

Analyze a religious song



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The paper "Religious Song Amazing Grace by John Newton" is a wonderful example of an essay on religion and theology. 'Amazing Grace' is probably one of the most popular religious hymns in the world today. The song is particularly popular in the United States as it has become part of the secular music in American society today. It has been identified that the first five stanzas of the song 'Amazing Grace' were written by John Newton (1725-1807) whereas the last and sixth stanza was composed by an unknown author. The song was first published in 1779. John Newton was an English poet and clergyman and the songstresses on forgiveness and redemption and offers hope for the believer that he/she will be saved by God's grace in spite of the sins committed by the person. Rogers was right when he observed that the song contained so much of the personal experiences of the composer himself; for him, John Newton himself as "the self-proclaimed wretch who once was lost but then was found, saved by amazing grace" (Rogers). Many who love the song do so for its melodious tone even though the origin of the melody is unknown. However, it is commonly agreed that the song resembles ancient American folk melodies sung by the slaves. 'Amazing Grace' can be regarded as one of the finest hymns of the time. Hymns are religious songs that praise, adore and offer prayers to any deity or deities. As such, one can notice that the whole song is a Hymn praying God to shower His grace and blessings on the blind humans and to lead man safely. The song can be best understood as an invocation by a devotee who confesses his sins and believes in God's unending mercy. It was God's grace that led the devotee through "many dangers, toils, and snares" and it is the same grace of God that offers him hope now. Similarly, he believes that God's grace can relieve him from all sorts of fears and he trusts in God's

promise. The song also echoes the devotee's strong belief in life after death where he expects to lead " a life of joy and peace". No doubt, the theme of the song and its universal appeal to the listeners has immensely contributed to the wide acceptance and popularity of the song.

The composition of the song and its simple lyrics deserve primary attention when one thinks of the voice, texture, and tune of the hymn. The song is usually sung in chorus with instrumental accompaniment and the melody of the song touches the heart of the listener. In fact, the song can be categorized as a Canata. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines Canata as " a composition for one or more voices usually comprising solos, duets, recitatives, and choruses and sung to an instrumental accompaniment" (Cantata-Definition and More from the Free Merriam-Webster Dictionary). ' Amazing Grace' also is sung in different voices and in various parts of the world the song is rendered with solos and choruses and as recitatives. Similarly, the rhyming words (end rhymes) such as me-see, sound-found, fear-appear, relieved-believed, etc add to the beauty of the song and makes it heartfelt to the hearer as well as the singer.

Similarly, a close analysis of the song convinces one that it has a strophic song form. A strophic song is conceived as " a type of song that has the same melody (tune) but different lyrics (words) for each stanza (strophe)" (Estrella). One can very well see that each of the stanzas in the poem maintains the same tone even though the lyrics vary from one strophe to another. Certain strophic songs do have a refrain that is repeated at the end of each verse. Similarly, there are many today who use the first strophe of the song after each of the other stanzas. Very often, strophic forms are widely being employed for carols, hymns and folk songs and the ' Amazing

Grace' has the qualities of all the three. These strophic characteristics of 'Amazing Grace' have also led to the popular appeal for the song.

It is also worthwhile to compare 'Amazing Grace' with other similar religious songs. There have been a number of popular religious songs such as "From First Mass for Christmas" (performed by Benedictine Monks of the Abbey monasteries), "Behold, I tell you a Mystery", "The trumpet shall sound" and "Hallelujah Chorus" (all the three composed by George Frideric Handel). The first one belongs to the Kyrie song, the second is quite recitative, the third is from Handels Messiah and the Hallelujah song is always sung in choruses. "Behold, I tell you a Mystery" is also a Christian song and the music is provided by Steve James (born 1953), a Welsh Anglican priest. Unlike 'Amazing Grace' the song is quite recitative and the repetition of such words as 'mystery', 'victory', 'changed', 'more', and 'sound' makes the song capturing. Similarly, the Hallelujah Chorus Hymn is regarded as one of the finest choruses and the song, like the 'Amazing Grace', is a hymn of praise and worship. Both of these songs were composed by G. F. Handel, one of the greatest European composers during the Baroque period of the 18th century and he is widely known for his oratorio Messiah.

To conclude, there are a number of reasons why one is lured by the song 'Amazing Grace'. Much of the song's popularity lies in its composing where John Newton has employed simple diction and rhyming words that provide a rhythmic quality to the song. Similarly, the melodious effect of the song is enhanced by the strophic form and the canata characteristics. Above all, the universal theme and message conveyed by the hymn add to the devotional touch of the song which enables everyone to immerse in the rendering from the depth of their hearts.