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# **SPIRITUALITY: WORSHIP MUSIC IN NORWEGIAN CONTEXT**

## ***A QUALITATIVE STUDY: PHILOSOPHICAL VIEWS of WORSHIP in HILLSONG CHURCH OSLO***

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## ABSTRACT

The rise of popular music used in praise & worship in Contemporary Pentecostalism challenges the level of impact in a consumer-oriented culture. Research has shown that many philosophical and theological issues come to the surface as culture is never neutral. This study aims to analyze how the members of Hillsong Church Oslo experience the impact of praise & worship on their lives. I investigated the people's experiences; thus, this thesis used interviews and participant-observation methods to gather the material. Based on the data gathered, I examine three factors to answer the main research question of this thesis.

Firstly, I argue the significance of proper understanding about praise & worship of the participating member. It means further that a member should understand the purpose of singing praise & worship, leading to proper preparation in all aspects. This kind of preparation will lead to proper focus during Sunday services.

Secondly, I argue the importance of a personal relationship between the participating member and God as access to the presence of God. It conveys that the singing of praise & worship is an overflow of how a member lives in daily life. In this way, the primary function of singing praise & worship, which is to meet God, is accessible for those devotees. Thus, the singing of praise & worship impacts the devotees – those who have a relationship with God.

Lastly, I examine the entire congregation as a collaborative relationship that requires unity during praise & worship. The unity in the singing of praise & worship signifies vulnerability, openness, acceptance, a sense of belongingness of the participating member. In this way, a relational community is developed to create commitments and modes of bonding among the members.

Based on these findings, there are three modes on how the members of Hillsong Church Oslo experience the impacts of praise & worship on their lives as follows: **A) congregants' proper understanding of praise & worship, B) congregants' personal relationship with God, C) congregants' unity.**

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

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*“Music is indeed the mediator between the spiritual life and sensual life.”*

*-Ludwig Van Beethoven*

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In this thesis, I will discuss worship as part of spirituality in a Pentecostal context. Pentecostalism is a big denomination with many different churches; thus, I have chosen the megachurch Hillsong. The fact that the Hillsong church is rooted in an old Pentecostal group (Assemblies of God), I will dig deeper into its root and give background as key concepts of this study. The founder and senior pastor of the Hillsong church in Sydney, Brian Houston, together with his wife, Bobbie Houston, had the vision to expand the Hillsong church from Sydney to big cities worldwide. That vision became true. There are Hillsong churches worldwide, and Hillsong Oslo is one of them – the field of my research.

Klaver (2018) states that Hillsong Church is a big-foot congregation and serves as an example of the term “branding of religion”. The branding of religion implies that Hillsong Church is a franchise like McDonald's, Burger King, and many others. The expansion of Hillsong could be analyzed by what Ritzer has described as a form of McDonaldization, which means as a feature of globalization, observed in the values of efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. Through this concept, Miranda Klaver further states:

*“Hillsong seems to adopt a religious franchise model neglecting the diversity of cultural contexts and bringing a form of decontextualized Christianity” (Klaver, 2018 p.3)*

As a global religious brand, Hillsong Church is known for its worship music (Wagner, 2019). It is one of Hillsong's strengths that has magnetized the consumers in the market of religion. The distribution of worship music through uploaded videos and live stream on (hereafter “YouTube”), broadcast television, and worldwide concert tours enabled them to penetrate the global markets (Marti, 2017). Hillsong church is now a worldwide phenomenon and considered a dominant producer of worship music globally (Riches T. & Wagner T., 2018).

Furthermore, the worship music that Hillsong has produced is used by Pentecostal churches worldwide during Sunday gatherings.

I am passionately curious about the deeper understanding of worship music and the practice hereof inside the church. I am eager to know about praise & worship as an element in weekly services and its impact on the members' lives. Therefore, my empirical research will focus on praise & worship in Hillsong Church Oslo context.

### *1.1 Thematic Focus and Research Question*

The general theme of this thesis is Spirituality: Worship Music in a Norwegian context. This huge concept is considered as my starting point to conduct empirical research. As it is a vast concept, I have chosen a specific topic that will be discussed in this thesis focusing on the singing of praise & worship in Hillsong Church Oslo. The complexity of the chosen topic drives my wish to understand it in a deeper sense. I want to find out the modes of impact during praise & worship as part of the services in Hillsong Church Oslo. I want to analyze the striking force that affects upon the lives of the participating members. It led me to the questions underneath.

- a) What is the understanding of praise & worship in Hillsong Church Oslo's context?*
- b) What are the members' expectations in Hillsong Church Oslo during the praise & worship part of the service?*
- c) What are the elements of good praise & worship in Hillsong Church Oslo's context?*
- d) What are the impacts of singing praise & worship?*

Based on these questions, I have developed my main research question that is to be answered in this thesis:

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*How do the members of Hillsong Church Oslo experience the impacts of praise & worship on their lives?*

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## 1.2 Motivation

My driving force for choosing this research project is a deeper understanding of the essence of praise & worship during services in Pentecostal churches. Singing praise & worship in Pentecostal congregations is the thing that fascinates me the most because I enjoy listening to different music on YouTube in my solitude. Hillsong Church is one of the global and popular brands in the religious market that produces their own worship songs, and this ignites my curiosity. Furthermore, I found only one published research about Hillsong Church Norway. My desire and hope for this thesis are to bridge the gap in the literature and satisfy my curiosity at the same time.

Worship music in Hillsong Church services makes them attractive to the attendees (Kleiveland, 2018). As I visited the official website of Hillsong, watched and listened to a particular song they published online on YouTube, it drew my attention even more. It was not the first time that I listened to their music, but when I heard the song entitled “What A Beautiful Name”, I thought in the back of my mind that something was interesting in this kind of music. The idea of researching worship music and spirituality has started at that very moment.

Music is one of the menus in Hillsong website wherein we can see worship tour concerts and announcements worldwide for the Hillsong Australia team. The concert worldwide is one of the bridge events to promote the church in collaboration with the local worship teams. It appears to me that singing songs is essential for them too. Is singing praise & worship that important? Is there something more than just singing the songs? Does the experience of singing worship songs in Hillsong Church make an impact on their lives? An American blogger named Ed Stetzer states:

*“You can’t talk about Hillsong without talking about the music. Even churches that are not like Hillsong Church - or even dislike the church – use and love their music. That’s the key part of the global growing influence of Hillsong. It’s simple. Books change minds, but songs change hearts, and that’s central to Hillsong’s influence... They’ve focused their music on a universal idea that God is worth praising, and since all Christians agree on that, Christians around the world embrace Hillsong Music even if they don’t know much about Hillsong Church.” (Riches, T. et al., 2017 p.145)*

### *1.3 The Origin of Hillsong Oslo*

The Hillsong Church is a denomination rooted in one of the biggest Pentecostal churches from the 20th century, the Assemblies of God in the United States of America (Marti, 2017). The Hillsong Church began as “Hills Christian Life Centre” in 1983. Later they changed the name to “Hillsong”, which is a combination of its birthplace- the Hills district in Sydney and the songs that it is famous for (Wagner, 2019). It was founded by the couple Brian and Bobby Houston. The church operates independently even though it is a member of the Australian Assemblies of God. It has expanded outside Australia since 1990, and Hillsong Oslo is part of it (Klaver, 2018).

Recent research confirmed that Brian Houston made his first visit in Norway in 1994. He visited Oslo Christian Church (OKS), one of the Pentecostal congregations in Oslo and from there established a strong connection. It is further believed that he visited around ten more times to build a long-term friendship with the OKS and cast his vision of expanding Hillsong all over the cities of Norway (Kleivelend, 2018). It is the process of globalization that Klaver (2018) has mentioned as well. These consistent visits of Brian Houston made to OKS can be viewed as a strategy to fulfill the vision of expanding the Hillsong church. The Hillsong family in Norway has started to gather in theaters as Intro Church. Intro Church then went on to plant other churches in some cities of Norway, and they officially became part of the Hillsong family by 2017 (Kleiveland, 2018).

### *1.4 Earlier Studies of Hillsong Megachurch*

Much research has been published about the Hillsong Church in general, but I have found only one that focused on Hillsong Norway. It is written by Silje Sævareid Kleiveland, entitled “A Journey Towards Hillsong Church A Norwegian Story”. The study outlines why the members, especially the youth, are attracted to Hillsong Church. Kleiveland (2018) found that one contributing factor is the good musical experience during the service. Music is one reason why the church members enjoy being in church gatherings and make the church itself attractive to churchgoers.

Kleiveland (2018) has mentioned the same song that I listened to as my key point in conducting this study, “What A Beautiful Name”. This song, produced by Hillsong music, won a Grammy Award in the year 2018 with millions of views on YouTube. Underneath are the lyrics of the song:

*<sup>1</sup>“You are the word at the beginning  
One with God the Lord Most High  
Your heaven glory in creation  
Now revealed in You our Christ*

*What a Beautiful Name It is  
The Name of Jesus Christ My King  
What a Beautiful Name It is  
Nothing compares to this  
What a Beautiful Name It is  
The Name of Jesus*

*You didn ’t want heaven without us  
Jesus You brought heaven down  
My sin was great Your love was greater  
What can separate us now*

*You have no rival  
You have no equal  
Now and forever God Your reign  
Yours is the Kingdom  
Yours is the Glory  
Yours is the Name above all Names”  
(Hillsong Worship)*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQWFzMvCfLE>. Accessed: January 29, 2020

This study aims not to promote the worship music produced by Hillsong Worship nor to interpret one of their songs. However, this song makes an impact somehow, which made it one of the most popular on YouTube. This given example of a worship song can be an inspiration tool that will impact one's faith and declaration of what one believes. In this way, as a researcher, I will be inspired even more in doing empirical research about the singing of praise & worship in Hillsong Church Oslo.

Another study that I read is a study by Miranda Klaver entitled "Global Church Planting in the Middle Age: Hillsong Church". In her study, she mentioned how Hillsong as a megachurch expanded in the process of globalization. The geographic expansion of Hillsong uses the same marketing techniques of entertainment and branding as other franchise systems. In the 1990s, the Hillsong was renowned for its music with their first released album entitled "Shout to the Lord" led by Darlene Zschech. The Hillsong music became the leading Christian music in the English-speaking world from then on. It became one of the tools to leverage Hillsong in the market. The global success of Hillsong music is undeniable. The global concert tours of the Hillsong's bands (the Hillsong United and Hillsong Young & Free) boosted the success and popularity of Hillsong worldwide. (Klaver, 2018)

Miranda Klaver mentioned in her studies that, "the key attraction for visitors is the Hillsong band and the music" (Klaver, 2018 p.8). This statement shows the similarity of Kleiveland's study in Hillsong Norway, as she states that music is one of the reasons that attract the believers, especially the youth in Hillsong Church Norway (Kleiveland, 2018).

Klaver (2018) & Kleiveland (2018) both showed interest in globalization as the general theme of their studies. Globalization is not the main focus of my thesis; however, both of these studies stress worship music which connects to my field of interest. Based on these as well, it shows that worship music indeed impacted the Pentecostal/charismatic churches globally. The findings of their studies widen my perspectives and help me navigate the chosen topic.

## *1.5 Background & Key Concepts of the Study*

In this part, I briefly discuss the key concept terms in this study and a short background of singing as a ritual practice in Pentecostal worship. Further, I discuss the short overview on how the singing of songs in Pentecostalism started and how it was developed overtime. This is to give a clear picture of the complex terms used in this thesis.

### **1.5.1 Singing Background: Pentecostal Worship**

Singing in Pentecostal worship is one of the elements during the gathering that is being stressed by some scholars, especially in contemporary churches around the globe. It is an essential element not just in these present days but ever since the beginning of Pentecostalism. During the 20th century, the Pentecostal Black American community gathered on Azusa Street, which is known to be a solid foundation of this ritual practice (Dowley, 2011). The Azusa Street movement is viewed as the same works of the Holy Spirit as the first apostles of Jesus Christ experienced on the day of Pentecost, written in the Bible, in the book of Acts chapter 2. The parallelism of these two main events in history became the frame on how and why singing songs inside the church is important this time. So, what happened on Azusa Street in the last 20th century?

#### *1.5.1.1 The Azusa Street: Musical Element*

The Azusa Street Revival movement is indeed a remarkable event for the believers of Pentecostalism not just in the United States of America but worldwide. This movement impacted the history of Pentecostalism in the entire the world. Again, as it is believed as the works of the Holy Spirit, the believers had their meetings without a preplanned form of worship. Scholars and historians mentioned specific hymns used in the Azusa Street Revival. However, one of the participants in Azusa named Frank Battleman, who is an itinerant evangelist, claimed that “We had no human program” (Dove, 2009 p. 246), and “No subjects or sermons were announced ahead of time and no speakers for such an hour” (Dove, 2009 p.247). Dove (2009) claimed that music is intimately tied in liturgy, but this general idea seemed to be invalid during the Azusa Street Revival movement.

He further stated that the participants were claiming to have no liturgy and incapable of making a program during the service; instead, they just relied on the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The Azusa Street Revival movement was not the same thing that the Pentecostal looks like today when it comes to the musical element of the service gatherings. Unlike modern Pentecostal churches, the Azusa Street Revival movement did not use the same instruments and did not use collections or advertisements. The members of the Azusa Street Revival movement during the 20th century claimed that God gave them the right song at the right time. There was no preparation for the service gathering, and that everything just happened through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It means precisely that there was no human-imposed program and musical preparations beforehand (Dove, 2009).

Thus, the praise & worship like how the Pentecostal Churches do today is not the same as how they did during the Azusa Street Revival. The Azusa Street movement practiced “singing in the Spirit” (Dove, 2009 p. 248). The term “singing in the Spirit” is associated with a worshipper who is believed to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Dove (2009) further described the term “singing in the Spirit” as “the singing of tongues”. The term “singing of tongues” and “speaking of tongues” are both understood as manifestations of being filled with the Holy Spirit. The only difference between the two terms is that the person who is singing of tongue receives a piece of heavenly music made up of sound, while the person who is speaking of tongue receives a different language to speak. As this thesis will be focusing only on the musical element, I will no longer tackle the belief in speaking of tongues.

Therefore, the Azusa Street Revival movement can be viewed as the worshippers during that time were completely dependent on the move of the Holy Spirit. It may mean that the believers were singing songs given only by the Holy Spirit. The leaders never made a structure on how the worship will happen beforehand but instead allowed and waited for the coming and intervention of the Holy Spirit in the service gatherings.

To sum up, the Azusa Street Revival movement displays juxtaposition with the form of worship in this research field- the Hillsong Church, Oslo. (*The Hillsong form of worship will be discussed in Chapter 5*)

It may sound irrelevant to this thesis; however, the focus of this thesis is to analyze how the members of Hillsong Church Oslo experience the impacts of praise & worship on their lives. The Azusa Street Revival movement impacted the lives of the people who were there, and the singing of songs in Pentecostalism was rooted in that movement. It is the same impact that I am searching for to answer the main question of this thesis. Thus, I firmly believe that tracing back the origin of singing in Pentecostalism is relevant. Further, it will help me to explore and widen my perspectives on the chosen topic. As the singing of songs during the Azusa Street Revival movement shows contrast, I will briefly discuss the rise of worship music to connect the form of singing in Pentecostalism nowadays.

#### *1.5.1.2 The Rise of Worship Music in Pentecostalism*

During the 20th century, the form of worship in the Pentecostal group has evolved around the world. From the singing of hymns & psalms, the style of music, the use of instruments, light effects, smoke-machine, etc., all developed into the form of contemporary worship music as we see it today. This exterior equipment, materials, and body movements are considered the form of worship in Pentecostalism (Meyer, 2010). The rise of worship music in Pentecostalism started in the middle of the 20th century, but it became popular in the Christian music industry in the early 1970s. The worship songs by Scripture by David and Dale Garratt in New Zealand and Maranatha Music were introduced and used mainly in Pentecostal/Charismatic groups.

From then, many more songs were produced by Thank You Music, Integrity Music & Vineyards during the 1980s and 1990s (Klaver, 2018). Today, more Christian music groups rise in the music industry posted on YouTube, and one of those is Hillsong music. Hillsong music started to produce songs in 1983 and was led by Geoff Bullock. But they first became well known a decade after, when they released the 1993 album entitled *Shout to the Lord* under the leadership of Darlene Zschech (Riches & Wagner, 2017). After that, many more songs were produced by Hillsong up to this time.

### 1.5.2 Literature Key Concepts

The term spirituality is a vast concept and is defined by different scholars within Christian spirituality. Thus, I would like to focus on understanding of Spirituality according to McGrath (1999), which I believe is the most relevant to the specific topic of this thesis.

*"Spirituality is the outworking in real life of a person's religious faith – what a person does with what they believe in. It is not about ideas. It is about how the Christian life is conceived and lived out. It is about the full apprehension of the reality of God...reflection on the whole Christian enterprise of achieving and sustaining a relationship with God, which includes both public worship and private devotion, and the results of these in actual Christian life" (McGrath, 1999 p. 2)*

He further quoted one of the most relevant definitions of Spirituality by Richard O'Brien that states: "Spirituality has to do with our experiencing of God and with the transformation of consciousness and our lives as outcomes of that experience" (McGrath, 1999 p. 3). Based on the two perspectives, Spirituality is one's living practice of what a person believes in within the course of religion in order to sustain one's relationship with God. Through this practice of belief, a person may experience God, and a person will be changed because of the said experience. Again, as the main goal of this thesis is to analyze how the members of Hillsong Church Oslo experience the impacts of praise & worship, these definitions are useful for me to explore the specific topic in a more profound sense.

#### 1.5.2.1 Pentecostal Spirituality Perspective

As mentioned in the first chapter, the root of Hillsong Church is one of the biggest Pentecostal groups globally, the Assemblies of God. Therefore, it is important to narrow the definition of the term "Spirituality" to "Pentecostal Spirituality". The Pentecostal Spirituality can be understood as "a particular configuration of beliefs, practices, and sensibilities that put the believer in an ongoing relationship with God" (Albrecht, 1999 p. 218). This definition is conveying more specifically in order to grasp spirituality in the Pentecostal context. It shows continuous understanding and parallelism from how McGrath (1999) defines the basic understanding of spirituality as mentioned above.



The two authors imply similar perceptions as spirituality can be understood as what a person does in sustaining the relationship with God (McGrath, 1999). In Pentecostal spirituality, the term is still too broad to define and needs to be narrowed down even more. According to Albrecht (1999), there are six characteristics and qualities that embody Pentecostal Spirituality. They are as follows, leadership, worship, words, gifts, ministry, and missions. In short, the worship ritual practice within Pentecostalism is a small part of a vast concept of spirituality. This thesis will stick to the general theme, Spirituality: Worship Music in the Norwegian context through the church of Hillsong Oslo. Again, as the Hillsong Church Oslo is rooted in Pentecostalism, I will only discuss below one of Pentecostal Spirituality's characteristics/qualities, which is worship.

### *1.5.2.2 Praise and Worship Ritual*

What is the meaning of the term praise & worship? The word praise & worship is complex to define, which causes many varieties of perceptions among Pentecostals. The first word that will come out of one's mind about praise & worship among Pentecostals is music or songs. The term might be misunderstood for some as singing fast and slow songs before the sermon of the preacher. There are misconceptions among Pentecostals as they believe that "praise" songs are those upbeat songs whilst "worship" songs are considered slow songs. On the other hand, the medium tempo is misunderstood as neither praise nor worship or perhaps can be understood as both (Thornton, 2016). The term praise & worship linguistically can be grasped in different meanings.

Based on the research of Albrecht (1999), the word "worship" is perceived as having different meanings. For some, the entire Sunday liturgy can be called a worship service, whilst the verb perception of worship implies adoration of God. The conception of worship as "entire Sunday liturgy" means that all of the elements in the service gathering are served to worship God. It includes praying, singing songs, preaching etc. It causes even more confusion when Contemporary Pentecostalism has developed the term "worship" into 20-30 minutes of singing during services and called it "praise & worship" (Albrecht, 1999).

For instance, Albrecht has mentioned that one of the worship leaders in his field research said: “Let us pray before we begin to worship” (Albrecht, 1999, p. 156). This statement clearly connotes that the worship leader understood singing songs as the only worship to God in service gatherings. It shows that even a worship leader misunderstood the original concept of the term “worship”. So, what is the main concept of worship? Albrecht (1999) clarifies that there are three connotations of worship in Pentecostal understanding, these are as follows:

*“(1) Worship as a way of Christian Life, particularly outside of the church services and activities. All of life is seen as worship, as an expression, a gift, offered to God (2) Worship as the entire liturgy, the whole Pentecostal service and (3) Worship as specific portion, aspect or rite within the overall liturgy.” (Albrecht, 1999 p. 225)*

This thesis will focus primarily on the third understanding of what worship is as it refers to a part of ritual practice inside the church. As mentioned above by Albrecht (1999), this ritual practice was developed by Contemporary Pentecostals. This is the musical element called “praise & worship” during the Pentecostal gathering when everyone is encouraged to join in singing praise & worship to God for 20-30 minutes. He further stated the deeper understanding of worship based on his research as “another way of saying the presence of God” (Albrecht, 1999 p. 226). This understanding of praise & worship by Albrecht (1999) is relevant to understand the functions of singing praise & worship in contemporary Pentecostalism, which is to be tackled underneath.

### ***1.5.2.3 Functions of Praise & Worship Ritual (20-30 minutes)***

During the 20th century, the conceptions of praise & worship vary and are not constant from different Pentecostal churches. It means that the functions follow the way the concept is being perceived. For example, some Pentecostal churches still embrace the function of praise & worship as preparatory for the teaching/sermon of the pastors. It further means that singing songs during services is done before the pastor delivers the sermon to prepare the congregation to receive the message. The singing of songs helps in positioning the heart and mind before hearing the word of God.

Despite the misconceptions that affect the function, the concept of praise & worship -as another way of saying the presence of God (Albrecht, 1999), never ceases in Pentecostalism. Klaver (2016) underpins this concept in her recent study by understanding praise & worship as the presence of God. She mentions the primary purpose of the said ritual based on her understanding stated below:

*“The overall purpose of worship is to experience an immediate and intimate encounter with God- to be in his presence. As Tim, the LGC’s worship leader, explains, “Leading worship is like taking a group of people on a journey. We want to bring them to the place where we can be together with God, so that your heart is connected to the heart of God””*

*(Klaver, 2016 p. 104)*

Klaver (2016) clearly states the function of worship inside Pentecostal gatherings – to experience the divine presence of God. She further mentions that the impact of music and singing plays an important role to the newcomers and converts during her research in Pentecostal churches of the Netherlands. In addition, she stresses that the intense religious experience of the converts can recall is through the praise & worship time during the church service. And that the impact of singing praise & worship inside the Dutch churches is far beyond her anticipations during her research.

Considering the studies of Klaver (2016) & Albrecht (1999), both authors express a similarity of ideas when it comes to the main function of singing worship songs during Pentecostal gatherings. It is now understood that music is one of the iconic ways to experience the divine presence of God. It means that a believer expects to encounter God while singing praise & worship, and through it, one can have deep communion with Him. Considering these concepts, are the members of Hillsong Church Oslo aware of this main function of singing worship songs inside the church?

The goal of this thesis is not to define the key concepts and the terms used. However, I find it relevant to dig deeper into this and get a solid foundation to ask the right questions in conducting my research. It gives me a wider understanding of exploring this thesis and helps me to navigate the chosen topic. Therefore, discussing the key concepts and the terms is necessary for this thesis.

## *1.6 The Structure of the Thesis*

After this introductory part as the first chapter of my thesis, chapter 2 follows. It covers the research methods that I used and how I gathered the material and ethical considerations during my empirical research.

In chapter 3, I discuss the theory that I used to analyze the collected material and answer the main research question. The theory that I used is the concept of aesthetics/sensational forms by Meyer (2010) and Klaver (2016). I explain this theory briefly as my lens in analyzing spirituality in the Pentecostalism context.

In chapter 4, I present my entry into the field. It includes my informants, field observation, personal reflection, and the form of worship in Hillsong Church Oslo.

In chapter 5, I present the data that I've gathered through interviews. It includes the understanding of praise & worship, elements of good praise & worship, expectations of the members, and the impacts of praise & worship on the lives of the members in Hillsong Church Oslo.

In chapter 6, I analyze the data and argue with the application of the theory. In chapter 7 includes the entire discussion of this thesis. It follows the conclusion part in chapter 8, and it follows the need for critical thinking & further research in chapter 9. In chapter 10 will be the references that I've used in this thesis. Chapter 11 includes the appendixes.

## **2 RESEARCH METHODS and ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In this chapter, I tackle the research methods that I've used in this thesis. I state further the tools used in gathering the data, the transcriptions of data and the modes of analyses. Furthermore, I discuss the limitations and ethical considerations in the course of my research.

### ***2.1 Qualitative: Participant Observation***

It is important for me, a researcher, to understand the religious phenomena by participating while observing in the fieldwork to reflect on what people do in a certain group.

The participant observation phase of my research allowed me to focus on observable activities, actual events, and practices inside Hillsong Oslo (Harvey, 2014). To widen my perspectives, I participated at the same time observed the practice and how the people responded to it during services. However, as this thesis aims to understand the members' experiences, I have to bear in mind that this phase of my research requires professional distance to produce objective analysis rather than give my impressions and experiences. (Harvey, 2014) The participant observation phase gives me the chance to engage within Hillsong Church Oslo and paint a clear picture about how the bodily movements of the people and the material that they used during the singing part of the service.

Even though I already had prior knowledge before entering into the field, learning in the field is not always as expected, and therefore, as a researcher, I have to learn systematic recording and taking notes. In this way, I can reflect on the knowledge that I gain that will lead me to a deeper understanding of my subjects. It involves being open to possibilities and careful to allow for unexpected experiences. Furthermore, this stage of my research does not just observe nor participate in what people do, but also involves dialogue. To converse with the people is the necessary step for the success of the project. It requires honesty about being there as a researcher from the beginning, and humility will lead to being trustworthy. Establishing and maintaining friendships occur in this phase as part of the engagement and connection to make my research feasible (Harvey, 2014). In this way, I can build connections in the field by making some prospects to whom I should approach as informants and open good possibilities for gathering data.

## ***2.2 Qualitative: Interviews***

According to Bremberg (2014), interviewing an expert, like a religious leader in a certain group, is believed to be an accurate method in researching people's beliefs and religious experiences. Therefore, I applied expert interviews as one of my tools in gathering the needed data. I have chosen three (3) leaders of the creative/music team in Hillsong Church Oslo as my key persons in the expert interviewing. These three leaders are collaborating in leading the congregation in singing praise & worship on Sundays. My thesis will investigate how the members experience the impacts of praise & worship on their lives. Thus, an interview through the leaders was a helpful instrument for this thesis.

Moreover, I have to combine the said research tool with focus-group interviewing. The focus group-interviewing method is another way to access the minds of the members in Hillsong Church, Oslo. It consists of five (5) members of the church, which I also believed to be a precise method in collecting the data needed. Through this tool, I had the privilege to gather information regarding their perceptions and experiences in singing praise & worship of the church. I had to conduct interviews with the church members to get their perspectives and experiences to analyze further and get the answers that I needed for this thesis. Combining these two types of interviews in gathering my material is my primary tool to analyze the given research question. These two main research tools are designed to use semi-structured interviews.

On the other hand, Brinkmann & Kvale (2018) states that the least number of focus-group interviewing is six (6) individuals and suggests a group discussion. However, I struggled a lot in searching for my informants due to coronavirus restrictions. Further, I have to be flexible with the availability of all my informants, which makes it even more challenging to have a group discussion online.

### **2.2.1 Semi- Structured Interviews**

Since I am asking for the interviewees' experiences, thoughts, feelings and I cannot anticipate what the answers will be, it is vital for me as a researcher to be open-minded and at the same time show flexibility and sensitivity.

This led me to use the semi-structured interview (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). The semi-structured interview is considered to be my guide only in conducting interviews. I bear in mind that I should be open and alert for something that will come up during actual interviews. Moreover, I prepared two (2) sets of questions, one (1) for leaders and one (1) for the focus group as a frame for my interview. I sent a copy to my interviewees when they asked for it beforehand, but most of them are courageous enough to be interviewed without it. The interview aims to analyze how the members in Hillsong Church Oslo experience the impacts of praise & worship in church gatherings on their lives. The experiences of the members may differ from one another. Also, there is a possibility that the perspectives from two groups may contradict each other. Therefore, I have to accept no right and wrong answers in interviewing people's ideas and experiences.

However, I have to make sure that the quality of my material for this thesis will be met. As a researcher, it is my sole responsibility to get the answer that I need. Therefore, the quality of my material lies in my ability to conduct interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). It means that I shall not appear overly confident but rather show attentiveness, keenness, and humility by listening to my interviewees regardless of their answers. Thus, using a semi-structured interview guide and the right attitudes during actual interviews helps me navigate my research in the field and make it even more meaningful and feasible.

### **2.2.2 The Actual Interviews**

I could say that the actual interviews were another exciting and overwhelming part of this empirical research. As the pandemic was still affecting our daily routine, my best option in conducting interviews was online. The fact that I do not have a connection with Hillsong church, and my approach is through social media, created some negative assumptions and mixed emotions beforehand. I may not be comfortable with the idea, but I was excited about the experience as a fieldwork researcher.

During the interviews, I had to make sure that my recording audio is positioned closed to my computer's speaker. I had to make a test of my recording as the first thing that I should do. I introduce myself and let them know a piece of short basic information about me. I prepared some warm-up questions for my interviewees to get to know each other and connect with them on a more intentional level before proceeding to the main interviews.

Afterward, I proceeded to a briefing stage, which is one of the important elements in setting the interview stage. I reintroduced the main topic of my research verbally, briefly told the purpose, used a tape recorder, and asked the interviewee if there are questions in mind before starting the main interview (Kvale, 2007). This is to make sure that my interviewees understand what is going to happen. Also, I allow my interviewees to clarify any confusion before proceeding with the formal interview. In this way, it will increase the quality of the interview.

My first interview was not that satisfying as I was a bit nervous and uncomfortable, which affected the quality of the interview. The first interviewee was very engaged in the conversation, which challenged my ability to produce a quality interview. I just waited for him to be done talking while strategizing how I could stay on track of the interview in a way that would not cause discomfort. However, I was relieved and happy because I learned and knew already what to improve for my next interviewees. I tried to ask for feedback from my first interviewee, if the questions were difficult for him to answer and how I portrayed my role as a researcher. I tried to rephrase some of my questions by making them shorter and easier to understand for my next interviewees. The subsequent interviews became smoother and more comfortable as I learned to embrace and project my role as a researcher. The more I understood the different views from my previous interviewees, the easier it was to navigate the answers I was seeking for the rest of my interviews.

As there is a briefing before starting the interview, there is also a debriefing at the end of the interview (Kvale, 2007). In this stage of interviewing, I asked the interviewee if there was anything more to say, such as important points, for my research. I gave my interviewees the chance to express their experience about the interview to release the tensions as I turned off the recorder. (Kvale, 2007) I let them know that the recorder is off already for them to be comfortable expressing their own selves and express my gratefulness for cooperating in my research.

### **2.2.3 Transcription of the Interviews**

Transcribing qualitative interview material is often stressful and tiresome to do (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). I did the transcription of all the materials that I gathered. And therefore, I could attest that this is indeed tiresome, even if I heard them already, as the quality of the audio recording matters.



I jotted down every single word and edited some grammatical errors but not to the point of altering words or statements that may change the thought of what was being said during the interview. I deleted some unnecessary words, such as “ammhh” or “like” that were repeatedly mentioned in the interview process. I remember the intonations such as pauses, periods, and emotional expressions during the actual interviews. To note the intonations, emotional and facial expression is a key to importance (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). It means that the interviewees' responses should be recorded and/or be observed keenly as it may imply dual or deeper meanings. I should stress how they responded with the tone of their voice and highlight some phrases that express the main points of their statements.

However, as the interviews were online, some factors affect how I transcribed the conversation, especially when there was a disruption with the internet connection. There was an instance when my interviewee was in the depth of our conversation. All of a sudden, we both lost our connection. In that way, we both lost the momentum, and thus the intensity of the emotion, which signifies importance was abrupt. This case might affect the quality of my transcription as I cannot note the tone of the voice, emotions, and facial expressions as Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) suggested. Due to the given situation, I transcribed right away after the interview so that the conversations were still fresh on my mind. In addition, this would help me to double-check how I understood the entire conversation. And most importantly, I had ample time to reflect deeply on the material that I have gathered afterward.

#### **2.2.4 Analyzing Interviews**

According to Brinkmann & Kvale (2018), qualitative research is described as inductive because the researcher will often approach their subjects without too many preconceived ideas to test, but rather the researcher allows the empirical world to decide which questions are worth seeking an answer to. It conveys that the researcher requires to have an ability to observe keenly and examine closely the data gathered as Brinkmann & Kvale further states:

*“Induction is the process of observing and scrutinizing numbers of instances, for example in one’s transcripts, in order to say something general about the given class of instances.”*

*(Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018 p. 118)*

In applying the inductive approach, I analyze the transcripts focusing on meaning with the use of meaning coding and meaning condensation as my modes of interview analysis (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). The meaning coding analysis uses coding and categorizing to analyze the text of the transcription. This approach helps me systematically determine how often my informants address a specific theme in a text. Also, the meaning coding structures the entire interview transcription into few columns of relevant themes in a text (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Further, I analyze the transcription using meaning condensation to formulate a central theme from the long statements of my interviewees. It is to compress by rephrasing the words said during interviews into few words without altering the main thought of the statements. I use conversation analysis as well during interviews while I am taking down notes.

I analyze the conversations focusing on the interviewee's interactions to analyze the foregoing interviews in depth (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018).

### *2.3 My Role as a Researcher*

The reality that I am a Christian myself and I love music challenges me to balance being objective and subjective in my research. However, the fact that I do not have a connection with Hillsong Church helps me to distance myself as a researcher. As I agree with the idea of Klaver (2018) that Hillsong Church is one of the popular religious brands worldwide, it made me critical from the beginning and throughout my field observation. Also, the role as a researcher involves the tension between the idea of projecting professional distance and a personal friendship, knowing that I consider myself one of them, not just in the same church. I may project myself as a warm and caring researcher during my empirical research. However, I have personal agenda that may involve faking the friendship (Kvale, 2007).

Hence, I need to show respect for the dignity and integrity of my subjects as one of the principles in the course of my research. This involves knowing and adopting cultural norms in the church community during my fieldwork, paying attention to the people I am studying, and listening effectively to how they express themselves. This would help to navigate the rich-multidimensional of the research subjects effectively. Moreover, to show dignity and integrity as a researcher means to protect my research subject's privacy by being confidential. (Bird & Scholes, 2014)

Above all else, it is my highest call as a researcher to show my own integrity, regardless of my background and beliefs, to produce quality and unbiased knowledge. This involves accuracy, honesty, and fairness from obtaining the knowledge during my fieldwork to the judgment as I analyze the data in the final report. The soundness of the knowledge, perceptions, and arguments in this thesis rely on my integrity as a researcher.

## *2.4 Limitations & Ethical Considerations*

As a standard in conducting research, I had to notify the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD) about my research project before I could start conducting interviews. I filed a notification for approval to the NSD official website with the help of my supervisor in filling up the form. I sent them my project description, interview guide, and consent letter with a standard format/template provided by NSD. After seven weeks, the assessment of my research project was approved.

I informed the local pastor of Hillsong Church Oslo right after I got the approval expressing my desire to conduct research on the church. I sent through email the consent letter that NSD has approved, informing her of my entire research project. The consent letter that I sent to her includes the general theme, title, purpose, main research question, methods, and data protection with regards to my informants. After two weeks, she referred me to the creative pastor as approval that I can conduct research in Hillsong Church Oslo. Albeit I got approval from the local pastor of the church, I still had to do the same process as I approached the members of the church individually.

Regarding my member-informants, I have chosen to make them anonymous for them not to be identified in my final report. The goal is to keep my informants anonymous from one another; therefore, I am stating only partial truths about them in my final report. I do not use their real names nor state exact personal descriptions about them. Aside from that, I am using masculine figures for all of my informants in my final report.

As Hillsong Church Oslo is not a big community yet, and a few of my interviewees were introduced to me through the worship leader I interviewed first, I have to be very careful, and the ethical considerations must be handled with extra care. This further implies that as a researcher, I have to meet the accuracy, integrity, confidentiality, and security requirements in processing personal data as agreed with NSD.

#### **2.4.1 Language and Cultural Differences**

The church is very accommodating, with wonderful ushers who welcomed everyone while entering the church. The warm smiles can imply optimism in conducting this study. The people standing at the church building entrance possess radiance in their faces, giving the impression to make an easy approach. However, it did not change the reality of our society; wherever we are, as we encounter someone different from our race, it will create a hesitation from the start. Generally speaking, this has been a common challenge to everyone as immigrants of the country. To conduct a study is even more challenging considering the language and cultural differences.

As my Norwegian language is not well enough to engage and build a deeper connection to the church members, I would prefer to speak when I am at the best of my confidence. To express through words is the first approach to engage in a community wherein I am new and would appear as a stranger. My master thesis is in English; however, I cannot deny the fact that a more comfortable approach for the sake of the interviewees is to use the language they speak. In addition, it is undeniable that it can create miscommunication during the interview as the mother tongue of Norway is not English. Furthermore, the English language is not my mother tongue, but I considered it as my second language considering that I used it since first grade in school. Thus, I consider myself as sufficient with my English language skills but sometimes I have to choose words to relatively express myself so that I am understood with my interviewees.

Although the Norwegians are very good English speakers, the language barrier is still present in addition to the culture gap difference. I came from a country wherein talking to people wherever we are is not difficult regardless of the differences of the language we speak. My first visit was only greetings with exchanging smiles towards one another. I had the chance to converse with the person who was assigned as the host of the service during my second visit.

She was very good at expressing herself on the platform, but we both experienced linguistic and cultural differences when conversing face-to-face. I had a good time talking with her, though, but the fact that we came from different backgrounds and didn't speak the same language limits both of us from interacting with each other. For this reason, this made me a bit hesitant as to whom I should approach as the informants of my research. Thus, language and cultural differences are the first things that I had to consider in conducting interviews in my thesis.

### **2.4.2 Leadership Challenge**

In the year 2020, it was announced that the host pastor of Hillsong Oslo, Norway, is going to resign. The Hillsong Church Oslo used to be known as the Intro church. Since Intro Church, the Hillsong Church Oslo was led by a couple, David and Jenny Hasseløy, for eleven years and six months (11.5yrs). Before summer, the said couple announced publicly their resignation from the leadership on social media via Instagram. Morten Larsen has also reported from the "Vårt Land" newspaper that the couple's resignation was effective on August 7, 2020. I tried to dig deeper into the reason behind their resignation, but neither the news nor the church members mentioned it exactly. The journalist Larsen of "Vårt Land" raised a question if it has something to do with trouble against Hillsong Norway leadership. However, the report says nothing about any controversial issue behind it.

For this reason, it makes me a bit hesitant at first if my research is even feasible in a way that I need to approach the church's host pastor. The host pastor has a general overview of the church and could help me choose whom would be relevant to interview. Moreover, approaching the interviewees through the pastor would induce great trust in me as a researcher and make the interviewees more open. Regardless, I push through my empirical research in Hillsong Oslo.

### **2.4.3 Prevention is better than Cure (COVID 19)**

The pandemic that the world has been facing since last year has to be considered when it comes to limitations in my research project. The coronavirus infections rise and fall, which causes strict implementations advised by the World Health Organization and The Norwegian Institute of Public Health (FHI), which the Norwegian government has imposed.

Some imposed rules to avoid spreading the virus affected how I connected with the members of the church. One of the opportunities that limited me in the course of my research is a physical connection with the members of the church. The one-meter distance rule against one another already creates a gap in communicating with people I do not know and made it challenging to build a genuine connection as the first step.

Also, the refreshments part after the service in the café is no longer available. The refreshments part is a social gathering wherein the members meet in the café of the church. It is a good chance to have a conversation with the members to relax and drink coffee or tea after the service. To avoid spreading the virus and for the sake of everyone's safety, the cafe of the church is closed temporarily. To join the service at Hillsong Church Oslo, one has to register. The church building is not very big, which limits how many they can accommodate considering the social distancing from each other. Therefore, it is only by chance that I can register for Sunday services as the registration is often full. There were times that I went to church without registrations and hoped somebody wouldn't show up so I can take their seat. Luckily, the church had a systematic way to accommodate everyone who wished to join the services without prior registration if the number of people was not reached.

Another social lockdown because of the coronavirus happened in the first week of November. It meant that all residents of Norway were advised to stay home, stay away from public places, and people were forbidden to gather in large numbers. The situation has been a great challenge for me as a researcher, even though there are online services. It is not the same to watch online as in a live performance. The videos are focused only on the worship team, as perhaps there was no congregation present in the room. In this case, it is not the same experience and not sufficient as a fieldwork researcher.

The Corona situation became worse during January due to a mutated virus from Great Britain in the Nordre Follo municipality area in Norway. The government imposed more concrete recommendations by declaring social lockdown again to limit the spread of the virus in surrounding municipalities. Thus, the church is continuously closed, which hinders me from engaging the church and approaching the members as my informants. There is no assurance yet when this pandemic will be solved. The government has imposed strict rules and regulations from January up to this time. No one knows when this pandemic will end. Therefore, COVID19 is one of the limitations in the course of this research.

### 3 THEORY – Aesthetics/ Sensational Forms

This chapter tackles the theory that will help me analyze and answer the main research question. According to Meyer (2010) and Klaver (2016), the singing of praise & worship in Pentecostalism is an aesthetic/sensational form. I apply sensational form developed by Birgit Meyer (2010) combined with the concept by Miranda Klaver “Worship Music as Aesthetic Domain of Meaning and Bonding” Klaver (2016).

It is essential to highlight the understanding of the aesthetics used by Meyer (2010) to grasp the theory entirely. Meyer (2010) mentions Alexander Baumgarten - a philosopher, who describes aesthetics as “humans’ capacity to perceive the world with their five senses and to interpret it through these perceptions” (Meyer, 2010 p. 747). The concept of aesthetics is too broad to understand based on this idea; therefore, Meyer (2010) further narrows down the understanding of aesthetics in a religious context as bridging forms between humankind and the divine.

There are more bridging forms in the Christian community, such as arts or using images as a mediation between God and people. (Meyer, 2010). It refers to the Catholicism community; I will no longer discuss it further as this thesis focuses on the Pentecostalism context. I have discussed the short overview of how worship has evolved in Pentecostalism in Chapter 1.5 as authorized mode to experience the presence of God.

Meyer (2010) argues that the “sensational form” is a tool to grasp how the Holy Spirit operates according to Pentecostal understanding and experiences. Below is an example of how the Holy Spirit works in Pentecostal services:

*“Pentecostal services, with their emphasis on praise and worship so as to call the Holy Spirit through the powerful songs, offer a sensational form that seeks to involve believers in such a way that they sense the presence of God in a seemingly immediate manner and are amazed by His power. I have witnessed many such services, in which the pastor and congregation sing and pray for the Holy Spirit to come. After some time, the prayers become louder and louder, and many starts speaking in tongues. This is taken as a sign that the Holy Spirit is manifested”*

*(Meyer, 2010 p. 753)*

Pentecostals believe that they can sense the presence of God through the operation of music and powerful oratory. Also, they believe that the Holy Spirit resides inside of them and further claim that the Holy Spirit is an experiential presence that invokes feelings; thus, they can sense the Holy Spirit within their bodies wherever they are and act on such feelings. (Meyer, 2010)

Meyer (2010) created the sensational form concept, during her study in Ghana, based on her understanding of religion as a mediation between the levels of humans and God. Sensational forms bridge the distance between the human and the divine with one's consciousness and feelings. She further states: "sensational forms are authorized modes for invoking and organizing access to the transcendental that shape both religious content (beliefs, doctrines, set of symbols) and norms" (Meyer, 2010 p. 751). The singing of praise & worship in Pentecostalism is one way to connect to God through their senses. It comprises beliefs, doctrines, and norms; therefore, the singing of praise & worship is a sensational form.

In sensational forms theory, Meyer (2010) argues that form is not in opposition to the content and meaning, norms, and values of the practice of praise & worship. The form is not a static container of stereotyped actions of the practice but rather a necessity, modality, or device in expressing the meaning and content of the practice. Therefore, she argues further that the idea of body and spirit are conjoined in the practice of praise & worship - which means the physical and spiritual, the form and content, and the body and mind can be grasped through the lens of sensational forms. The main topic that will be discussed in this thesis is how the members of Hillsong Church Oslo experience the impact of praise & worship, and thus, the use of sensational forms theory is relevant.

This concept is supported by Klaver (2016), who also describes the singing of praise & worship in Pentecostalism as an aesthetic form. She states further that the main purpose of the said practice in Pentecostalism is to encounter the presence of God. Thus, the praise & worship ritual indeed bridges the gap between humans and the divine. She advances the concept of aesthetic form as personal mediation between God and humans to strengthen the community as she states:



*“The importance of worship music and singing for believers reveals that suitable aesthetic forms are powerful means of creating commitments and modes of bonding. Embodied participation during the time of worship is not just an expression of commitment but, at the same time operates as mode of bonding, as the act itself generates commitment and convictions”*

*(Klaver, 2016 p. 110)*

Therefore, a combination of the concept of aesthetic/sensational form by Birgit Meyer (2010) and Miranda Klaver (2016) is apropos of the chosen topic of this thesis.

## **4 ENTRY INTO THE FIELD - Hillsong Church Oslo**

In this chapter, I present my field observation in Hillsong Church Oslo. I describe how I get through into my research field, from contacting the local pastor and finding my informants. I state further the descriptions of my informants. I describe in detail the form of worship in Hillsong Church Oslo. Also, I state my own experience and reflection during my participant-observation phase of my empirical research.

### ***4.1 Contacting the Pastor of Hillsong Church Oslo***

My first challenge was to contact the leader of Hillsong Church Oslo. As mentioned in chapter 2.4.2, the local pastor had resigned. In fact, a pastor from Sweden was doing the preaching during my visits in September. I read through the official website and was optimistic about finding a way to get in contact with the leader of the church. I took my first step by sending an email via the general query address of Hillsong Church Oslo. It took several days before I received a response from the temporary leader of the church. It was not easy to access and gain her trust (Mickecz, 2012), as I was a stranger to her. Thus, I had to show flexibility and patience so that I could get started with my research. The temporary leader of the church finally responded after several days, informing me that the creative director was willing to cooperate to make my research feasible.

## *4.2 Searching for Informants*

During my visits, I talked with a few people to find some prospects I could ask to be my participants for my research. However, as I was still waiting for the assessment from NSD, I was not allowed to do interviews and ask them at that moment. The challenging part was when the church services could not be held physically due to the pandemic. The only way I could think of was to reach out to those I had engaged physically by finding them through social media. I started to send messages to those people that I could remember, but only one (1) person responded.

It was difficult for me because reaching out to people through social media is not as effective as asking them personally. Some just read the messages but did not bother to respond. Also, others did not even open the message at all. When one person responded, I grabbed the opportunity to ask his help if he knew some others who would be willing to help me in this research too. He suggested some people, and I sent emails to them informing them of my research project. A few days after, they were all responding, but I had to use the name of my first informant to gain their trust.

### **4.2.1 The informants**

The informants are both male and female, whose ages are between 20-40 years old. They are all active attendees in Hillsong Church Oslo from different backgrounds, having different personalities. I sent via email or Instagram a private message the informed consent approved by the NSD. In this way, the informants are rested assured of the confidentiality of this thesis. It conveys further that there will be no private data identifying the subjects in this thesis.

#### **My informants are as follows:**

##### *Worship Leader A*

Worship Leader A is one of the leaders in Hillsong Church Oslo. He is a sophisticated person who garnered his bachelor's degree abroad. Further, he is a well-trained singer and musician who takes the lead responsibility in the church's worship team.

He is working as a volunteer who loves to share his passion for music within the church. He leads the praise & worship himself in the church. He is currently studying here in Oslo to pursue greener pastures and build himself more to the career path that he wants to do for a living. The interview with him was online.

#### *Worship Leader B*

Worship Leader B is a student, one of the lead singers in the church who went to study Bible College here in Norway. He has been a Pentecostal believer for a long time and was active in church during his childhood. He used to be a member of a different Pentecostal church before he committed to Hillsong Church Oslo. He is passionate about music which motivates him to lead worship in the church. He believes that church is a gift, and his love for God and people has been his inspiration in serving the Hillsong Church Oslo. The interview was conducted online due to virus preventive measures in Oslo. The interview was engaging and filled with enthusiasm, although it was online and impromptu.

#### *Worship Leader C*

Worship Leader C is a teacher, one of the lead singers as well in the church. He was raised from a Pentecostal family and has been a worship leader in a different church before moving to Hillsong Church Oslo. He has a background of studying in Bible College somewhere in Norway that groomed him to become rooted in the Word of God, which is necessary as a worship leader of the church. He has experienced God in many ways, which has made him grow deeper in his relationship with God. He desires to know the heart of God every time he leads worship so he can choose the right songs to sing during the Sunday services. The interview was online as well to follow the rules and safety measures due to COVID19.

#### *Member A*

Member A is a university student who loves to dance and enjoys praise & worship during service gatherings. He has been an active member of the church for more than three years. He considers Hillsong Church Oslo as his spiritual family. Moreover, he calls himself a person who cares and prioritizes mental health. He encountered God at a young age, and that experience made him believe that God is real. He believes that the praise & worship part of the church gatherings is one of the essential elements of the service because he can personally connect with God through songs. The interview was conducted online due to coronavirus restrictions.

### *Member B*

Member B is also an active member of Hillsong Church Oslo. He has been a member of the church when it was still Intro Church. He grew up in Oslo and was raised in a Catholic home. He took his bachelor's degree at the University of Oslo and pursued a master's degree abroad, wherein he started to join the Hillsong Church. Currently, he works as an accountant by profession in Oslo. He describes himself as an organized, observant, and analytical person. He believes that how you respond to praise & worship in the church reflects an intimate relationship with God. The interview was online.

### *Member C*

Member C was raised in a Christian home and used to be a member of the Church of Norway. He was a member of Hillsong Church somewhere else as he took his master's degree outside the country. He started to attend Intro Church when he moved back to Norway. He describes himself as a person who has an introverted personality, but he can precisely express his thoughts and ideas. He believes that God deals with his children differently. For him, singing praise & worship is one way to connect with God out of his intimate relationship. Also, he had tasted the goodness of God during his brokenness when he joined a Sunday service. He believes that God reminds him of what he is through the songs that they are singing inside the church. The interview was online.

### *Member D*

Member D used to be a member of the Church of Norway before he changed to Hillsong Church Oslo. He grew up with Christian values and beliefs, which influences his way of living. He considers himself an extroverted person, passionate about playing sports such as playing football, mountain biking, and swimming. He loves adventures and traveling outside the country. He is fascinated with singing praise & worship as his way of connecting to God during Sunday services. He believes that the impact of singing praise & worship in the church can be many things. Also, the interview was online.

### *Member E*

Member E grew up in a devoted Roman Catholic home. He converted into Pentecostal beliefs during his stay abroad. He first attended the Hillsong Church abroad, wherein he believes that he encountered God while singing praise & worship during the church service. He currently lives in Oslo and pursues his dream by taking the career path as a means of living.

He has been an active member of Hillsong Church Oslo since he moved back to Oslo two (2) years ago. He defines himself as a solemn person. He would prefer simplicity and not a glamorous worship setting inside the church. He says that what matters to him the most is communicating with God during praise & worship. He loves to sing himself, and he further believes that above all the singing, God wants the purity of his heart.

### *4.3 Personal Reflection*

I started to join the Sunday services in Hillsong Church Oslo regularly from September 2020. However, the restrictions due to the coronavirus limited my field observation. I attended the service both in real life and virtual cases during my research. I watched online services sporadically since they are just using video clips from Hillsong Church Sydney. The experience of watching online was completely different from being one of the participants in the congregation.

The participant-observation phase during my fieldwork was exciting but at the same time challenging in the course of my empirical research. I had to be observant while participating in the entire service, especially the praise & worship part. The enthusiasm of the worship band, the setting of the church itself, and the members are very inviting as both a participant and researcher. The challenge was that it became so easy to be carried away by what my senses perceive; therefore, I had to be diligent in keeping a professional distance during the field observation.

I sang along in every singing part of the service. I lifted my hands and sang or bowed down my head as I analyzed the lyrics of the song. Sometimes, I sat as close to the stage as possible to observe the worship team on stage closely. Other times, I sat in the balcony to see the entire congregation and observe everyone inside the building. I acted and felt the ambiance during the musical element of the gatherings. I experienced and participated just like everyone else in the room. The only difference was I always had my mobile phone with me to take down notes if necessary or take pictures of the lyrics of the songs we were singing. It was a bit challenging to focus because my mind was curious on what was going on around me. On the other hand, I was filled with excitement, not just with what I could observe but by what I was going to experience.

I observed the church members on how they responded and participated during the praise & worship part. Some were lifting their hands singing out loud, and some were just silent, closing their eyes. After the service gathering, I sat down for a while, noting down everything I had observed and experienced on that particular Sunday. And whatever I thought and felt, I had to analyze afterward how relevant they were in my research project.

I remember when I attended one Sunday evening with a special event entitled “Bønn og Lovsang”, which means prayer and worship in English. It was a total blast and an overwhelming ambiance as I stepped inside the church. The room was illuminated with a dimmed light and was full of people. I noticed the music band on stage in the same formation as videos from Hillsong Church Sydney, as seen online. The lead singers in front and the musicians behind them with a choir. The service gathering started and ended with live band music. Further, I noticed that the keyboardist was playing during the entire program of the service, even when someone was talking on the stage as background music. The intensity of the musical sound from the keyboard complemented the person’s voice as he talked on the platform.

As the band started to play, the music they created lead the atmosphere setting the mode of being spiritual in the entire room. The lead singers were appealing and inspiring to listen to. Everyone on the stage appeared to be inviting people to sing along with them. The singers were very passionate in singing, and the musicians were engaged in playing their instruments, but the most persuading part was the lyrics of the songs. It conveys a strong declaration of faith as it says:

*“My hope is built in nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame. But wholly trust in Jesus' name. Christ alone cornerstone, Weak made strong in the Saviors love. Through the storm, he is Lord, Lord of all” (Hillsong Worship)*

I sang along while meditating on the song's lyrics simultaneously, and many questions arose in my mind. In front, the song leaders had shown a heartfelt connection in what they were doing through body movements and facial expressions. At the same time, the congregation engaged in singing as a response to it. I saw that majority of them were lifting their hands while singing. I perceived it in a way that it was not just like a secular concert, but something deeper was in place about how the people responded and the atmosphere in that exact place.

I am not certain if “the something deeper” that I saw was a spiritual intimacy with the divine or if it was just a form that they normally do during praise & worship. During the following visits, I noticed that the pattern and form of singing worship songs were almost the same. The music band had prepared sets of songs both in English and Norwegian and both slow and fast songs. The praise & worship part was indeed an exciting ritual practice in every gathering. I perceived it as the music itself plays a significant role in the service. There was no silence at all, unlike how I have experienced it from other churches.

My journey in Hillsong Church Oslo widens my perspectives about worship in a Norwegian context. The interviews, interactions, and observations enlighten my mind and motivate me to finish my thesis. I had the chance to look outside and inside of the context as a participant-observation phase of my fieldwork. It gave me the greatest opportunity to put myself in the shoes of the members of the church. Also, it gave me the lens to view worship in detail as a member of the church. Hence, I did not only have the chance to experience, feel and act just like a member, but the experience as an objective researcher was priceless. I had a story to tell, not just being a researcher to satisfy my curiosity and bridge the gap of missing literature in this field. But a testimony to share whenever, however, an instance that will connect to this related field. I have something worth sharing, not just from my head but something worth delivering from the bottom of my heart.

My own experiences were overwhelming from time to time. However, I cannot deny that the worship band on stage in Hillsong Church Oslo was acting in the same way as the online artists from Hillsong Music that I saw on YouTube. The style, musical performance, body movements, and songs were the same as all the rest of Hillsong churches worldwide. I started to question the authenticity and the originality of praise & worship in a Norwegian context. Was it only what my senses can perceive? Was it just a form without substance? If there was no substance, how can we validate the authenticity of impacts on the members' lives?

These experiences from my visits ignited my passion for researching, as many questions arose in my head. They intensified my curiosity – was the experience that I had the same for the members in Hillsong Church Oslo? Most importantly, I was so eager to find out how they experience the impacts of praise & worship to answer the main research question of this thesis. In order to answer this question, I will be presenting the first layer of my research in the field by describing further the form of singing worship in Hillsong Church Oslo

#### *4.4 The Form of Praise & Worship in Hillsong Church Oslo*

Based on my observations, the visual image of the form of worship in Hillsong Church Oslo is similar to many other Pentecostal churches worldwide, as seen on YouTube. As I mentioned earlier, the formation of the worship band on the platform is the same as with other worship bands that we can see online.

In Hillsong Church Oslo, according to Worship Leader C, there are two (2) worship leaders in charge every Sunday; the core worship leader and one assistant worship leader. It means that these two (2) are responsible for choosing the songs to sing and leading the praise & worship ritual. They are standing in the middle with two (2) worship singers and the instrumentalists around them. In addition, a group of singers forms a choir standing at the back of the worship band. The musicians start to play two (2) upbeat, or lively songs called praise songs (Worship Leader A). Afterward, they sing three (3) songs with a slow tempo expressing a variation of the message connected with the sermon. The duration for singing songs is between 20-30 minutes, and the host of the particular Sunday service comes on stage at the end of the last song to close it through a short prayer.

The praise & worship ritual uses modern sounds effects, good lighting, and multimedia effects. The mixing of the instruments and voices was very delicate and sounded heavenly. The light effects and the use of multimedia complement the tempo of the songs. It means that the movement of the lights and effects will follow if the song is either slow or upbeat, mellow or happy. The confluence of technology and the musical element are just like other music performances elsewhere. The only difference is that they are singing songs that mention God. Generally speaking, what we have seen from YouTube becomes live inside Hillsong Church Oslo.

The worship band opens and ends the Sunday service in Hillsong Church Oslo. It means to say that the worship band starts to play as the gathering begins, and as the service ends, the band leads a celebration song as a finale. Sometimes the worship band leads four (4) songs and a short prayer, and sometimes the prayer is in between the songs. The worship band goes up on stage again as the sermon/preaching is about to finish.



Generally, during my visits, the keyboardist is the first to start playing, accompanying the preacher. After the preaching, there is a short announcement as a transition before the full worship band starts playing the final song. However, the musicians keep on playing the moment they are on stage until the end of the service.

The church's congregation responds by standing as the worship leader said, “let us all rise and worship Jesus in this room”, or the members would stand automatically without the worship leader asking for it. The worship leaders sometimes utter short praises in prayer between songs or say some encouraging words to the congregation. Sometimes they lead the congregation to repeat the chorus a few times, which implies or stresses a certain lyrical point of the song. They believe that God wants to speak to His people through a particular passage of the song or a faith declaration (Worship Leader C). The worship leaders are well-trained in how to lead worship songs, the way they sing, move, and speak while leading worship in addition to their angelic voices. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the worship leaders on stage perform similarly like to the rest of Hillsong Church's performances posted on YouTube.

This given structure of the service is noticeable as we step inside the church building. However, I am not satisfied only by what my eyes can see, but I am more interested in what my mind can comprehend. I am not satisfied with the form but rather the substance of the praise & worship ritual inside the church. Therefore, I will examine the substance of praise & worship by presenting the interview data to answer the questions below.

According to the Hillsong Church Oslo, these questions will be answered in the next chapter:

- A) What is the understanding of praise & worship?
- B) What are the expectations of the members about the praise & worship part of the service?
- C) What are the elements of good praise & worship?
- D) What are the impacts of singing praise & worship?

## **5 INTERVIEW DATA**

In this chapter, I present my interview data from the fieldwork. I discuss the perceptions of the term praise & worship from my informant's perspectives. I organize the presentation of interview data according to the questions raised in the last part of chapter 4. As I was using two (2) different sets of questions, I answer the said questions by group below. Firstly, I present the perceptions of praise & worship in the Hillsong Church Oslo context. It follows the expectations of the members, then follows the elements of good praise & worship. Lastly, I present the impacts of singing praise & worship from all of my informants as the end discussion of this chapter.

### ***5.1 The Perceptions of Praise & Worship in Hillsong Church Oslo Context***

Here, I present the perception of praise & worship in Hillsong Church Oslo context. Foremost, I present the views from the leaders and follows with the views from the members.

#### **5.1.1 The Leaders' Views of Praise & Worship**

Worship Leader A emphasizes that the two (2) words in the term praise & worship has different meanings; however, the term conjoins together. The term praise & worship is not limited to just singing songs, but an action that gives honor to God. He further categorizes the praise & worship ritual in the Hillsong Church Oslo context in two different ways. The praise songs are upbeat/fast with content that expresses praise, honor, and thanks to God. Whilst the worship songs are mellow and slow, more personal and intended to take one deeper into the presence of God. However, he stresses the main essence of worship as a “way of living” through the book of Romans in the bible that says:

<sup>2</sup>*“So, here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you”*  
(Romans 12:1-2, The Message Version)

According to Worship Leader B, praise & worship is lifting the name of Jesus in his daily life. He further emphasizes that “to lift the name of Jesus” means honoring him in everything that he does both inside and outside the church. He mainly stresses that praise & worship is not about the songs that they sing inside the church but living a daily life that pleases God. He further states that, in this way, the singing of songs inside the church means authentic worship to God. To be authentic does not mean perfection and sinless life; it is real without pretension and hypocrisy before God. He even admits that he started to lead praise & worship in the church with a wrong motive inside his heart. However, he believes that God has changed his heart and mind, which led him to perceive that praise & worship is all about “lifting the name of Jesus” in everything he does. He clearly emphasizes that it was the turning point of his life – his genuine relationship with Jesus started from that very moment. Further, Worship Leader C simply states his own understanding of praise & worship by saying:

*“I would like to underline the fact that praise & worship is not just through songs presenting as worship to God. It is essential for me to understand that my whole life is presenting as praise & worship to God. And that includes in everything that I do, in my decision making, my everyday life – that is my worship to God”*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%2012%3A1-2&version=MSG>. Accessed: May 6,

This understanding of praise & worship is similar to the two (2) other Worship Leaders as discussed above. He further states, that to lead praise & worship during Sundays becomes easy if his own life outside the church represents as worship to God. This can be viewed in a way that to lead the praise & worship is not about his singing skills nor his ability to persuade people. To lead praise & worship on Sundays is all about his whole life living for the glory of God.

#### **5.1.1.1 Short Discussion**

The three (3) Worship Leaders show similarity in their perceptions of praise & worship in the real sense. The perceptions of worship from them can be understood as something that cannot be separated from daily life. The existence of life means to give praise & worship to the creator of life. They clearly express that praise & worship is not only the singing of songs inside the church, but rather a lifestyle that honors God. The singing of songs inside the church is an expression and reflection on how the believers live outside the church. This means further that everything that a person does should serve as an act of praise & worship to God. The perceptions of the three (3) leaders are underpinned with the perspectives of worship by Samuel Powell as he states:

*“Worship then, is more than vocal praise and ritualized movements. It is, ideally, the totality of the consecrated life, in which everything is offered up to God as a holy sacrifice”*  
(Powell, 2005 p. 105)

Therefore, the term praise & worship is not just a ritual that the members should do, during the Sunday services, but it is a real experience in everyday lives as an overflow with their relationship to God. Thus, it is a personal lifestyle which honors God. Based on these perceptions of praise & worship from the leaders, do the members of the church understand it the same way? How does the perception of praise & worship affect the impacts on the lives of the members?

#### **5.1.2 The Members’ Views of Praise & Worship**

Member A expresses his perception of praise & worship as the main activity inside the church, which connotes “singing of songs”.

For him, the main essence of praise & worship is to express his gratefulness for what God has done in his life. He believes that it is essential for him to utter words that express his thankfulness to God during praise & worship. He further states that to worship God means using his gifts and talents for the glory of God. He emphasizes that the singing of praise & worship in the church is his way of connecting to God. Also, he claims that it is easier for him to connect with God through the singing of songs rather than listening to the preaching/sermon of the pastor. Lastly, the singing of praise & worship is a necessity for his mental health. For this reason, he considers praise & worship as the most important part of the gathering services.

Member B defines the term praise & worship in two (2) contexts. He distinguishes these two contexts by using the terms: non-church context & church context. The non-church context of praise & worship can be described as part of the service when the members do the Christian karaoke singing. Whilst the church context of praise & worship is every element of the service program is considered as praise & worship. He further states that the preaching, the tithing etc. is served as an act of praise & worship to God. For him, the singing of songs inside the church is one way to express thankfulness which is similar to what member A has mentioned.

In addition, he perceives praise & worship as an instrument in setting his focus on God before listening to the pastor's preaching. He means further that the singing of praise & worship songs serves as preparation of his heart to receive God's word through the sermon. Thus, member B's understanding of praise & worship summed as follows: A) Christian singing of songs, B) a way of expressing gratefulness to God, and C) a tool to fix his focus on God. These are the main ideas about his understanding of singing praise & worship in the service gatherings.

Member C understands the term praise & worship as a way of connecting to God through music. It is his way of communicating with God as he considers himself as an academic person. He implies that he is the type of person who prefers to express his thoughts and feelings through arts and literature rather than expressing them through mere words. He further intensifies his understanding by describing praise & worship as one of the ways to “touch one’s soul” in a poetic way. Moreover, he states that the singing of praise & worship is similar to reading the book of Psalms in the Bible. It is an opportunity to express his gratefulness to God, in an artistic way, for everything God has done in his life. Also, often, this is his way of being filled with the Holy Spirit by speaking of tongues.

Moreover, member D expresses his understanding of praise & worship by saying:

*“I think worship is something that is part of your whole life, it is not music or sound, but it is a way of life in a way. Worship is what you do as it says in the Bible, worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24). It is not really about the songs, although I like music and worship God through music. I think worship is something that changes us. It is a kind of aligning yourself with God in a way”*

This understanding is similar to the perceptions that the worship leaders have. For member D, praise & worship is not the music or singing of songs, and it is a part of his life, something that changes him and aligns him to God. Moreover, member D clearly states that worship is not the singing of songs inside the church but rather how he lives his life according to the spirit and truth.

Member D emphasizes the purpose of the singing of praise & worship inside the church or during his personal devotion to God into three (3) things: A) it humbles himself before God, B) elevates God, and C) to connect with God. Also, he describes the singing of praise & worship inside the church and conferences wherein the believers are singing together to God as “magical”. He further states that many things can happen in the spiritual realm that his eyes cannot see in this kind of musical setting.

Last but not least, member E defines praise & worship as one of the ways to glorify, adore and express thanks to what God has done in his life. For him, the praise & worship ritual is an opportunity to express his feelings, his thoughts & communicate with God in a very personal way. It is a similar perception as member C. Further, he says that praise & worship does not happen only on Sunday services. He means that praise & worship is part of his everyday life. His understanding of praise & worship shows similarity to member D as well and to the worship leaders. In addition, he believes that God is omnipresent, which means that God is everywhere at the same time. Thus, for him to sing praise & worship to God is not limited to being done inside the church. Also, he further claims that the singing of praise & worship is simply an expression of his personal relationship with God.

### *5.1.2.1 Short Discussion*

The five (5) members of the Hillsong Church Oslo express different perceptions of how they understand the term praise & worship. The members D & E highlight the central concept of praise & worship as a part of their whole life which shows a similar perception as the worship leaders. All of the members, except member D, give emphases that singing praise & worship is one way for them to express their gratefulness to God for what he has done to their lives.

However, member D clearly states: “Praise & worship elevates God and humbles me in a way”. This statement is far beyond being grateful and can further be perceived as an expression of giving God the glory – God takes the glory for the good things in his life. Therefore, I believe that the members have a unanimous perception of praise & worship as one of the ways to express their gratefulness to God.

The perception of praise & worship as preparation for the sermon (Albrecht, 1999) is mentioned by member B. He clearly states that singing is a helpful tool to prepare his heart for the sermon. He uses the phrase “to fix” his focus on God, and the rest of the members use the phrase “to connect” with God. The phrase “to fix his focus on God” means further positioning his heart in preparation for the sermon. The word “connect” is defined by Merriam-Webster as <sup>3</sup>“to become joined” while the word “fix” is defined <sup>4</sup>“to direct one’s attention or efforts”. It means to say that there is a slight difference between “to connect” and “to fix”. “To connect” involves two recipients of action in the connection process, while “to fix” could be executed by one recipient alone. Member B clearly states that every part of the church gathering is an act of praise & worship to God. Again, this is similar to what Albrecht (1999) stated above in literature key concepts as one of the perceptions of praise & worship in the Pentecostalism context.

Based on the findings of this research, the term praise & worship is not clearly defined among the members. It causes different misconceptions from one member to another. It may affect how the members experience the impacts of praise & worship on their lives. On the other hand, all of them believe that the singing of praise & worship impacts their lives.

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<sup>3</sup><https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/connect>. Accessed: May 6, 2021

<sup>4</sup><https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fix>. Accessed: May 6, 2021

Again, the main goal of this thesis is not to discuss the term praise & worship according to the perspectives of the members in Hillsong Church Oslo. However, I need to investigate if they have a fundamental understanding of praise & worship to analyze the data in-depth and answer the main research question. These different perceptions about praise & worship from member to member lead me to investigate further if they have different expectations before the praise & worship part of the services. Below, I will present the members' expectations before the praise & worship part of the services.

### *5.2 The Members' Expectations Versus Reality*

The members of Hillsong Church Oslo had different responses when I asked about their preliminary expectations of the praise & worship part during Sunday services. The expectations differ concerning how they understand the concept of praise & worship.

Member A believes that the praise & worship element of the services is an essential part. He claims that it is easier for him to connect and hear from God in singing praise & worship than in listening to the delivered sermon of the pastor. For this reason, he is expecting that the worship team will lead the congregation on Sunday services with a variety of messages in the songs. In this way, he can always find something from one of the songs to personally connect and hear from God. It shows further that member A relies more on the message of the songs to commune with God than the preaching part of the service. Thus, it is not the preaching or style of music nor the melody, but the lyrics of the songs that primarily speak to his heart. Through this way, he can easily connect and meditate with God during the singing of praise & worship.

On the other hand, member B clearly states that it is easier for him to connect and hear from God when he listens to the pastor's preaching. He views praise & worship as a tool to fix his focus on God as preparation for the sermon. This perception of praise & worship leads him to set different expectations during the praise & worship part of the service.

Member B expects the worship band to be well prepared when they lead praise & worship on Sundays. He emphasizes that it does not need to be perfect technically, but he requires excellence as he believes that; "we are serving the God of excellence".



He further admits that the chaotic performance of the people on stage can affect his focus to be in the “mode of worship”. Thus, he further expects that the people on stage should know what they are doing. In other words, the worship team members should be diligent in practicing the chosen songs and their voices or instruments.

Another thing he expects is that the worship team leads the congregation in how to express worship to God through body movements, gestures, and expressions. He believes that it is easy for the congregation to worship God if the people on stage embrace the role of being a worship leader. For example, the clapping of hands or the dancing; these movements are essential to project by the worship singers in order for the congregation to follow, especially for newcomers. He is aware not to be distracted by these minor things. However, he admits that it is challenging for him not to be distracted when something goes wrong on stage. In addition, one of the factors that affect his focus is when he is physically tired, stressed, or something happened before the Sunday service.

Moreover, member B expects to encounter God, have new perspectives, and the people as a church, to be hungry for God. However, he stresses that it is dangerous to have expectations towards something that God controls or expects something beyond his control. Lastly, he expects new songs because the Bible encourages the church to do so. He believes that the people of God need new songs that will fit the season that they are in as a church. To sing a new song means to prophesy or to speak life for the season or give them a focus for the new season ahead. In this way, the church will refrain from dwelling on the current difficulties nor dwell on the past, but rather look forward to the positivity in the future. The idea of singing a new song is underpinned by Worship Leader A when he mentions the importance of singing new songs. It is a declaration that new things are coming up according to the church's season. Furthermore, the Bible clearly states in the book of Psalms:

*“Sing to God a brand-new song! Earth and everyone in it, Sing! Sing to God- worship God! Shout the news of this victory from sea to sea, take the news of his glory to the lost, News of his wonders to one and all!”*

*(Psalms 96:1-3 The Message Version)*

Therefore, the member B has few expectations, namely:

- A) the team is excellent,*
- B) the team should set themselves as an example,*
- C) encounter God,*
- D) get some new perspectives,*
- D) people to be hungry for God, and*
- E) sing new songs during praise and worship gathering of the church.*

Members C and D express similar expectations when they sing praise & worship in the church. They expect to have a personal encounter with God. The members C & D both say that they enjoy singing praise & worship, although they both admit that it is challenging these days due to the pandemic. Member D admits that he has some expectations, but he does not think about it every time he participates in singing praise & worship. He would rather enjoy the moment singing and praising God than thinking of any expectations. He is aware that standing on stage should set an example for the congregation to follow.

On the other hand, he understands the burden that the worship team members carry in leading the entire congregation into worshipping God. He emphasizes further that the expectations he has in mind do not matter. In this way, it helps him enjoy singing during praise & worship and to focus on God.

Member D further stresses that to enjoy God in singing praise & worship means further that he has to prepare himself before coming to the church because he believes that it is not the nature of God to force His children when He moves. It means precisely that the willingness and the hunger of his heart are significant in allowing the Spirit of God to move his life. He gives an example of the Christians in China wherein the government does not allow them to gather as a church. Thus, the members are meeting secretly in the underground. It conveys that they have no freedom to express their worship to God the same way they do in Hillsong Church Oslo. This idea motivates him to be excited and ready before coming to church on Sundays, regardless of his expectations.

Lastly, member E does not have any expectations as he would rather enjoy the services on Sundays. He further emphasizes that he does not care about technicalities during praise & worship by saying:

*“I don't really have expectations about how the praise and worship should be like for instance, the worship team should perform perfectly or a glamorous setting in the room. I am more like a solemn person, and thus acapella music will do as long as the atmosphere of worship is there. And what matters to me the most is to be open for the presence of God”*

### **5.2.1 Short Discussion**

Thus, the five (5) members express different expectations that signify who they are and how they understand praise & worship in the real sense. These expectations may affect their experiences during praise & worship as they cannot control anything other than their expectations. The greater expectations a member has, the greater the challenge is when things do not happen according to their expectations, affecting the level of impacts. So, how do the leaders and the worship band members prepare for praise & worship in Hillsong Church Oslo? What are the elements of good praise & worship?

## **5.3 Elements of Good Praise & Worship (Spirit-led worship)**

It is the worship team's goal to facilitate a good experience every time they lead the congregation in singing praise & worship – leading the entire congregation to the presence of God. The entire worship band embraces their role on Sundays. Member D mentions that he understands the burden that the entire worship band has to carry every time they lead the congregation to praise & worship. Thus, I will discuss below the elements of Spirit-led worship based on the perspectives of the three worship leaders.

### **5.3.1 Preparation Spiritually**

Firstly, it is essential to note the entire team's preparation spiritually as one of the keys that makes the praise & worship well. According to Worship Leader A, this is the number one factor that the whole worship band should consider and not just him alone before leading the people in singing praise & worship. He stresses that it is essential for the worship band to be connected to the Spirit of God first.

In this way, they can get a new revelation from God or get something fresh from Him for the church. Worship Leader A stresses the importance of being connected to the Spirit of God as he states:

*“And if the worship team themselves are connected in Spirit, there is a change of the room that makes the atmosphere of the room good in a way”*

The idea of “preparing spiritually” is supported by the Worship Leader B and C. They both understood the cost they have to pay before leading praise & worship on Sundays. Worship Leader B underpins this idea by spending time with God in prayer and worship. He stresses that it is vital for him to pray to God from choosing songs and before standing on the stage during services.

The Worship Leader C is strongly convicted to spend much time praying and worshipping alone with God significantly during the week before leading on a particular Sunday. He believes that to lead praise & worship is like leading in a battle, and thus to soak himself in prayers is a potent weapon for victory against the devil. He further believes that the devil is attacking him personally before leading others to sing praise & worship. Thus, spending time in prayer is necessary.

The same way with Worship Leader B, he spends much time with God in prayer when choosing songs to sing. This means that both Worship Leaders B and C ask God what to sing on the particular Sunday. Aside from praying at home personally during the week, the whole worship team will spend time with God together through prayer, spontaneous worship and encourage one another before coming up on the stage. This is the kind of preparation that every team member is encouraged to do before leading the congregation in singing praise & worship to God. Thus, the whole team does not only rehearse to make them sound good technically, but above all else, it is the individual spiritual preparation that matters the most.

### **5.3.2 Right Focus**

Another factor to consider in having a good experience of praise and worship is when the entire team's focus is right. It is one of the elements that Worship Leader A emphasizes when he says:

*“And I think even if something goes wrong, for instance, even if we play the wrong note or sing a wrong lyric of the song, but the focus is right, I think when the focus is right, the atmosphere is good”*

This implies further that the perfection of the music by, for example, hitting the right notes during praise & worship does not matter when the focus is right. He emphasizes that the congregation can sense the Holy Spirit in the room, which makes the room's atmosphere good. Moreover, worship leader B shares his personal experiences, which underpins this idea. During the early stage as a worship leader of the church, one of his intentions whenever he was on stage was to show people his singing skills. He used to think of how he sang on the stage and was more conscious of pleasing the people/audience. However, he realizes over time that leading praise & worship does not focus on the technical performances of the worship band. Even though the importance of excellence is encouraged, the main focus should be God - the center of praise & worship must be God and not the performance for the sake of impressing the people. Thus, the excellence of performance conveys to impress God and not the people. This realization has led Worship Leader B to understand that praise & worship is all about “lifting the name of Jesus”. It means further that the focus of worship should be Jesus.

*5(IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE IN ORDER TO AVOID CONFUSION THAT THE HILLSONG CHURCH BELIEVES IN TRINITARIAN GOD. IT MEANS FURTHER THAT THEY BELIEVE IN GOD THE FATHER- GOD THE SON/JESUS- GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT – HILLSONG OFFICIAL WEBPAGE.)*

Worship Leader B clearly states that the reasons he stands on the platform are not anymore because he wants to show his talent and skill of singing but rather to lead the congregation to focus on Jesus. Therefore, to make the “right focus” means to set their focus towards Jesus as the center of their worship.

Furthermore, the Worship Leader C gives emphasis well to support the importance of the “right focus” when singing praise & worship in the church as he states:

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<sup>5</sup> <https://hillsong.com/what-we-believe/>. Accessed: May 6, 2021

*“What I hope what the people would experience during praise and worship is that we can set our focus away from ourselves and that we can forget the people are standing next to us for a second in order to encounter God”*

Worship Leader C conveys the significance of “right focus” to the entire congregation, underpinning the importance of “right focus”. In order to make the focus right, one should focus away from oneself and the surrounding people. In this way, the participating members can focus on God as the center during praise & worship.

### **5.3.3 Short Summary**

Based on the finding of this study, there are two elements that will make praise & worship good. These are as follows: **A)** spiritual preparation of the entire worship band and **B)** the right focus of worship, which is God. He believes that there is a change of atmosphere inside the room when the entire worship band applies these two elements. It means that there is a possibility that the participants can experience the presence of God when singing praise & worship. These two elements are not limited nor applied only with the worship band of Hillsong Church Oslo. It means further that these elements apply to the extent of the congregation. However, it is clear now that the worship band plays a role that can affect the level of impacts of the participating members. To discuss this will lead to answering the main question of this thesis. In other words, these elements are contributing factors for the members in experiencing the impacts of singing praise & worship. Underneath, I will discuss the impacts of singing praise & worship based on the members' experiences in Hillsong Church Oslo.

## ***5.4 The Impacts of Singing Praise & Worship in Hillsong Church Oslo***

The impacts of singing praise & worship to the participants are in different aspects. There were many questions raised in my mind during the interviews. The impacts of singing praise & worship have a massive effect. I underestimated the impacts of singing praise & worship from the beginning of this empirical research. Klaver (2016) mentions the enormity of impacts during her research in Hillsong churches in New York and the Netherlands. The singing experience of the participating members is the first thing they can recall.

Klaver (2016) emphasizes that the praise & worship part struck her during her research. She further states that some of the first-timer guests converted to Hillsong because of their good experience of praise & worship part during their first church attendance. Some experienced healing in many different forms as they participated in praise & worship. In the same way on the findings of this research, as Worship Leader C states:

*“I know that the impacts of praise and worship are so great, and we cannot see them. When I was a teenager, I always looked for evidence in a room. I always look for God, moving in things that I can see. I was looking for a feeling in my heart, I was looking for emotions like crying... When I got to experience the Presence of God, it does not always happen like that. You just have to know that the Spirit of God is in the room. Sometimes it is just a whisper or just stillness with the feeling of being loved or being set free from addiction or any bondages”*

Worship Leader A stresses too that the impacts of singing praise & worship are enormous. He believes that when the people of God praise and surrender to God together, it is a powerful tool and dangerous to the devil. He further believes that the devil cannot dwell in a place wherein the people of God worship Him. Praise & worship is personal; however, there are enormous effects when the people of God worship together in unity. Worship Leader A stresses further when he states:

*“I know that in Old Testament, especially when the worship is in front, I think it is very interesting because they will pave the way for the rest and for everything else. I think that worship is a powerful tool to break down walls, break down barriers, especially spiritually... Worship is a place where we can experience healing and freedom from different things”*

Worship Leader C underpins the enormity of the impacts in singing praise & worship. He clearly emphasizes that to take the lead in singing praise & worship means to take the lead in a spiritual battle. He firmly believes that the weapons used in this kind of battle are the songs they are singing. For him, the lyrics of the songs are words that will shake the earth and break any form of spiritual bondage. The singing of praise & worship is an act of proclamation, a victorious declaration over any spiritual battle. It is an act to let the devil know that he has no place in the lives of God’s people.

Thus, based on the perspectives of Worship Leaders A and C, the impacts can be described as follows: **A)** break down walls and barriers spiritually, **B)** freedom from spiritual bondages **C)** healing from any sicknesses. Concerning these impacts of praise & worship, do the believers experience it the same way? Hereunder are the impacts of singing praise & worship according to all of the informants

#### **5.4.1 Mental Impact**

One of the impacts in singing praise & worship is the mental health of human beings. It is supported by member A as he believes that singing songs on Sundays has enriched his life mentally. He further emphasizes that the singing of praise & worship boosts his mental being. It makes him dependent on God as the source of his strength, joy, and confidence. He further claims that God nourishes his mental health through the singing of praise & worship.

For this reason, he considers the singing of praise & worship as the essential part of Sunday's services. As mentioned in 5.2, he claims that he can connect more with God during the praise & worship than listening to the preaching or sermon. That is why he prefers to sing different messages from the songs on Sunday services because the lyrics of the songs impact his mind.

The experiences of members C and E impacted their mental aspects. They are both explicitly mentioning “peace and sound mind” as the result of singing praise & worship. Member C states that when he encounters God during praise & worship, it takes away all the worries and fears that succumb his mind. While member E shared his experience of when he obeyed the conviction of the Holy Spirit to cease from his wrongdoings, there was peace in his mind, and he believed God has spoken to him at that moment. Both C and E members are reminded personally of the truth on who they are, which gives them peace and assurance of their circumstances.

Member D states that the singing of praise & worship is similar to meditating truths from the Bible. He implies that the songs that they are singing are words directly from the Scripture. For this reason, the songs that they are singing become compelling and truthful that will align their thoughts to God. The transformation of the minds happens when they sing songs directly quoted from the Bible.



Further, the experience of member B impacted him mentally as he gains new perspectives during praise & worship, although the message of the pastor speaks to him more than the praise & worship part of the service. In this way, the new perspectives gained and the reminders of their faith in God which give peace, are healthy to the person's mind - that is, mental impact.

#### **5.4.2 Emotional Impact**

Member C shares his experience, which involves crying as the manifestation that he encountered God. He shares his encounter with God when he attended a Sunday service one day, and he was feeling so scared and broken. He said the lyrics of the song that state, “You are never alone, and God sees You. But there is a place where you cannot hide, where Your love can’t find me”. For Member C, this passage of the song helps him through the season of His brokenness deep within. The thought that God saw him in the crowd makes it very special for him. He felt so loved by God, strengthened and whole again, which led him to be emotionally touched by God. He admits that he could not help himself from weeping while singing the song. He claims that God spoke to him through the songs in that very moment. He felt so much lighter afterward, and that encounter with God strengthened his faith even more.

Further, member D admits that he cannot avoid being emotional during praise & worship even though praise and worship are beyond emotions. He stresses that the songs that talk about his feelings for God do not fit him, for instance, “How much I love You, God”. He further explains that there is nothing wrong with that kind of song. However, he claims that songs which require a special state of emotions are not suitable for him. The songs about God based on the Bible moved him more. For him, the effectiveness of the songs should be based more on who God is and not on his feelings and circumstances.

Members C and D might be in a different situation and may vary from the preferences of the songs. The impacts differ from one to another depending on their circumstances, and the impacts are indeed enormous. However, both of them claim that being emotional is inevitable in praising & worshipping God. As mentioned above, Worship Leader B used to think that emotion is evidence that God moves in a room. He used to find physical manifestations of the impacts. However, he clearly states that it is not always like that. He clearly states that many things can happen when the Spirit of God hovers the place. Nevertheless, the two (2) members and Worship Leader B do not deny that emotions are of the impacts in singing praise & worship to God.

### 5.4.3 Deviation Impact

Member E shares his encounter with God when he was so discouraged about life. He was doing something that was not according to the will of God. However, the time came that he had no one to turn to but God. It was Sunday worship service inside Hillsong Church when he decided to turn back to God. He remembers the specific song that impacted his change of ways and direction of his life. “Oh, come to the altar. The Father’s arms are open wide. Forgiveness was brought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ”. According to him, when he heard this song, he was convicted to stop his wrongdoings. He believes that God spoke to him through the song that led him to ask God’s forgiveness. He was crying to signify his sincerity before God. He believes that it was the Holy Spirit of God who invited him to cease doing the evil things he did and reconciled with his relationship with God.

The deviation impact can be supported with the idea from Worship Leader B when he shifted his focus to Jesus as the center of worship. The wrong motive of his heart in leading people into praise & worship on Sundays has changed. He admits that he came to the correct perception of what worship is all about when God transformed his heart, leading him in a different direction. There was a deviation impact on his heart and mind when he understood that to take the lead in singing praise & worship is not about impressing the audience with his singing skills. He has to let go of his selfish motives for taking the lead in praise & worship and direct people to Jesus alone. The sole reason why he stands on the platform is not to show his talent and skills but to lead the congregation into the presence of God. Thus, for Worship Leader B, the deviation impact can be viewed as a change of his motives and focus from himself and turn them to Jesus. This realization occurred when he led praise & worship in Hillsong Church Oslo.

Deviation impact can happen in many cases and different conditions. Member E describes his deviation impact as to cease and change his wrong actions. On the other hand, Worship Leader B points out his deviation impact as a shift in the motive of his heart from impressing the people to leading the people into the presence of God. The deviation impacts might be in a different form. However, it is essential to note that the deviation impact happens from the transformation of thoughts and hearts, resulting in a shift of ways and actions for God.

#### 5.4.4 Invigoration Impact

According to Worship Leader A, “faith is lifted and strengthened” when the people of God come together in worship. The members' faith is lifted and strengthened is one of the impacts in singing praise & worship during Sunday services. Worship Leader A clearly emphasizes that everyone goes through a different season in life. It means further that every single member of the church is in different phases of life. For instance, a person faces challenges, problems, and struggles in any form. The songs they are singing will remind the goodness of God, which will strengthen and give hope to the person.

As a community, the coronavirus affects not just individually but the entire church. For member B, there is a difference between worshipping God corporately in the church and being alone at home. The pandemic affects the whole aspect of a person. For this reason, the songs that they are singing give them hope and a reminder that God is in control. For Worship Leader B, it is important to sing the faithfulness and goodness of God to speak life and hope to the church.

Member B supports this idea when he expresses that he misses the corporate worship together in the church. The pandemic could be a lonesome situation, but the songs give him new perspectives to lift his spirit. He mentions that the songs they are singing, especially the new ones, can speak life to the season. He supports his claim by quoting from the Bible that “the tongue has the power of life” (Proverbs 18:21). Lastly, for member B, to worship God together does not just strengthen him but give him the spirit of belongingness.

In the same way with member D, he admits that it is challenging for him to watch online services. He prefers to have a physical meeting and sing praise & worship together as a church. He emphasizes that he misses the feeling and the idea of corporate worship; as for him, it is uplifting his spirit. Member D adds that corporate worship is magical, and many things can happen that his eyes could not see.

Further, member C states that the singing of praise & worship inside the church encourages, builds, and reminds him of what he believes about his faith and the truths of life. He further emphasizes that his experiences change his internal world, and frequently it is his way of being filled with the Holy Spirit. He boldly expresses that it is the work of the Holy Spirit that strengthens him whenever he is down.

Worship Leader C states his insights to underpin the idea of “faith is lifted and strengthened” when people come together in worship. He mentions the Hillsong Church Oslo itself as the host pastor resigned last summer 2020. For him, the situation of the church does not weaken the church nor cause any division. He believes that as they worship together on Sundays, the situation strengthens their faith in God instead. Everyone is contributing, functioning their parts so the ministry will continue even without an official leader of the church. The season that the whole church is in does not hinder them from singing praises & worship God. The season of the church does not take away their focus on God. It strengthens their faith as he believes that there is power if they confess, declare, and proclaim in their mouth with the truths over any circumstances.

To sum up, there is an impact both universal and individual as the whole church gathers together in unity. Based on these perspectives, “faith is lifted and strengthened” when a church gathers and worships God in unity.

#### **5.4.5 Short Summary**

As mentioned, the impacts of singing praise & worship are indeed enormous. Every informant has a different story and experience that make the impacts complex to comprehend. It is not limited only to what I have mentioned above through the members' experiences in Hillsong Church Oslo. The different impacts of singing praise & worship are pertinent to discuss in this thesis. In this way, I can analyze in-depth to answer the main question of this thesis – “how do the members of Hillsong Church Oslo experience the impacts of praise & worship on their lives?” To answer this, I will analyze all the data gathered using the theory of aesthetics/sensational theory by Meyer (2010) and Klaver (2016) in the next chapter.

## 6 ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I apply the concept of aesthetics/sensational forms developed by Meyer (2010) with the combination of aesthetics concept by Klaver (2016) to analyze the members' experiences in Hillsong Church, Oslo. Meyer (2010) also introduces the notion of aesthetics persuasion to discuss in depth the practice of praise & worship in Pentecostalism. I argue some aspects from the data gathered as stated in the two previous chapters to answer the main research questions of this thesis – how do the members of Hillsong Church Oslo experience the impact of praise & worship on their lives? Foremost, I would like to discuss the aesthetics/sensational forms of Hillsong Church Oslo.

### *6.1 Aesthetics/ Sensational Forms: Authoritative Style of Worship*

*“I do not use the form in opposition to but as a necessary condition for expressing content and meaning of ethical norms and values; form is also not a static container but a modality or device that allows for repeated”*

*(Meyer, 2010 p. 751)*

The form of worship in Hillsong Church Oslo displays aesthetic practice during Sunday services. It is evident with modern technologies such as smokes machine, light, and sound effects. Also, the people's body movements on the stage, the style of music, and artistic visual effects of multimedia are well presented and visible form as part of worship. Through this, it enhances the spiritual settings of the place. The room's ambiance with these modern technologies and physical movements draws everyone to participate, especially in the praise & worship part. This kind of setup is the same as the rest of the Hillsong churches we can watch on YouTube. To watch online with this kind of form is already convincing and to be one in the congregation singing together is more than that. That is why one of the members described it as a “magical” experience to be in this kind of setting. The application of modern technologies, gestures, or body movements during the praise & worship are the specific subjects that one can perceive and interpret through senses. Furthermore, the bodily expressions in Hillsong Church Oslo are similar to the rest of the Hillsong Churches we can watch online.

Klaver (2016) stresses that the performative aspects of worship from the leaders on stage influences a lot to bring a transformation of the audience in terms of emotional engagement. She emphasizes further that the bodily expressions that the congregation demonstrates might signify an authentic encounter with God. There is only one thing that I did not notice. I could not hear the worship leaders online and live speaking of tongues as they lead the congregation. However, they do not deny this doctrine as part of the manifestation as being filled with the Holy Spirit as mentioned by member C. Nevertheless, as mentioned, the similarity of the body movements in the entire congregations is noticeable.

It is the authoritative style of worship that the Hillsong church globally is practiced, enhanced, mediated, and shared (Klaver, 2016). As this is the authoritative style of worship in Hillsong Church, this becomes part of their own identity. These are the body movements as a response to the singing of praise & worship. For instance, the lifting and clapping of hands, dancing, closing eyes while singing, jumping, and many others.

This authoritative style of worship that was shared, enhanced, mediated with the congregants benefit not just individually but as a community. This kind of community-making relies on their shared sensibilities between people rather than official membership ties of the church. It can create commitment and bonding within this kind of community (Klaver, 2016). As she clearly states further:

*“The importance of worship music and singing for believers reveals that suitable aesthetics forms are powerful means of creating commitments and modes of bonding...This mode of bonding not only involves the actual community of worshippers but also has the potential to evoke a sense of community within a larger imagined and relational network”*  
(Klaver, 2016 p. 110)

In the context of Hillsong, gathering together and worship shows commitment and strengthening not just their own but as the whole church. Although the songs that they are singing together do not convey cohesion, the singing of songs develops relationships not just to God but also towards one another.

(Klaver, 2016) As mentioned above, worship leader B states that the singing of praise & worship strengthens and unites every member knowing that the host pastor resigned officially last 2020 summer. Instead of division in the church, they stick together without someone to look at as a leader. Every member contributes, helps, and supports one another. The authorized leaders from each department comply with their designated tasks in order to build a relational community. Each one commits to support one another, and as they sing praise & worship to God, they believe that God is the head of the church. In this way, they will stand in unity, proclaiming God's goodness and greatness despite the whole church's situation.

Another angle to underpin the idea of Klaver (2016) that singing worship creates commitments and modes of bonding is the pandemic situation that the whole world is facing. The social lockdown that hinders the gathering of the church deprives the members of being together physically. The majority of the informants miss the corporate worship together. Also, the idea of being in the kind of community committed and bonded with one another. Member B mentions during the interview that he misses corporate worship and be together with other church members. He further expresses that it is more challenging to be in a mode of worship alone on screen.

He prefers to meet physically in the church. He believes that there is a big difference between being together than watching church services alone at home. This idea underpins worship Leader A as mentioned above; worshipping together as a church is powerful. Hence, the importance of singing praise & worship together as a community is powerful means to create commitments and modes of bonding among the members in Hillsong Church Oslo.

As praise & worship is an authoritative mode to experience the divine, modern technologies and other materials can be part of the tools to bridge the gap between humankind and God. Klaver (2016) does not focus if the authoritative style of worship in Hillsong is the manifestation of the Holy Spirit or not. However, she mentions how it generates spiritual conviction, which I will use in 6.3 (Aesthetics Persuasion: Worship Music Text/Lyrics). In this context, Klaver (2016) angles the authoritative style of worship as beneficial to the community.

I find it relevant to be part of this analysis as the impacts of praise & worship can be viewed from personal to a communal extent. In this way, I can analyze the practice of praise & worship as bridging forms in a broader perspective.

As the authoritative style of worship is just part of the form, I will stick the argument based on the concept of aesthetics/sensational theory by Meyer (2010) as she clearly stated:

*“I do not use the form in opposition to but as a necessary condition for expressing content and meaning of ethical norms and values; form is also not a static container but a modality or device that allows for repeated”*  
(Meyer, 2010 p. 751)

Meyer (2010) further argues that religion is about the link between humans and the divine, and in order for that link to experience as authentic, the sensational forms must be persuasive. Also, she quoted the idea of Even Barth that states “wary if aestheticization, acknowledged that God persuades human beings through shape and form” (Meyer, 2010 p. 757). Thus, the authenticity of the experience through the form can be viewed as genuine when it is persuasive.

The moment that I stepped inside the Hillsong Church Oslo; I could undeniably say that it was remarkable. I was persuaded and emotionally compelled by the atmosphere of the room. I could further attest that whether it is the Holy Spirit or simply what my senses can perceive, or a confluence of both, the experience was persuasive.

What are the preparations of the leaders beforehand to demonstrate the aesthetics form persuasively during Sundays? What are the doctrines and beliefs to execute so that the aesthetics become persuasive?

## ***6.2 Aesthetics Persuasion: Beliefs, Doctrines of Praise & Worship***

Meyer (2010) further emphasizes that the sensational forms are considered the authorized modes for invoking and organizing access to the transcendental that shape norms and religious content such as beliefs, doctrines, and set of symbols. Thus, the singing of praise & worship in Pentecostalism is an authorized mode to implement and strategic gateway to the supernatural that creates some beliefs and doctrines or standards.

In the context of Hillsong Church Oslo, the worship band leaders unanimously believe that there are some preparations beforehand to examine.



These preparations will contribute to experience the presence of God during praise & worship. Based on the interviews with the leaders, the spiritual preparation for each member of the worship band is more highlighted over technicalities. Albeit there are some routines to follow for technicalities as the whole team. For instance, according to Worship Leader C, the worship band will meet Thursdays for music rehearsals. Further, they should be in the church ahead of time before the service starts to make themselves ready for the service gathering. This kind of preparation is not stressed by Worship Leader A; instead, he highlighted the spiritual preparation of the entire worship band before leading on Sundays.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there are just two things that the entire worship band should do before leading people into praise & worship such as, “spiritual preparation & right focus”. These are the key elements that Worship Leader A gives strong emphasis on preparation beforehand. The preparation spiritually means being connected to the Spirit of God themselves first. It is done by spending much time in prayer and worshipping God before Sunday. It is further done individually at home and corporately as the whole team during rehearsals and before coming up on stage. Secondly, having the right focus implies not focusing on the perfection of music as they play, but every worship band member should focus on God. To have a “right focus” is an outcome of being prepared spiritually beforehand.

These two intertwined concepts are vital because they believe that to lead the praise & worship means to lead a spiritual battle in the entire congregation. According to Worship Leader C, they cannot do that if they cannot defeat their own battles. As mentioned again in the previous chapter, the worship leaders express their belief that praise & worship is a powerful tool to win the battle against the spiritual realm. The spiritual battles refer to individual struggles in different forms, strongholds of the devil that the physical eye cannot see. It is related to the belief in praise & worship discussed by Meyer (2010) during her study in the congregation of Ghana. The worship leaders further claim that the singing of praise & worship is very dangerous to the devil when the children of God proclaim, declare, and confess with their mouths as a church. Therefore, the spiritual preparation of each member of the band is essential prior to lead the congregation on Sundays. Also, the spiritual preparation of the worship band members will lead to the proper focus as they lead the congregation on Sundays. These two key elements are essential factors to meet the purpose of encountering God during praise & worship. In this way, the experiences of the participating members are persuasive.

According to Worship Leader C, Spirit-led worship means the Holy Spirit is moving inside the room. It means further that there are things that they cannot see with their physical eyes when the Holy Spirit moves, but they can sense it. However, it is essential to note what Worship Leader A has stated in the previous chapter that it is not all the time that people get healed, be freed from any form of bondage, etc., when they sing praise & worship. He further stated that it is not the people's fault or something that they can do. It means that this is something beyond their control, and he does not know its reason. However, he has emphasized that God wants the best for His children, and thus there is always a positive outcome of singing praise & worship.

Another aspect to examine as one of the contents in the practice of praise & worship is the unanimous understanding of the worship leaders about worship as a "lifestyle or way of living". As mentioned in the previous chapter, they unanimously believe that worship is not the singing of songs, but every action outside the church should serve as an offering to God. Is this the main essence of worship or just a part of it? If this is the main essence of worship, can we say that this is the bottom line or why the people in the church sing praise & worship? How can we analyze the concept of worship as a lifestyle pertaining to aesthetics persuasion?

If praise & worship is an authorized mode to get access in the presence of God, can we say that living a surrendered life to God is the key so that the presence of God can dwell in a gathering wherein a group of people praise & worship to God? It means further that the expression of worship inside the church is persuasive when the worship band on stage and the participating members live as a sacrifice in everyday of their lives. In this way, the basis of genuine experience is a genuine lifestyle outside the church. Thus, worship as a lifestyle is part of the doctrine/content/belief as a prerequisite to get access in the presence of God that will make the experience authentic and persuasive.

### **6.2.1 Short Summary**

To sum up, praise & worship as a sensational form becomes aesthetic persuasion with some preparations beforehand from the leaders and correct fundamental perception of praise & worship. In the Hillsong Church Oslo context, the content/belief/doctrine of praise worship is vital to examine and validate the genuineness of the experience. In this way, the practice of praise & worship as aesthetics persuasion is further analyzed. The aesthetics persuasion is not limited to this based on these findings. Thus, I will discuss further the text/lyrics of the songs in praise & worship as aesthetics persuasion.

### *6.3 Aesthetics Persuasion: Worship Music Text*

The aesthetics/sensational form as persuasive is discussed above from the perspectives of the worship leaders in the church of Hillsong Oslo. I have examined the preparations, doctrines, and beliefs as aesthetics persuasion. Here, I will analyze the findings of aesthetics persuasion through the text/ lyrics of the songs. The text/lyrics of the song is one of the things that I noticed, which I believe part of aesthetics persuasion during this empirical research.

The informants affirm and emphasize the significance of the text/lyrics as it impacted the way they think and feel. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Worship Leader B has expressed his perspectives every time he leads praise & worship to underpin this idea as he states:

*“And also, as a family praising God, my hope for people who are standing together in worship is that they would know that they are not just singing lyrics, but words that shake the earth and break the bondages...and that we are saying words that are powerful....”*

These direct statements from Worship Leader B show that the aesthetics persuasion in praise & worship through lyrics/texts of the songs can be analyzed.

This idea has been supported with the perspective from member D when he says that what impacted him the most are songs with lyrics quoted from the Bible/Scriptures. Member C has mentioned too that singing of praise & worship is similar to reading the book of Psalms from the Bible/Scriptures that make it meaningful and impact his thoughts and feelings. As mentioned in the previous chapter, he believes that God has spoken to him directly through the lyrics/text of the songs they were singing.

The same way with the perspective of member A, as he gives more importance to the singing part more than listening to the sermons. It means further that the lyrics/text of the songs has content that speaks to his mental health. Member B and Worship Leader B believe that the purpose of the songs they are singing is to prophesy the church. It means to say that the text/lyrics of the song can be a tool to encourage, strengthen and restore some aspects of the members. Thus, the lyrics/text of the songs is part of aesthetics persuasion.

Again, as sensational forms help us grasp the form and content, the physical and spiritual, and the body and the mind (Meyer, 2010), I would like to argue further how the lyrics/text of the songs impacted the participants. One of the songs that member D has mentioned is the song God of the City by Chris Tomlin as follows:

*“You're the God of this city, You're the King of these people  
You're the Lord of this nation  
You are  
You're the light in this darkness, You're the hope to the hopeless  
You're the peace to the restless  
You are  
There is no one like our God  
There is no one like our God”*

Member D has cited this specific song as proof that many songs that they were singing came from the Holy Spirit. This song was given spontaneously by the Holy Spirit to a missionary when he visited a club bar with different people who needed to know the truth about God. He sang the said song right there at that moment, believing that the Holy Spirit has told him to do so. He obeyed, and as a result, many people got saved and got to know God. The point is that what impacted the participants are songs that the Holy Spirit has given. It is why the worship leaders are spending much time asking God what to sing on Sundays.

Moreover, it is essential to know that the songs they are singing are quoted directly from the Bible/Scriptures. To test the authenticity of the lyrics/text when quoted directly from the Bible/Scriptures. Moreover, there is a high risk of perceiving the meaning of the words as negative if they are not authentic and biblical. (Klaver, 2016). The same way with the perspective of member E when his experience changed his life completely. As mentioned above as well the song entitled “Oh come to the Altar” by Planetshakers goes:

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.songfacts.com/facts/chris-tomlin/god-of-this-city>

Accessed: March 25,2021

*<sup>7</sup>“Are you hurting and broken within?  
Overwhelmed by the weight of your sin?  
Jesus is calling  
Have you come to the end of yourself?  
Do you thirst for a drink from the well?  
Jesus is calling  
O come, to the altar  
The Father's arms are open wide  
Forgiveness was bought with  
The precious blood of Jesus Christ”*

The song's message confirms the need of member E at the moment as an affirmation of the authenticity of the Holy Spirit's work. The song impacted to him, which convinced him to change his ways and redirect his life. He believes that the song was given indeed by the Holy Spirit since the song has ministered to him. In this way, the act of singing does not just generate commitment but so with conviction on a spiritual level (Klaver, 2016). As mentioned above, the authoritative style of worship is more profound if the impacts transform the participants' lives. It is not just about the artists' performance, bodily expressions, or feeling of being in the community. The content of singing praise and worship is perceived when the text/lyrics of the songs transform the hearts and persuades the minds.

Based on the findings, in the Hillsong Church Oslo context, the songs they are singing can impact the participating members through the songs given from the Holy Spirit. To know if they are indeed from the Holy Spirit, it will speak to the person/community, and it should be biblical.

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<sup>7</sup><https://www.metrolyrics.com/o-come-to-the-altar-lyrics-elevation-worship.html>

Accessed: March 25, 2021

#### *6.4 Aesthetics/Sensational Form: Experiences of the Members*

I have argued praise & worship as aesthetics/sensational form in the context of Hillsong Church Oslo. Also, I have discussed the preparation of the worship leaders and the content/beliefs/doctrines of praise & worship as aesthetics persuasion. I have added the text/lyrics of the songs as a significant part of aesthetics persuasion. Here, I will argue the experiences of the members in Hillsong Church Oslo through the lens of aesthetics/sensational forms by Meyer (2010) and Klaver (2016). In this way, I can analyze further and answer the main question of this thesis – how do the members of Hillsong Church Oslo experience the impact of praise & worship on their lives?

Meyer (2010) argues that the use of sensational forms allows us to grasp the confluence of the physical and the spiritual or transcendental fully. It offers a new lens through which dualisms of matter and spirit, form and content, body and mind are rejoined in a broader understanding of aesthetics. Further, Birgit Meyer clearly states:

*“Exploring Pentecostal religiosity via sensational forms allows us to move beyond James` s approach of religious experience as primary; instead, we can ask how authorized and shared religious forms for experiencing the Holy Spirit make personal experiences and possible (and repeatable)”*

*(Meyer, 2010 p. 752)*

The fact that the Pentecostals believe in the Holy Spirit, and further believe that they need to be filled/touched with the Holy Spirit. One way to do so is singing praise & worship – to be filled/ touched with the Holy spirit is an outcome of encountering God. It is manifested in bodily experiences based on the findings through the informants. These experiences vary from one to another depending on the personality and the need of the person. Again, Meyer (2010) clearly states that the Holy Spirit is an experiential presence that invokes feelings, and thus, some become emotional expressed by crying. Through this way, they feel loved that suffices the multiple emotional longings and needs deep within. For instance, members C, D, and E described their bodily experience by involving their emotions. Members A & B express their experiences more on the cognitive outcome when participating in praise & worship.

These experiences are personal, and they vary from one person to another. It may mean further that the members A to E differs from how they experience the Holy Spirit through their emotional and mental aspects. Member C has experienced both mental and emotional aspects. Also, he alone mentioned the term as well being “filled with the Holy Spirit” as he participates in the singing part of the service.

The lifting of hands, kneeling, closing of eyes, rhythmic clapping, and jumping are physical body expressions which indicate that the participants are well-engaged in singing. These bodily expressions are personal, possible, and even repeatable with every member of the church. How? I want to bring up again the notion of aesthetics persuasion that Meyer (2010) has developed to examine the authenticity of the experiences.

Firstly, the experiences of members A and B are more on the mental aspect. Member A clearly emphasizes that the singing of songs in the church nourishes his mental health. The same way with member B when he claims that he gains new perspectives from singing songs. They do not mention emotional manifestations like crying. However, they both believe that physical movement during praise & worship is necessary.

Secondly, the experience of member C is both mental and emotional impact during his participation in praise & worship. As mentioned in the previous chapter, member C perceives praise & worship as his way of connecting to God and being filled with the Holy Spirit. According to him, he was moved emotionally by God when fears and worries succumbed to his mind. He was ultimately broken during that time. He felt that the Holy Spirit spoke to him through a particular song that persuaded his mind. He was kneeling, crying in the middle of a crowd in response to the touch of the Holy Spirit. For him, the Holy Spirit invokes his emotions (Meyer, 2010) and the lyrics of the songs renewed his mind. As he claims that praise & worship is one way to connect with God, it means further that to experience the presence of God is personal and repeatable.

Thirdly, it is vital to highlight the response of member D as he mentions too that he cannot help himself from being emotional every moment he participates in praise & worship. He clearly states that he does not know the exact reason, but he believes that it is the Holy Spirit who invokes his feelings.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the kind of songs that will move him are songs that exalt and describe the Sovereignty of God rather than songs meant to cater his feelings. Again, this experience can support what Meyer (2010) has mentioned that the Holy Spirit indeed invokes feelings of the believers. In this way, the concept of aesthetics persuasion convinces member D to believe in the authenticity of his connection to God during praise & worship.

Therefore, based on these experiences, being emotional can be viewed as manifestation and indicates the Holy Spirit's work. It can be analyzed further that some bodily manifestations occurred, such as lifting of hands while closing the eyes or teary eyes while meditating the truths about God. It is clear that this experience is personal as the experiences of member D differ from member C. It is repeatable and possible as well as they experienced being emotional not just once, but every time they felt connected to the Spirit of God.

Member E experienced the same, when he believed that the Holy Spirit convicted him of ceasing from his wrongdoings. As a response to the Holy Spirit, his bodily expressions were crying and kneeling as he asked forgiveness before God. For him, that was an unforgettable experience because it changed the direction of his life. As mentioned in the previous chapter, he boldly claims that it was the Spirit of God who convicted and spoke to him through the song. Thus, in this context, the body manifestation or any physical movement while participating can be an indication of being touched by the Holy Spirit. It includes the speaking of tongues, as mentioned by member C.

As the sensational theory enables us to examine the form and the content, the body and mind, the physical and spiritual rejoined together to grasp Pentecostalism. (Meyer, 2010) These physical manifestations are valid to believe as an outcome that will lead to the transformation of the participants' lives. Further, the physical manifestation based on the informants' experiences, regardless of whether it is emotional/mental or spiritual, could be inseparable from the spiritual realm or transcendental. Therefore, "aesthetics of persuasion is responsible for the "truth effects" of religion... by authorizing the body as the harbinger of ultimate truth and authenticity" (Meyer, 2010 p. 756).



## 7 PRAISE & WORSHIP IN HILLSONG OSLO CONTEXT

In the previous chapter, I have examined the praise & worship ritual in Hillsong Church Oslo as an aesthetics/sensational form by Meyer (2010) & Klaver (2018). I have applied the said theory to analyze how the members of Hillsong Church Oslo experience the impacts of praise & worship on their lives. Based on the findings, there are three (3) factors to discuss further based on the data gathered to answer the main research question as follows:

- A) Proper Understanding: “Right Preparation & Focus”
- B) Personal Relationship: “Taste and See”
- C) Collective Relationship: “Strength in Unity”

These are the main content of my discussion to be tackled underneath.

### *7.1 Proper Understanding: “Right Preparation & Focus”*

As mentioned in Chapter 1.5, the root of singing in Pentecostalism originated in Azusa Street. Historically, the leaders created no form in their gatherings. They just came into the meeting without any preparation beforehand as they relied wholly on the Holy Spirit. (Dove, 2009) There were no liturgies, weekly rehearsals, and programs to follow. In short, the Hillsong form of worship shows juxtaposition on how the singing of praise & worship in Azusa Street.

However, the Contemporary Pentecostals adopted the new forms of worship expression to search for relevance to contemporary culture. During the late 20th century, in the charismatic movement, one of the worship leaders in Vineyard argues that the pursuit of change in worship expression is not because for the sake of change but because of their desire to express their love to God in new and relevant ways. (Ward, 2005)

The rise of popular music culture and modern technologies in religious rituals were good from the beginning. The Vineyard has produced many songs as new expressions of their worship to God before Hillsong. The congregations were increasingly singing worship songs whose style identifies with their own culture.

It means to say that there were no contradictions of culture in the use of popular music. In 1997, the problems started to occur when the leaders focused more on external arrangements and preparations instead of focusing on God. The leaders and the congregants became connoisseurs of worship instead of seeking God (Ward, 2005).

The case in the Hillsong Church Oslo is different, as the leaders are more focused on spiritual preparation than the technicalities. As discussed in chapter 5, worship leaders emphasize the “spiritual preparation and right focus” as the elements of Spirit-led praise & worship. The Worship Leader A highlights the importance of being connected to the Holy Spirit first before the entire band stand on the platform on Sundays. Further, the worship leaders emphasize the importance of having the “right focus” than technicalities in leading the congregation into praise & worship. As mentioned, Worship Leader A has stated that there were times that the worship band played a wrong note or sang lyrically wrong; however, as the focus was right, they sensed that the Holy Spirit was in the room.

It further means that the importance of spending time with God individually and corporately before Sunday worship leadings is a must. Thus, the worship leaders prioritize spiritual preparations themselves and the entire band first before leading praise & worship on Sundays. The worship leaders understood the main focus of singing praise & worship, which is God.

Also, the worship leader C underpins the idea of having the “right focus” in order to experience the presence of God as he clearly states:

*“What I hope what the people would experience during praise and worship is that we can set our focus away from ourselves and that we can forget the people standing next to us for a second in order to encounter God” (as mentioned in chapter 5)*

In this statement, Worship Leader C conveys the importance and supports the idea of having the right focus, not just within the context of the worship band on stage. He implies the entire congregation to focus on God as they sing praise & worship. Do members perceive the same way?

The concept of “right focus” in worshipping God is supported by the members C, D and E when they emphasize their expectations as “to enjoy the presence of God” and “to meet God” (discussed in chapter 5). The idea of member E clearly stated, (as mentioned above) he does not care about the glamorous setting during Sunday services. Further, the four members emphasized the concept of “connecting to God” when they sing praise & worship – these perceptions show that they understood to whom the focus of worship is. The conceptions of the members convey similarity to the purpose of singing praise & worship, which is to encounter God, according to Miranda Klaver (2016). However, the level of understanding about praise & worship of the member-informant differs from one to another. Thus, it affects their expectations before singing songs during services. As the perceptions vary, the expectations follow.

Therefore, it conveys further that as people have misconceptions of praise & worship, it will lead to different expectations, thus, affecting the impacts. Again, as mentioned in chapter 5, member B honestly admits that his physical condition sometimes – stressed or tired – will hinder him in focusing on God, and he quickly gets distracted when something goes wrong on stage. However, he is so aware not to be distracted with these things, which means that he understood the concept of “right focus” and the need for “self-preparation” not to defeat the purpose of going to the church. It can be viewed further as another angle that the preparation before coming to church is not the sole responsibility of the leaders. It further shows the need for preparation on the side of the members as well. Ward underpins this idea as he states:

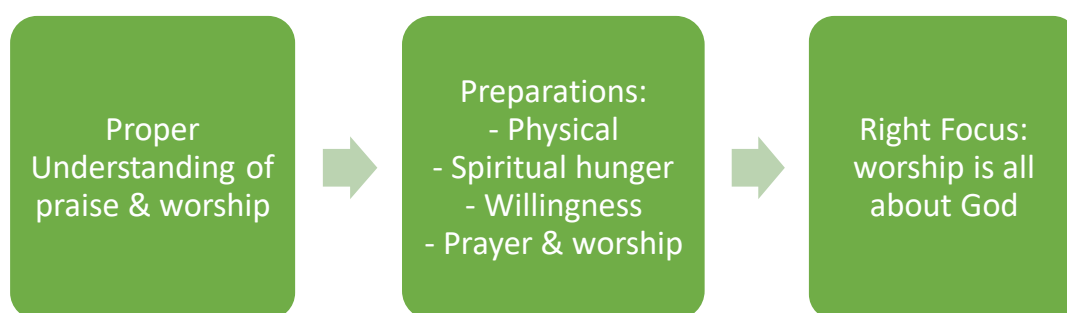
*“We were challenged to ask ourselves individually when I come through the door of the church, what am I bringing as my contribution to worship? Then the truth came to us: worship is not a spectator sport; it is not a product molded by the taste of the consumers. It is not about what we get out of it. It is all about God” (Ward, 2005 p. 172)*

Ward (2005) means that worship is not the same as watching a football game, for instance, wherein the viewer's response relies on the performance of the people playing. In the context of singing praise & worship, Ward (2005) further emphasizes that the congregation renders something in worshipping God and the attitudes of the heart should be - worship is all about God. As Worship Leader B says, worship is about lifting the name of Jesus whether he is on the platform or not. Thus, the concepts of right focus and self/spiritual- preparation are significant for the participating members too.

Another angle to examine that may affect the level of impacts in singing praise & worship is the idea of members B and D as they emphasized the importance of being hungry with God's presence. Member D emphasizes the idea of willingness and hunger of his heart before coming to church as he believes that it is not the nature of God to force His children if they are not willing to meet him. It means that the presence of God will only dwell in a place where He is welcome, which means further that the people are willing and open. Thus, the impacts may vary upon the willingness and hunger of the participating member. To be hungry for God means the focus and motives of coming to church are seeking God. (Ward, 2005) Based on this, the importance of self-preparation in human aspects before coming to church may affect the impacts in singing praise & worship.

With all these, we can say that the need for "self-preparations" will lead to "right focus" during praise & worship on Sundays. These two related concepts are an outcome of the proper understanding of why the participants sing praise & worship in the church. In this way, the members of Hillsong Church Oslo can experience the impact of praise and worship on their lives.

### 7.1.1 Illustration



*Figure 1 – Proper understanding: Preparation & Focus*

## 7.2 Personal Relationship: “Taste and See”

*“Exploring Pentecostal religiosity via sensational forms allows us to move beyond James’s approach of religious experience as primary; instead, we can ask how authorized and shared religious forms for experiencing the Holy Spirit make personal experiences and possible (and repeatable)”*  
*(Meyer, 2010 p. 752)*

Here, I further argue the members' experiences through the lens of aesthetics/sensational theory by Meyer (2010) for a more comprehensive understanding of the impacts in praise & worship in the context of Hillsong Church Oslo. I want to underpin my argument with the concept of sound spirituality by Sailors (2005) to answer the main research question of this thesis in a more profound sense.

I want to bring up again the perception from Albrecht (1999) that praise & worship as part of the Pentecostal Spirituality is conveyed as sustaining the ongoing relationship to the Spirit of God. Also, the idea that the primary function of singing praise & worship is to encounter God by Klaver (2016). How can this be possible? Is this even possible in the Hillsong Church Oslo context?

Sailors (2005) clearly emphasizes that the human senses can function to experience the divine through sound. He further stresses the significance of “hearing and seeing” for awakening, sustaining, and deepening the relationship between humans and the divine. Sailors (2005) further emphasizes that when sound and text are combined, the human being can experience the divine in the context of religion and traditions. Thus, as praise & worship uses the combination of sound and text, humans can indeed experience the presence of God through it.

Sailors (2005) builds his argument of experiencing the divine in and through sound with an analogy from the most excellent musician in the Bible, King David that says, ““O taste and see the goodness of the Lord” (Psalm 145:1)” (Sailors, 2005 p. 334) How can one “taste and see” in the context of singing the praise & worship ritual? How can we apply this analogous phrase in connection with the members' experiences in Hillsong Church, Oslo?

As discussed in Chapter 5, I have described some aspects of impacts based on the members' experiences of Hillsong Church Oslo, such as *mental*, *emotional*, *deviation*, and *invigoration* impacts. These experiences vary from one to another based on the data gathered from the informants.

To “taste and see” may imply abstract understanding at first glance, however, to examine it closely means an indication that humans have the possibility to experience the divine using their senses. Further, the phrase “the goodness of the Lord” is too broad to define. However, this passage may imply as beneficial to humans in different aspects. So, if the phrase “to taste and see” means the possibility to experience the divine through senses. Also, if the phrase “goodness of the Lord” means beneficial to humans, then this can be perceived as: to experience the presence of God is beneficial to humans in different aspects.

Therefore, the four (4) impacts mentioned from the experiences of the members in Hillsong Church Oslo can be understood as benefits of being in the presence of God during praise & worship in the church. A recent study also shows that being empowered spiritually through participating in prayer and worship includes psychological aspects (mental, emotional) as added benefits (Davidson & Lee, 2017). Furthermore, the study of Kgatle (2019) in South Africa shows that the singing of worship in Pentecostalism serves as an act of therapeutic agent to all sorts of ailments – physical, psychological, and spiritual ailments. In the same way with the experiences of all the informants in Hillsong Church Oslo. Members A and B are moved in mental aspects, while members C, D, and E are more on emotional aspects. Thus, there is the possibility that the member's experiences of Hillsong Church Oslo are part of spiritual empowerment as an outcome of encountering the divine.

However, it is essential to note that the “benefits” are not the focus of singing praise & worship. As mentioned previously that the focus of worship is God (Ward, 2005). The benefits are just an outcome, a result of the personal encounter with the presence of God. It means further that there should be a foundation to not fall into the trap of consumer-oriented culture in this context. It means that the idea of getting the benefits in singing praise & worship should not overrule the idea of seeking God in worship (Ward, 2005). Otherwise, this is wreaking havoc on the idea that singing praise & worship is all about God. How does it work, then?

Further, it is essential to highlight the unanimous conception of worship from the worship leaders. They clearly state that worship is “part of life, way of living and lifestyle”. This conception connects to the understanding of the member D that sums it all as he says:

*“I think worship is something that is part of your whole life, it is not music or sound, but it is a way of life in a way. Worship is what you do as it says in the Bible, worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24). It is not really about the songs, although I really like music and worship God through music. I think worship is something that changes us. It is an aligning oneself with God in a way” (as mentioned in chapter 5)*

This understanding of praise & worship by member D shows precisely the same meaning as the definition of Worship Leader C that states:

*“I would like to underline the fact that praise & worship is not just through songs presenting as worship to God. It is essential for me to understand that my whole life is presenting as praise & worship to God. Moreover, that includes in everything that I do, in my decision-making, my everyday life – that is my worship to God”*

This understanding of worship by member D and Worship Leader C connects to the perspective of Powell that says:

*“Worship, then, is more than vocal praise and ritualized movements. It is ideally, the totality of the consecrated life, in which everything is offered up to God as a holy sacrifice” (Powell, 2005 p. 105)*

According to Worship Leader A (as stated in chapter 5), this is precisely the main essence of worship. It implies that the authentic worship of God is the consecrated life – daily devoted life to Him. That is why the leaders of Hillsong Church Oslo define worship as “part of life, lifestyle, way of living”. It means further that the singing of praise & worship inside the church boils down to their ongoing passionate relationship with God. To emphasize further, the singing of praise & worship inside the church reflects how the member lives outside the church (as discussed in Chapter 5). Thus, “to taste and see the goodness of the Lord” – the benefits of experiencing the presence of God are possibly accessible to the devotees.

In this way, to experience the Holy Spirit through authorized modes can be viewed further as possible and repeatable (Meyer, 2010). That is how the members experience the impacts of praise & worship in the context of Hillsong Church Oslo.

### 7.2.1 Illustration

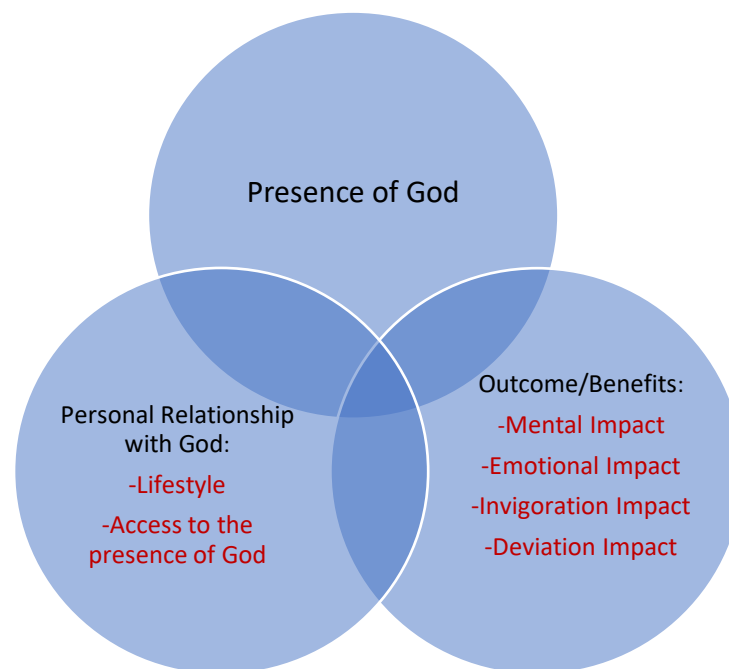


Figure 2 - Personal Relationship: "Taste & See"

### 7.3 Collective Relationship: "Strength in Unity"

*"The importance of worship music and singing for believers reveals that suitable aesthetics forms are powerful means of creating commitments and modes of bonding... This mode of bonding not only involves the actual community of worshippers but also has the potential to evoke a sense of community within a larger imagined and relational network."*

*(Klaver, 2016 p. 110)*



Based on the findings of this research, the impacts of praise & worship go beyond the personal horizon. Thus, I will argue further how it moves within the communal sphere. I will move further the idea of “tasting and seeing” by Sailors (2005) to a communal context and underpin with the claim of Klaver (2016) – Worship as aesthetics domain of modes commitment and bonding within a relational community.

As mentioned in chapter 6, worship leader A claims that praise & worship is powerful when the children of God gather in unity. The worship leader C stresses how the singing of praise & worship strengthens the congregation despite an unpleasant circumstance that the church is facing. Further, members B, C, and D express how they miss the feeling of being in corporate worship together inside the church due to the pandemic. Member B emphasizes that there is a difference when he worships together inside the church with other members.

These ideas underpin the idea that praise & worship has moved from personal to collective impact. It is precisely what Klaver (2016) conveys that the singing of praise & worship in Contemporary Pentecostalism creates modes of bonding and commitments within a relational community. Thus, the singing of praise & worship is beneficial not just to individual participants but also to the entire community. How does it work?

Members B, C, and D mention that they miss the idea of being together in the church due to the coronavirus restrictions. They miss the corporate worship together because online services are entirely different from physical meetings. They can feel the connection when they gather and sing together as a church.

Further, the authoritative style of worship in Hillsong enhances the congregation's response and receptivity (Klaver, 2016). It means the clapping of hands, lifting of hands together, and all the body movements on the stage. In addition, the people standing next to one another can motivate them to be in the mode of worship. The shared sensorial sensibilities between people in this kind of community are the basis rather than the formal ties or church membership (Klaver, 2016). Thus, all of the informants long to be back in the church again for corporate worship. Aside from the authoritative style of worship which binds the participants, the singing of songs addressed to the divine is one thing, as Sailors (2005) states:

*“Music is the language of the soul made audible, conferring upon human speech and addressed to the divine its originating silence and mystery, especially as music is the performative mode of prayer and ritual engagement of a community” (Sailers, 2005 p. 336)*

Sailers (2005) further argues that humans can form and express deep emotions through sound, pitch, bodily movements, rhythm in everything that humans do in festivals, campfires, communal acts of singing inside the church or temples, etc. Thompson (2009) confirms as well how the music arouses intense feelings. Thus, deep emotions indeed are involved in the singing of praise & worship. However, that is not the point here, but through this idea, it will build the argument from the idea of “tasting and seeing” within the communal sphere through the members' experiences in Hillsong Church Oslo

In praise & worship of the church, where the idea is “to taste and see” in the context of the entire community, it means to experience the presence of God as a community. Since singing praise & worship can be described as a communal act of singing inside the church, the congregation can form and express deep emotions while singing to God. It means further that every participating member can contribute deep emotions as they respond together to the presence of God during praise & worship.

For example, watching a concert wherein everybody is cheering, singing while watching the performers. In other words, there is a powerful impact when the entire audience is receptive, responsive, and cooperative altogether at the same time. In the same way, in the context of singing praise & worship inside the church. The only difference is that the response and receptivity of the congregation do not rely on the performance of the worship band but rather to the presence of God (Ward, 2005). As the congregation unites and expresses their adoration, thanksgiving and praises to God, it makes a difference and powerful impact within the community.

That is why the Worship Leaders A and C emphasize the unity of singing praise & worship inside the church. As mentioned above, Worship Leader A clearly says that praise & worship is powerful when the children of God stand together in worshipping Him. This further means that the praise & worship will impact- when all the souls express their music as a response to “tasting and seeing” the presence of God. Sailers (2005) further states:

*“If music is the language of the soul made audible, then human voices conjoined in the community are primary instruments of the collective soul – a medium for what transcends the immediately commonsense world.”*

*(Sailers, 2005 p. 337)*

In the context of praise & worship, the participation of singing should be an expression of innermost beings – making one’s soul audible and the human voices together. In such gatherings can be viewed as a collection of multiple souls expressing worship to God. The music that the congregation creates is an expression more than the state of mind and emotion, it is a piece of music as the language of one’s soul (Yob, 2010). It shows how member D describes that this kind of musical setting is magical in a more profound sense. Thus, the collective expressions of authentic worship to God from diverse souls make a difference.

To elaborate further, every soul varies as everyone has a different struggle, circumstance, and seasons in life. When they come together in the presence of God and let their soul be free while singing songs, some may need peace of mind, new perspectives as they sing, just like members A, B, and C. Some may need to feel loved and reassured like member C. Some may need to be freed from any form of struggle and healed from any form of sickness. There are maybe people who need to be reconciled in their relationship with God and redirect their lives like member E. In some cases, some people want to enjoy the presence of God and the collaborative relationship within the community. If these multiple, diverse souls congregate in unity to express deep emotions of worship, it will enhance the community's relationship.

It requires vulnerability, openness, and receptivity of the participating member. It means further that every soul is encouraged to express freely, not hold back, and be authentic. In this way, this will lead to a relational community that is open for acceptance, a deep connection, a sense of belongingness, and a bond for everyone.

It is the essence of being committed to the community wherein the basis of their relationship towards one another is through their sensibilities. Regardless of whether it is the Holy Spirit or not, this kind of community-making is more robust than a formal tie or a community membership (Klaver, 2016).

Therefore, there is strength & power in singing praise & worship together in unity. Again, regardless of whether if it is the Holy Spirit or whatever spiritual realm, this is how the members experience the impacts of singing praise & worship in the context of Hillsong Church Oslo.

### 7.3.1 Illustration

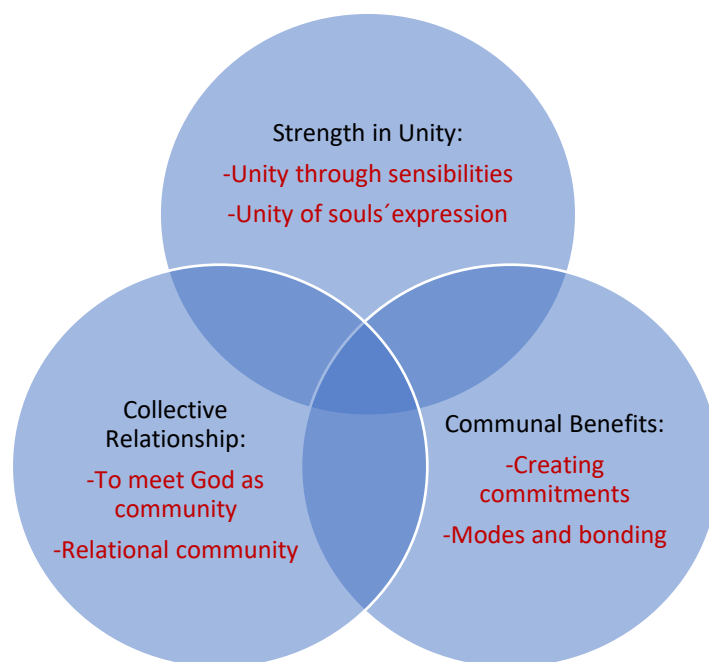


Figure 3- Collective Relationship: "Strength in Unity"

## 8 CONCLUSIONS

In the Pentecostal context, praise & worship as part of Pentecostal spirituality is a term that can be understood as a practice inside the church to mediate God and humans through the medium of music. It means further that the primary function of praise & worship is to “meet God” during services. For Pentecostals, to meet God means to be filled/touched with the Holy Spirit as impacts of praise & worship. However, the conception of the term praise & worship varies in different churches globally, which affects the impacts in the real sense.

Adopting the new form of worship intends to express the love and faith in God in more relevant ways. Further, it intensifies seeking God during services. The use of technological effects such as good lighting and sounds, multimedia effects, style of music, and body movements. These serve as the authoritative style of worship in the context of Hillsong Church Oslo. This form of worship is engaging to participate, which further enhances the impacts in the singing of songs during services. It creates modes of bonding and commitment more than an official membership in the church. It improves deeper connection with one another, and thus worship is a form of aesthetics practice that makes an impact relationally and as a united community.

Moreover, the singing of praise & worship is personal. Thus, it requires individual cooperation and commitment to experience the impact of praise & worship. The impacts may vary from one individual to another, depending on which aspect in life their needs are present. It is important to note that the impacts of praise & worship can be in different aspects and at the level of the spiritual realm. Thus, there are many more things that we do not know which means further that it is not limited to the findings in this thesis.

Based on the findings of this research, to answer the central question of this thesis – how do the members of Hillsong Church Oslo experience the impacts of praise & worship on their lives? – I have summed it up into three factors as follows:

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*A) congregants’ proper understanding of praise & worship*

*B) congregants’ personal relationship with God*

*C) congregants’ unity.*

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## 9 CRITICAL APPRECIATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

I want to express the need for critical thinking in this thesis due to inevitable circumstances that I struggled with during my empirical research. Firstly, as a qualitative researcher, it was my greatest struggle to gather the data needed due to the pandemic. The online interviews and field observations were not satisfying, which may affect the quality of my reports.

Secondly, I could have chosen my interviewees randomly inside the church if it's not temporarily closed due to coronavirus restrictions. Further, few of my informants were introduced with one of the leader-informants which may affect the quality of the data for some factors. For instance, the maturity of their faith is maybe the same level. Further, there is a possibility that they have the similarity of opinions and views. In this way, the beauty of diversity is challenged, and that limits my understanding to one direction instead of examining every angle to produce unbiased and quality knowledge. Also, I could have interviewed more than five members if only the church was open. However, as I do not have a connection inside Hillsong Church Oslo, this is the best option I have.

Further, the pandemic limits this thesis to examine the downside of the theory used. Birgit Meyer created the sensational form concept during her research in one of the Pentecostal churches in Ghana for more than a decade. I agree with the findings and the theory she has developed during her empirical research. In the context of Ghana, the aesthetics/sensational theory might be absolute but not in the entire Pentecostalism globally.

Considering the fact that Hillsong Church is a franchise, there is a high tendency that the concept of aesthetics/sensational form (Meyer, 2010) is not absolute, and thus, it is debatable. Meyer argues that the content, meaning, and spiritual can be perceived through the form. Further, Meyer (2010) clearly states:

*“I do not use the form in opposition to but as a necessary condition for expressing content and meaning of ethical norms and values; form is also not a static container but a modality or device that allows for repeated”*

*(Meyer, 2010 p. 751)*

This idea invokes the idea of Max Weber expressing that aestheticism can be viewed as stereotyped action. Meyer (2010) further disagrees with the view of Weber that says “aesthetics and arts are called to serve emotional and mass appeals” (Meyer, 2010 p. 750) in the context of religion.

In the context of Hillsong Church, as a famous brand (Wagner, 2019), there are pitfalls to scrutinize. Many scholars and researchers raised some downside angles of Hillsong Church as a franchise in the religious market. Klaver (2016) has mentioned during her studies in Hillsong, New York, and Europe that it is difficult for her to recognize which church she has been to as the bodily expressions and the materials they used are the same. She confirmed the idea of uniformity in the form of worship in Hillsong churches as she browsed on YouTube for the song entitled, <sup>8</sup>“This is how we overcome”. As the congregation sang in the church, they raised their one hand pointed above while turning around. Klaver (2016) has admitted that she was shocked to witness the same body movements inside the church during her research. This form of worship paints a picture of neglecting the diversity of culture and worship expression; thus, Hillsong promotes a form of decontextualized Christianity. (Klaver, 2018)

Thus, as Hillsong Church Oslo adopts the new forms of worship expression, further study needs to be done on how this new form of worship has challenged the culture and the worship expression in a Norwegian context. In addition, Wagner (2019) also argues that:

*“While popular music is easily absorbed into a variety of cultural settings, and this is a good vehicle of communication, it is also notoriously subjective, and thus its ability to reliably communicate meaning through either sounds or lyrics is debatable” (Wagner, 2019 p.129)*

Moreover, aside from neglecting the diversity of culture, popular music is subjective, which makes the content and meaning debatable. This idea will connect to the idea of Ward (2005), as he argues that the rise and adoption of new forms of worship music and different ways of worship nowadays can be at times be in danger of losing the integrity of worship.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdCg8oqMlrQ>. Accessed: May 7, 2021

Ward (2005) further claims that it is easy to get caught in the exciting new styles and forms; however, failing to be analytical and critical before adopting these new forms of expressing worship to God. He further emphasizes that the new form is not the basis of true worship as he clearly states:

*“To adopt new forms of expression – new music, dance, drama, and so on in worship – is by no means to guarantee the reality of its acceptability to God, and in many places, we are in serious danger of mistaking these actual developments for true worship in the sight of God”*

*(Ward, 2005 p. 173)*

Based on these facts from different scholars/researchers, the aesthetics/sensational theory is now challenged in the context of Hillsong Church Oslo. As the new form of worship is debatable, the content and meaning follow, which may contradict the aesthetics/sensational form theory by Meyer (2010). However, as Hillsong Church Oslo is not a big community yet, and one of the latest congregations of the Hillsong family, there is a possibility that these challenges are unnoticeable or not on the surface yet.

Finally, the initial findings of the impacts of praise & worship are more on the personal horizon. I realized, in retrospect, that it went on the communal sphere when I analyzed the gathered data without realizing it during the interviews. I assumed the members were just merely emotionally affected with the social lockdown, as everybody else was. Thus, the arguments in 7. 3 focus more on the leaders' perspectives, which could further mean that the members' perspectives are insufficient. However, as this thesis focuses on how the members experience the impacts of praise & worship, re-interviewing them about how the singing of praise & worship strengthens the community is another huge topic to examine. Therefore, below are my recommendations for further research pertaining to these issues.

*A) How does the Hillsong form of worship challenge the culture and worship expression in the Norwegian context?*

*B) How does singing in praise & worship become a strategic tool to strengthen the community?*



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## 11 APPENDIXES

### APPENDIX 1 – Interview Guide / Questionnaire for Worship Leaders

1. Can you please define the term “praise and worship” in Pentecostal worship?

*Follow-up question: Is there a difference between the two terms?*

2. How do you choose songs to sing during worship gatherings?

*Follow-up question: What is the most important to consider in choosing songs?*

3. How can you say that the praise & worship is good?

*Follow-up question: What are the elements of good praise & worship?*

4. What do you think the participants will experience during “praise and worship” at service gatherings?

*Follow-up questions:*

*4.1 How does the experience will become universal?*

*4.2 How does the experience will become personal existential?*

*4.3 Is there a formula in order to achieve the said experience?*

5. How does praise and worship play a vital role to the spirituality of the participants?

6. Do you think the experiences of the participants during “praise and worship” are the same or vary from time to time? if yes, Why?

*Follow-up question: How does the experience vary from every gathering?*

7. How does praise and worship make an impact to the lives of the believers in Hillsong Church?

**APPENDIX 2 – Focus- Group Interview Guide:**

1. How long have you been attending here Hillsong Church Oslo?
2. Were you a member from different church before Hillsong?
3. Are you an active member of the Hillsong Church Oslo?
4. When you hear the word praise & worship, what is your understanding about it?
5. How do you like the praise & worship part during services?
6. What is your expectation when you participate praise and worship?
7. Describe your individual experience in participation of praise and worship during services?
8. How does your individual experience in singing praise and worship impact to your lives?

### **APPENDIX 3 – Research Notification & Consent Form to be signed by Participants**

#### **REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE AN INTERVIEW**

My name is Jackelyn Genita Carias, MA student taking up Philosophy of Religion & Diversity: Conflict and Coexistence at University of Oslo, Norway. In completion of my study, I am required to write a thesis paper on a specific theme that I have chosen: “Spirituality: Worship Music in Norwegian Context. A Qualitative Study: Philosophical Views of Worship In Hillsong Church Oslo”. The main purpose of this project is to analyze how the members of Hillsong Church Oslo experience the impacts of praise & worship on their lives.

In order to accomplish this given task, I need to carry out research methods through the form of interviewing the expert (the worship pastor) and focus- group interviewing method which consist of (5-7) active members of Hillsong Church, Oslo Norway. This research tool will be combined with surveys and observations.

I will be using a tape recorder and at the same time taking notes while conducting the interviews and jot down important details during the observations of the services. The interviews will last about 30 minutes to an hour approximately, and we will agree upon the time and place where to conduct the interviews.

Everything you say in the interview will be confidential and will not be shared in any public forums. You will be anonymous in the final report and no one but me will have the access to the interview material. After I finish my thesis by the end of June 2021, all the gathered data will be deleted. The interviews are completely voluntary. You will at any time during the process have the possibility to withdraw your contribution from being used in the thesis without the need for any explanations. If you decide to withdraw, all the information about you will be deleted.

Moreover, kindly note as well that you have the right to request access to, deletion/correction/ limitation of one’s personal data and the right to send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer for the data controller or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority if there is any during the course of the research project.



Should you have further queries concerning the project kindly contact Jackelyn Genita Carias (+4792555996) or via email [jackelyn\\_carias@yahoo.com](mailto:jackelyn_carias@yahoo.com) or you can also contact Associate Professor Birgitte Lerheim, my research supervisor (+4791795331) or contact email: [birgitte.lerheim@teologi.uio.no](mailto:birgitte.lerheim@teologi.uio.no)

This project has been notified to The Data Protection Official for Research at NSD- Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS ([personvernombudet@nsd.no](mailto:personvernombudet@nsd.no), +4755582117)

Best Regards,

Jackelyn Genita Carias  
Student Researcher

Birgitte Lerheim  
Research Supervisor

### **Consent for Participation in the study**

I have read the above information about the project. I have received a copy of this form, and I'm willing to participate in this research interview project.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you😊