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Intermediate Composition – ENGL 2089 (024)

Professor

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Discourse Community

Ever since I was a kid, I grew up listening to Christian songs. My mother’s side of the family is very religious and believes that worshipping and listening to Christian’s songs should be taken very seriously. Thus, gospel songs have been in my life for as long as I can remember. One group of Christian singers in particular has always been one of my favorites: the *Hillsong Church*. According to their website, the *Hillsong Church, also known as “Hillsong,”* is a “contemporary Christian church” that was created in 1983 by the pastor Brian Houston and has massively expanded over time as it is now located in thirty countries on six continents. They qualify themselves as a “spirit-filled Christian church” which is known as a kind of Christian church that focuses more on the work of the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, and modern-day miracles as an everyday part of a believer’s life. When professor Carlson introduced the assignment about discourse communities to my class, it was like an evidence to me, I had to talk about Hillsong. For such a long time, the music part was the only thing that interested me because I personally believe that their music motivates and brings people closer to God during their weakest moments as well as in their happiest days. However, I had never made any research about the community that is behind those songs and I thought that this assignment was a great way for me to learn more and maybe it would make me want to become more involved in the community as it is very easy to become a Hillsong active member because of their massive presence on social media that makes them very accessible. From their website that encourages people to join them online or in their physical locations all around the world to their strong presence on Instagram, YouTube, and Spotify, it is very easy to learn more about Hillsong and discuss with the members.

The members of the Hillsong community are very active on social Media. For example, on their Instagram page named “Hillsong United,” I realized that they post a lot of contents such as music videos or videos of some of the members that are praying together or even some notes from different members to their peers. The most recent notes that they posted on their page are meant to encourage themselves during these complicated times and they always include something about God. One of their most recent post is a comment from “JD” who says that “this season of life has been surprising and unexpected” as he shares a Bible verse and encourages his peers to trust God even though we do not know what to expect for our future. At the end of his note, JD says “what has God been showing you?” Many members left comments like: “God has been showing me his goodness in a way I can’t handle,” “he has shown me that he remains faithful in every season,” and “Thank you for this message, you guys are amazing and we have been filling my home and kitchen with your music, especially during this time in life!” These comments show that the main objective of the community is to encourage people to believe in God, especially during these times. Another note was left by a member named Jad who says: “it’s important to care for one another now more than ever, let’s be people that are generous with what we have when it comes to the people in our world, especially when it can make such an impact on somebody going through a difficult time.” Many members replied and said: “Amen Jad, I’m grateful and giving thanks to you and Hillsong for your generosity.” Others said “Thanks Jad! Love all of you guys @hillsongunited” and “God has recently put on my heart to become part of his ministry. I feel like it’s a calling for both music ministry and preaching. Thank you Jad! We love you!” As we can see, the members express their love for each other and communicate about subjects that revolve around God.

While looking for Hillsong on the social media platform called Instagram, I was amazed by the number of accounts that I found, especially because they were all certified by Instagram as official Hillsong accounts. Those account were: Hillsong (the official and general page), Hillsong Worship, Hillsong United, Hillsong Young and Free, Hillsong New York City, Hillsong France, … They are all accounts in charge of the different ministries within the community. From my understanding, Hillsong created all those accounts to make sure that everybody can have access to them and become a member just through their phones. Their impressive presence on social media also reveals their desire to attract many young people. Another social media platform used by the Hillsong members is Spotify. It allows them to post weekly podcasts that are made by the pastor Brian Houston who is the founder of the Hillsong Church. On his podcast channel, the Pastor prays for the members and preaches just like he would do on a regular Sunday service. As he described it on his first podcasts, his purpose is that people will “be encouraged, blessed and inspired through these free podcasts.” Podcasts are a good medium because they are very accessible and therefore the community has even more chances to get more members. People can also listen to podcast whenever they want: in their car, before going to bed or even while driving. While talking, Brian Houston uses a conversational tone and it feels like he is directly talking to me about God. Podcasts are not the only content posted by Hillsong on Spotify, they also use the platform to post their songs and as a result they have been able to hit up to 235 million streams in their most known song, *Oceans*. According to Business Of Apps, Spotify has had more than 286 million monthly active users since the beginning of the year 2020, therefore the community has a big probability to expand the age range of their members as their ability to reach different ages, genders and people who speak different languages has been made easier.

As I previously said, music plays a big part in the community and is a medium that Hillsong has used to attract many Christians and encourage them to join the community. In fact, in Christianity, music is a way that many generations have used to worship and praise God. In the Bible, in the book of Psalms, chapter ninety-five, the verses one to three tell us how important singing to God is important as it states: “Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.” I think that this passage is a good representation of the huge importance that music has in the Hillsong community. According to the Billboard Hot 100 which is the music standard record chart in the United States, *Oceans*, a song released by Hillsong United, was the most listened to Christian song in 2014, 2015 and 2016. It is a song that I have always known but I did not realize the huge impact that it had. I decided to watch one of their concerts on their YouTube channel and saw that they had sixty-four million views on a video showing when they sang *Oceans* in Israel. A specific part of the video caught my eyes and got me a little bit emotional (3:20). They were already singing but then everybody stopped and we could only hear the music instruments playing on the background in a very quiet and restful way and then all together, they start singing: “Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders, let me walk upon the waters, wherever you would call me, take me deeper than my feet could ever wander, and my faith will be made stronger, in the presence of my Savior.” The audience showed many “worship expressions” such as closing their eyes while raising their hands, touching their hearts, or singing out loud. As a spectator of the video, I felt that the atmosphere was very pure and emotional. The members seemed all very genuine and they were expressing their emotions without fearing the opinion of those around them. I found another YouTube video showing one of their concerts in the United States where they sang their song called *Here I Am To Worship*, it was very interesting to see that many people had the same worship expressions as in the other concert that I analyzed. The members were raising their hands, singing out loud with their eyes closed and they all seemed to know all the lyrics as there was a perfect synchrony throughout the whole concert especially when the singers and the audience all started singing: “here I am to worship, here I am to bow down, here I am to say that you're my God, you're altogether lovely, altogether worthy, altogether wonderful to me.” The analysis of these two concerts helps us have a better understanding of the principal objective of Hillsong which is gathering as many Christians as possible to worship and praise God.

According to an article written by the BBC in 2019, an average of 130,000 worshippers attend a Hillsong service somewhere around the world every Sunday. It is hard to determine a specific number of active members of the community as it is open to anybody. However, the number of followers that they have on social media shows that there is a lot of people who either are active members or just love the community. On Instagram, the official account of the Hillsong Church has three million followers that follow their page on the daily. Hillsong United and Hillsong Worship, which are the church’s two music bands have respectively two and half million followers on Instagram and three million on YouTube, and two million followers on Instagram and six and half millions on YouTube. In order to stay organized in such a big community, there are many ministries that have been created such as Hillsong United, Hillsong Worship, Hillsong Kids, Hillsong Men, Hillsong Sisterhood, … Those ministries each have their responsibilities but they all constitute the Hillsong Church. For example, Hillsong United and Hillsong Worship are both focused on the music side of the community but their only differences are the people that manage the ministries and the singers. Hillsong Young and Free is focused on providing to young people like me a community with people around their age and with the same religious beliefs.

While doing my research, I learned a lot about the Hillsong Church. Even though I was a fan of their songs, I did not know much about the community. Hillsong impacts a lot of Christian people through their songs and concerts. They are very present on social media and have contents that interest the younger and older generations. My favorite thing in that community is the music. The main objective of the community is to create a big community of believers in Christ and their music allows them to achieve their goals as it brings people closer to God. With such a big community, it is literally impossible for all the members to know each other but I have realized that music is what connects them. Their synchrony while singing their songs such as *Oceans* and *Here I Am To Worship* was amazing. Now that I know more about Hillsong, I appreciate their songs even more and I will not hesitate to attend one of their concerts and Sunday services if I get the chance in order to have my own experience with the community and maybe become an active member.

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