin Jèsù tí a kánn'agbelẹ̀bú</i></p>
3	<p>Praise Him! praise Him! Jesus, our blessed Redeemer, Heavenly portals, loud with hosannahs ring!</p> <p>Jesus, Savior, reigneth for ever and ever; Crown Him! crown Him! Prophet and Priest and King!</p> <p>Death is vanquished! Tell it with joy, ye faithful, Where is now thy victory, boasting grave?</p> <p>Jesus lives! No longer thy portals are cheerless; Jesus lives, the mighty and strong to save.</p>	<p><i>Fì ìyìn fun Jèsù tó fara da 'yà wa Ìfẹ̀ àìlòpin, ó sì kúnf'ayò.È yìn! è yìn! Jèsù Olurapàdàawa Kí ariwoayò gba ọ̀run kan Jèsù, Olùgbàlà, jobatití láíláí È yìn! è yìn! gbogbo 'ránsé Ọ̀ba Jèsù npadà bọ̀ pèlú 'şegun lor' ayé AgbaraogofunOlùgbàlà.</i></p>

Example 3

Pass me Not Oh Gentle Savior *Mákojá mi, Olùgbàlà*

STANZAS	ENGLISH	YORUBA
1	Pass me not, O gentle Savior, Hear my humble cry; While on others Thou art calling, Do not pass me by.	<i>Mákojá mi, Olùgbàlà Gbọ adura mi 'Gbàt'Íwọ bá np'elomíràn Máṣekojá mi.</i>
Chorus	Savior, Savior, Hear my humble cry; While on others Thou art calling, Do not pass me by.	<i>Jesù! Jesù! Gbọ adura mi 'Gbàt'Íwọ bá np'elomíràn Máṣekojá mi.</i>
2	Let me at Thy throne of mercy Find a sweet relief; Kneeling there in deep contrition, Help my unbelief.	<i>N'itẹ́ ǎǎnú jẹk'émírí Ìtura dídun T'edun-t'edunn imo wolẹ̀ Jọọ ran mi lọwọ.</i>
3	Trusting only in Thy merit, Would I seek Thy face; Heal my wounded, broken spirit,	<i>N'ìgbékẹ̀lẹ̀ itọ̀yẹ̀ Rẹ Le m'o w'ọ̀jú Rẹ Wọ 'banujẹ ọkan mi sà̀n F'ifẹ̀ Rẹ gba mí. .</i>
4	Thou the spring of all my comfort, More than life to me; Whom have I on earth beside Thee? Whom in heaven but Thee?	<i>'Wọ orísun itúnú mi Jú 'yẹ́ fún mí lọ Tanimoní l'áyẹ, l'ọ̀run Bíkose Íwọ.</i>

Example 4

I am Thine, O Lord *Tìrẹ l'ẹmí ẹ*

STANZAS	ENGLISH	YORUBA
1	I am Thine, O Lord, I have heard Thy voice, And it told Thy love to me; But I long to rise in the arms of faith, And be closer drawn to Thee.	<i>Tìrẹ l'ẹmí ẹ, motigb'óhùn Rẹ. Ò nsọ, ifẹ Rẹ sí mi. Sùgbón mofẹ nde l'ápá ìgbagbó Kí nlè tubò súnmo Q.</i>
Chorus	Draw me nearer, nearer, blessed Lord, To the cross where Thou hast died; Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer, blessed Lord, To Thy precious, bleeding side.	<i>Fà mí mó 'ra, mó 'ra, Oluwa Sí b'agbélébú t'okú Fà mí mó 'ra, mó 'ra, mó 'ra, Oluwa Sí b'ẹjẹ Rẹ t'ó ní 'yẹ.</i>
2	Consecrate me now to Thy service, Lord, By the pow'r of grace divine; Let my soul look up with a steadfast hope, And my will be lost in Thine.	<i>Yà mí sí mímo funi ẹ Tìrẹ Nípa ore ofẹ Rẹ Jékí nfiokanìgbagbó w'òkè K'ifẹ mi tẹ sí Tìrẹ</i>
3	O the pure delight of a single hour That before Thy throne I spend, When I kneel in prayer, and with Thee, my God, I commune as friend with friend!	<i>Ah! Ayò mímo tiwákati kan Tí mo lòní'bi 'tẹ Rẹ Gbà mogbadúra sí Qlórùn mi Mo báa sọrò bí ọrẹ.</i>
4	There are depths of love that I yet may know Ere Thee face to face I see; There are heights of joy that I yet may reach Ere I rest in peace with Thee.	<i>Ìjìnle ifẹ nbe tí nkò lè mò Títí ng'ó kọjá odò Ayò gígati emikò lè sọ Títí ng'ó fi wá sinmi.</i>

Discussion

Interpretive Phenomenological and Thematic Analysis

This approach to the content analysis of the sampled hymns of Fanny Crosby provides the understanding of the songs by Yoruba Christian folks. In combination with hermeneutics, (the art and science of interpretation), it explores how the experiences of the people are interpreted based on their indigenous ethics and principles. Random and unstructured interview with selected Yoruba Christian folks from Orthodox and Pentecostal churches in Lagos and Ibadan revealed that singing the Yoruba version of

Fanny Crosby's hymn inject them with deeper understanding of the message embedded in the songs. Olaitan, one of the respondents noted that “whenever I sing those songs in Yoruba language, my subconscious mind visualises the person of Christ and I begin to act as though He is physically present- by pleading for a touch, Kneeling in submission, or sheading tears of joy”. Olaitan's statement among other similar ones reveals the Yoruba physical expressions when in contact with someone in higher authority or in a position of honour or has the ability to solve problems. Thematic analysis on the other hand entails the identification, analysis, and report patterns

(themes) of data. An in-depth understanding of the data like text content is crucial to generating an appropriate theme and reviewing them for reporting. It basically provides detailed report on the experiences, meanings, and the reality of participants.

Tabular illustration of Yoruba Interpretive Phenomenological and Thematic Understanding

	Hymn	Theme	Yoruba Meaning/Understanding
1	Blessed Assurance	Submission	Jesus submitted his life for me, my response to Him is total submission to His will. (Ancient Yoruba Monarchs and heroes bought freedom for their kingdoms) they are worshiped as ancestors and deities after their death.
2	Praise Him, Jesus Our Blessed Redeemer	Love	Jesus' love and redemption teach believers to love others unconditionally. Gratitude towards the saviour's act of love is consistently demonstrated through ceaseless praise and heart full of love towards others. Praise singing is a cultural phenomenon in Yoruba culture. They attribute more blessing to more praise, "yin ni yin ni ,kenise 'mi"
3	Pass me Not Oh Gentle Savior	Mercy	The Yoruba people refers to God as "Oba Alaanu/ Oluranlowo/ Baba fun omoorukan/ EkunokoOpo"/ All these names depict God's merciful act. He is ever willing to help, but you must call for His intervention. Yoruba people often call for the intervention of the ancestral spirits and deities through sacrifices and supplication sometimes accompanied with tea and outstretched arms.
4	I am Thine, O Lord	Commitment	The act of commitment is a phenomenon in indigenous Yoruba communities. Individuals, families, and clans are often dedicated/committed to the worship of certain gods/deities for several generations. These are usually reflected in their names, dressing and food they eat. The hymn tells of the believer's new choice of dedication/commitment to God in response to his love and gracious acts.

OjúÀánú (Mercy)

Literarily, the Yoruba word *Ojúàánú* translates to "the eyes of mercy" and represents the virtue of compassion, kindness, and empathy towards others. It is an act of compassion that joyfully alleviates the troubles of others. *Ojúàánú* is a critical value of Yoruba cultural ethics of *Omoluàbí* (Oyebade, Azenabor and Shotunde, 2018). Although seemingly silent, it promotes a symbiotic and caring community where members look out for each other. Fanny Crosby's hymns celebrate God's mercy as a fundamental attribute of His personality (See 'Lord, at thy mercy seat 'Hallowed Hymns, New and Old 119 and 'Pass me not, Oh gentle savior' Baptist Hymnal 140). God's mercy reflects His love, forgiveness and grace. The theme of mercy is common in her hymns that narrate the inherence of joy and peace in salvation as the ultimate act of divine rescue from sin and despair. Mercy as a call to Christian living portrays the replication of God's love and mercy to others. This aspect of mercy encompasses the transformative outcome of divine grace on the life of a believer that triggers sincere worship, service, and show of mercy towards others especially through evangelism.

Ifèni Ara Jin (Commitment)

The theme of commitment *Ifèniarajin*, highlights the importance of dedication, loyalty, and steadfastness in all ramifications. It is a necessary virtue in building trust within families, friendships, and the community at large community. Fanny Crosby's hymns often explore the theme of commitment, proposing articulated Christian commitment toward an unwavering trust in God, dedication to service, and a life marked by spiritual integrity (See examples 1-4). Also, Crosby's hymns often encourage believer's commitment to personal holiness and spiritual growth. Her hymn, "Blessed Assurance" includes elements that reflect a commitment to living a life in joyful obedience and assurance in faith. The hymn speaks of a "foretaste of glory divine" and being "washed in His blood," which signifies a consistent cleansing of the soul through the blood of Jesus Christ. A true believer's life is committed to worship and praise. The hymn "Praise Him! Praise Him!" best explains Crosby's commitment to glorifying God through music and poetry, urging believers to join in a life of worship.

Ifé (Love)

The theme of love *Ifé* in Yoruba culture like other cultures of the world encapsulates a broad range of kind and affectionate feelings among people. *Ifé* is foundational to Yoruba ethics, promoting harmony, unity, and peaceful coexistence. It advocates for selflessness, generosity, and the willingness to sacrifice for the good of others, reinforcing the interconnectedness of all community members.

Fanny Crosby's hymn tells of the unwavering love of God. When other forms of love answer to certain conditions, God loves the sinful world by giving His only begotten son Jesus Christ. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8 KJV). It is through this divine love that believers receive grace to be united, give support and care for one another.

Conclusion

In summary, the study analysed the four themes to explore the relationship between universal religious principles and community cultural expressions within the context of global Christianity and the sustainability of indigenous ethical values. The study established through relevant literature that Fanny Crosby's hymns provide a robust tapestry of Christian theology and emotion. Through her hymns, she communicates the fundamentals of Christian faith. The translation of her hymns to vernacular languages for easy worship of indigenous groups, including Yoruba language has tremendously enhanced her impact on the global dissemination of Christian ethics. The analysis of her works within the context of Yoruba cultural ideology, as discussed in this study illustrates the intersection between African indigenous ethics and Christian ethics. Her hymns are saturated with the themes of faith, submission, mercy, commitment and God's love towards humanity are reviewed in the light of the Yoruba concepts of *iteriba*(submission), *ojúàánú* (mercy), *ifèniarajin* (commitment), and *ifé* (love), gives a critical understanding of the trans-cultural and ethical depth of Crosby's hymns.

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