

Creativity in the Story of the Creation of Humanity and the Composition of Church Music (An Analogical and Typological Comparison)

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Abstrak

Dalam perspektif karya kreasi, manusia dan komposisi musik gereja pada dasarnya sama yaitu sebuah ciptaan. Ciptaan ini tidak datang begitu saja, melainkan sungguh-sungguh direncanakan berdasarkan akal budi, kesadaran, dan keinginan baik. Dari perspektif teori simbol Susanne K. Langer, manusia dan komposisi musik gereja tercipta karena adanya kreasi (dari yang belum ada menjadi ada), merupakan forma simbolis (sebagai seni yang telah mengalami transformasi), dan sebagai pengalaman estetis. Tujuan dari artikel ini adalah menyajikan perbandingan antara kreasi Allah dan kreasi manusia sebagai pencipta. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif-hermeneutik yang dipadukan dengan analisis tipologis. Sumber-sumber utamanya meliputi Kitab Kejadian 1-3, karya-karya filsafat Susanne K. Langer, serta literatur ilmiah mengenai teologi, estetika, dan musik gereja. Data dianalisis secara interpretatif untuk mengidentifikasi pola-pola simbolis, estetis, dan kreatif yang dimiliki oleh kedua bentuk penciptaan tersebut. Hasil penelitian ini menemukan bahwa makna di balik kreativitas (yakni Allah dan manusia) merupakan "pencipta", perbedaannya adalah Allah "menciptakan sesuatu dari ketiadaan", sedangkan komponis tidak menciptakan dari ketiadaan mutlak; mereka menciptakan dari materi musik, pengalaman iman, teks-teks Alkitab, tradisi gereja, dan konteks liturgi. Dengan kata lain, kreativitas manusia adalah bentuk partisipasi yang terbatas dalam kreativitas Ilahi, bukan bentuk penciptaan yang setara dengan tindakan Ilahi.

Kata Kunci: kreatif; komposisi musik; bentuk simbolis; forma yang hidup.

Abstract

From the perspective of creative works, human beings and church music compositions are essentially the same: they are both creations. This creation did not come by chance, but was truly planned based on common sense, awareness, and goodwill. From the perspective of Susanne K. Langer's symbol theory, the human being and the musical composition of the church are created by creation (from the non-existent to the existing), as a symbolic form (as art that has undergone transformation), and as an aesthetic experience. The purpose of this article is to present a comparison between God's creation and man's creation as a creator. This study uses a qualitative-hermeneutic method combined with typological analysis. Its primary sources include Genesis 1-3, the philosophical works of Susanne K. Langer, and the scholarly literature on church theology, aesthetics, and music. The data were analyzed interpretively to identify the symbolic, aesthetic, and creative patterns possessed by the two forms of creation. The results of this study found that the meaning behind creativity (i.e. God and man) is "creator", the difference is that God "created something out of nothing", whereas composers do not create from absolutely nothing; they create from musical material, faith experiences, biblical texts, church traditions, and liturgical contexts. In other words, human creativity is a form of limited participation in Divine creativity, not a form of creation equivalent to Divine action.

Keywords: creative; music composition; symbolic form; living form.

Introduction

When humans gaze upon the universe created by God, they are filled with profound awe and come to realize that they are not even a speck of dust. Humans increasingly realize that God is the supreme artist through His works that span the entire universe. One of God's greatest works is the creation of humanity itself. In Genesis 2:7, God breathed the breath of life into the first human and thus began the story of a being made in His image, unfolding through the dynamics of history.

That image of humanity has become a person. Humanity, created in the image of God, was blessed with God's own attributes—namely, the ability to create. Just as God Himself created something from nothing, humanity was endowed with the competence and potential to create as well. Human beings are, at their core, artists, for they have inherited the artistic nature from God. If humans can admire God's creations by deeming all of them “very good” and beautiful, then in truth, humans have also been endowed with aesthetic ability. Berglund so beautifully expresses the potential God has given to humanity as follows.

Man, created in the images of God, was uniquely created with the propensity for the appreciation of visual and aural beauty. The great Creator gave the intellectual and emotional potential for involvement in the experiences that are beautiful, rewarding, and enjoyable (Berglund, 1985a).

This is what sets humans apart from other creatures; humans are truly special and unique. Among the many human creations, music is one of them. Music as a means of creation for humans deserves special emphasis here, because music is capable of “creating feelings, ideas, emotions, values, or moods that are of, by, or for the unchanging way of life,” (Berglund, 1985b) more so than other works of art. Furthermore, music bears a resemblance to the fabric of life; “... music bears some resemblance to the fabric of life” (Ahlberg, 1994) and “the tonal structures we call ‘music’ bear a logical similarity to the forms of human emotion—forms of growth and attenuation (Susanne K Langer, 1953).” Although it does not use verbal language, through music humans are able to express their feelings, ideologies, inner worlds, and admiration; to reveal their emotional strength; and to serve as a social function and a means of understanding the meaning of life. Musical elements, such as melody, rhythm, and harmony, have become a ‘language’ that can be understood by people of all nations around the world (Tan et al., 2010).

Because of music's functions and capabilities, the Church has adopted it in such a way that it has become a crucial element within Christian liturgical practice—indeed, one that cannot be separated from it. Music in church liturgy is not merely an interlude, background noise, or entertainment; rather, it holds a significant and central meaning: worship. Humans create (compose) music so that they may ‘unite’ with God; for through music, humans can express gratitude, supplication, praise, offerings, and repentance; through music, humans can begin to make peace with God.

As mentioned above, humans inherit innate qualities from God. In a certain context, there is a similarity between God and humans: both possess the potential to create something—to bring into existence what did not previously exist; a work of art. Within that work of art lies a ‘living form’ (Cassirer, 1944) and expression, yet music possesses its own distinct expressiveness (Correia, 2019). The term “living form” is

borrowed from Cassirer (1944) to denote a distinctive form that distinguishes aesthetic beauty from natural beauty. This perspective is influenced by Immanuel Kant, who held that beauty also involves reason. Thus, it can be indicated that a living form involves the creator's form of consciousness and is a "living form" because it is capable of expressing the artist's life; "a living form that expresses life—feeling, growth, movement, emotion, and everything that characterizes vital existence (Susanne K Langer, 1953)."

In the study of theology and music, some studies emphasize that church music is closely related to the narrative of creation, divine order, and human religious experience. As explained by Priyanto (2024) in his article on the philosophy of church music, it is emphasized that church music must be understood as a theological medium rooted in the regularity of God's creation and human participation in divine creative works. Meanwhile, Schwöbel (2020) shows that the relationship between music and theology is reciprocal, because music is not just a medium of expression, but also part of the human experience of divine reality.

Other studies have more discussed the social and spiritual functions of church music. Benjamins (2025) explains that contemporary worship music forms habitus and generational identity in the church community through repeated musical practices. Bemey's research (2026) also shows that church music functions as a medium for the formation of spirituality and church character in the context of the Indonesian Pentecostal church. On the other hand, Tang (Michael) (2026) criticizes the tendency of contemporary worship music to emphasize too much emotional experience rather than biblical theological depth.

In the perspective of aesthetics and musical philosophy, the research on Susanne K. Langer has also undergone important developments. Research from Guter & Guter (2021) reviews Langer's theory of musicality, specifically the concepts of "felt time" and "virtual time," and confirms that Langer's symbolic theory is still relevant in understanding music as a form of expression of human experience. Meanwhile, Zangwill (2024) sees that religious music has a distinctive symbolic and aesthetic dimension because it connects the human experience with deeper spiritual and religious meanings.

In the context of research in Indonesia, several studies can be found that relate church music to semiotic approaches and contextual theology. The research of Kristanto et al., (2024) uses Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory to understand symbols in church musical verse. Another study from Pasae (2024) attempts to construct an eco-theological construct through music by connecting the narrative of creation and musical harmony. Nevertheless, these studies still focus on the function of music, lyrical symbols, the spirituality of the church, or the relationship of music to theology in general.

Based on the analysis of these various literatures, it can be understood that studies on church music have discussed a lot on theological, liturgical, social, and semiotic aspects, but not many have specifically compared the creative process of human creation in the narrative of Genesis with the process of creating church music compositions through Susanne K. Langer's typological and symbolic aesthetic

approach. Moreover, previous research has generally placed creativity only as an artistic ability of man, not as a typological reflection of God's creative actions in the creation story. Therefore, this article offers novelty by developing a typological analysis between the story of human creation and the creation of church music through the perspective of Susanne K. Langer's symbolic theory.

This paper attempts to compare several typological similarities between God's creation process and the creation of church music compositions by humans as a creation. This comparison of creation also involves what Langer calls primary illusion and secondary illusion. Primary illusion is a kind of background or screen onto which all can be projected in various forms of art; or a kind of main image contained in the artwork and will determine the virtuality of an artwork, while secondary illusion is the artwork itself (Reichling, 1995). In addition, it also involves what is called "symbolic form." The symbolic form launched by the artist into his artistic creation does not originate from his mind, but rather from his feelings, or more precisely, as a formation of his emotional experience. If the symbolic form originates from his mind, then what is produced is a 'philosophical insight' (philosophical understanding), but because it originates from his feelings, what is produced is an 'aesthetic insight' (aesthetic understanding).

This kind of creativity typology attempts to group objects based on similarities and basic characteristics in terms of artistic creation, namely the creation of mankind in the Book of Genesis can be compared typologically with the creative process of church music composition through Susanne K. Lange's theory of symbolic form. The principle of artistic creation is one and the same, but the results of artistic creation are different. Likewise, artistic expressions can be the same, but the form of expression is different. The general conception of art is also the same for each art, but the content of the conception is different. This typological analysis uses the definition of art expressed by Susanne K. Langer (1895-1985), an American philosopher, as a parameter. Through this parameter, the comparison of the pattern/character of creation carried out by God and humans can be clearly revealed and offers a theological-aesthetic reading of church music as a participatory expression of divine creativity. As such, this article contributes to expanding the dialogue between creation theology, the philosophy of art, and the aesthetics of church music.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with a hermeneutic and typological analytical framework. Qualitative analysis is essentially a research activity that focuses on the search for and discovery of the meaning behind a phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 1997). The primary data sources of this study consist of biblical texts, especially Genesis 1-3 concerning the creation narrative, as well as the philosophical writings of Susanne K. Langer related to symbolic forms, aesthetics, and artistic creation. Secondary data sources include scholarly books and journal articles on theology, philosophy of art, aesthetics, creativity, and church music published in both national and international academic publications.

In hermeneutic studies, attention is still paid to (1) the content must be maintained, and (2) interpretation as a result of mediation, as forms of symbols (Ratna, Nyoman Kutha, 2010). In other words, the methodological steps in this study include reading Genesis 1-3 hermeneutically, identifying the concepts of creativity, symbol, and beauty, interpreting church music through Langer's theory of symbolic forms, and comparing the two typologically to identify similarities and differences. The main goal is to discover the meaning of the creation of church music that originates from the Bible. In this context, there is an unavoidable consequence, namely the existence of different understandings, depending primarily on whether the interpretation's primary focus is on the sender, message, and receiver/reader (Bergant & Karris, 2002). Next, an analogical and typological analysis was carried out based on Susanne K. Langer's art theory.

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the data, this study employed source triangulation and theoretical triangulation. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing biblical interpretations, philosophical theories, and contemporary scholarly discussions on church music and aesthetics. Theoretical triangulation was conducted by relating theological perspectives with aesthetic and philosophical approaches in order to achieve a more comprehensive interpretation. In addition, interpretative consistency was maintained by repeatedly examining the relationship between textual evidence, theoretical concepts, and analytical findings throughout the research process.

Results and Discussion

The Essence of Art according to Sussane K. Langer

According to Langer (1953), art is understood as “the creation of symbolic forms of human feelings.” Langer herself defines a “symbol” as any device that can be used to create an abstraction; “any device whereby we are enabled to make an abstraction (Reichling, 1993).” In this regard, according to Langer, there are three points worth noting in the above definition, namely:

First, art is a creation; the bringing into existence of what did not yet exist. In the context of music, Langer refers to the existence of “virtual time” (true time) determined by the “primary illusion”: a sort of backdrop or screen onto which everything can be projected in various forms of art; or a kind of main image that is contained in a work of art and will determine the virtuality of a work of art (Susanne K Langer, 1950; Reichling, 1995), whereas “secondary illusion” According to Langer, it is the work of art itself, both music and art in general; “drawing upon examples from music and art,” (Reichling, 1995). Langer himself understands “illusion” as something unique. For Langer “illusion” is not a dreamlike state, a delusion, or something hallucinatory. As Frederick Burmick points out, this distinction can be traced to Kant who is careful to de-synonymize illusion and delusion. For Kant illusion are acknowledged by understanding as a play of the mind with perceptual appearance,” (Reichling, 1995). It is from this virtual time that pitch, rhythm, harmony, timbre, and even musical orchestration are created. While strings, wood, metal, plastic, and so on serve as the raw materials for instruments, or vocal cords as the raw material for vocals,

music itself is a “creation” of humanity: the composer does not merely arrange these materials—that is, notes into sounds within a unified whole—nor does he simply pluck strings or strike drums; rather, he truly ‘creates’ a musical composition in accordance with his artistic conception. The new musical composition he creates, which previously did not exist, now comes into being.

Second, the concept of “symbolic form”; any work of art is symbolic (Sussane K Langer, 1957). This form is contrasted with the content and substance of the symbol. As a symbolic form, music has truly undergone a transformation. Here, music has become a universalization of experience. This means that through this ‘symbolic form,’ the composer, in creating a musical work, has reflected upon and felt that direct experience and transformed it into a shared experience that others can also comprehend. Thus, the symbolic form does not point directly to the phenomenon itself or the experience itself, but rather to the experience that has been symbolized; that is, a symbolic expression of that experience.

Third, musical composition as a ‘philosophical insight’ and ‘aesthetic insight.’ This symbolic form of art is presented to the public as a performance (launched) by the composer; in this artistic creation, it does not originate from the composer’s thoughts, but from their feelings—or more precisely, from the formation of their emotional experience. If that symbolic form originated from his thoughts, then what would result is a ‘philosophical insight’ (philosophical understanding); but because it originates from his feelings, what results is an ‘aesthetic insight’ (aesthetic understanding) (Susanne K Langer, 1953).

Langer’s aesthetic insights contained in the categories above are used to compare analogously and typologically the creation of mankind and the composition of church music. The primary illusion in Creation Story. God’s desire to create humans in His image and likeness (Gen. 1:26), “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness,” while the secondary illusion is that humans themselves are “works of art” created by God. Here, humans are symbols of God’s love and presence. God’s love and presence are expressed in the status of humans who are “very good” (Gen. 1:31). The presence of humans as God’s creation can also be understood as God’s perfect “work of art,” which has aesthetic value because it comes from God’s own aesthetic experience.

Artistic Creations

Genesis 1:2 describes the earth as formless and empty; darkness covered the vast ocean, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. Then in Genesis 1:3, God said, “Let there be light.” And there was light. Here God is creating bringing into existence what did not yet exist, establishing the origin of human history with all the dynamics of its civilization (Gen. 2:5-25; 5:7-32; 8:20-32; 11:10-26). From the perspective of Langer’s theory, Gen. 1:2 is a primary illusion because it serves as the background that determines the secondary illusions: the firmament (Gen. 1:6); land and sea (Gen. 1:10); plants (Gen. 1:11-12); animals (1:25); and humans (1:27). Thus, it can be said that humanity is a secondary illusion of the universe.

Since the universe is the manifestation of God's glory, in the context of human creation, the image of God is the primary illusion, for this "image" or "likeness" serves as the backdrop for the creation of humanity as a secondary illusion. God's primary illusion is also demonstrated through His holiness (Gen. 2:3). In the process of human creation, God, the supreme Artist, "formed the man from the dust of the ground" (Gen. 2:7), and the creative process began by "breathing the breath of life into his nostrils" (2:7), and thus, "the man became a living being."

Herein lies the truth that human beings are indeed creatures consciously created by God; they are God's "work of art." God did not merely shape the dust of the earth into a form that ultimately amounted to nothing more than flesh with a shape; not merely a lump of flesh given breath, but truly a work of art; truly a 'creation' because the Lord God had bestowed a blessing (Gen. 1:22), and that means He had involved His Spirit in the creation of humanity. That work of art is truly complete, truly perfect (Gen. 2:2).

This creation story bears a typological resemblance to the creation of church music. One of the key factors distinguishing church music from secular music (Dasilva, 1984; Hargreaves, 1997; Sasongko, 2023) is that church music must be biblically grounded; "One of the factors that separates church music from non-church music is its involvement of scriptural truth and principles (Berglund, 1985a)," so that "a worship service is not a concert. It is not an hour of entertainment. It is a time to worship God in spirit and in truth," (John 4:23). Here, conceptually, church music already possesses a "virtual time," which concretely shares elements with other musical genres—such as rhythm, melody, harmony, timbre, intervals, and so on—yet church music possesses a primary focus distinct from secular music, the Bible. Thus, in the context of the creation of church music, the Bible serves as the primary source of inspiration, for it reveals humanity's origin and ultimate destination—God—and simultaneously provides the backdrop for the secondary source of inspiration: the music itself.

However, as stated above, God is the creator, and humans are merely His creations. God and humans have an existential difference. In other words, God's *creatio ex nihilo* differs from human creative creation in the form of musical composition. God creates in a divine and sovereign manner, while composers create through musical materials, personal and communal experiences, musical traditions, biblical texts, and liturgical contexts. Thus, while there are similarities between God and humans as "creators," this comparison is more analogical and typological, rather than ontological, placing God and humans on an equal footing.

Creation as a 'Symbolic Form'

As previously mentioned, in Genesis 1:27 God created humankind, and humankind was created in the image of God; "So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." This is a statement in which God engages in abstraction—a process involving ideas in the mind regarding a being called "human." This idea did not simply arise on its own but was already part of a "plan." A plan, by its very nature, involves a concept. As a symbolic

form of the image of God, humanity truly undergoes a transformation. Symbolically, humanity is a 'symbolic form' inseparable from God, for humanity is God's own "image"; humanity belongs to God.

In Genesis 2:18, the LORD God said: "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." This is an expression of the universalization of humanity, that in fact, humans live in pairs. The first humans, man and woman, refer to an experience arising from the ideas within God's own mind. Humanity is the "work of art" of the LORD God, involving experience, thought, and consciousness as the Supreme Being without intervention from anyone or anywhere. Thus, the meaning (object) symbolized is more important than the symbol itself, as the philosopher Whitehead said "*The object of symbolism is the enhancement of the important of what is symbolized* (Needham, 1979)."

In the context of church music, this symbol is present in the lyrics of the song, for example in the song "In Christ We Meet" in *Hymn of the Congregation* 259.

*In Christ, the whole world is found;
The Redeemer's people are united in His love.
(John 17:21-23; Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Gal 3:27-28;
Revelation 5:9; Revelation 7:9)*

*All hearts are united in His Body,
Working closely and diligently in His service.
(Ephesians 4:3-6)*

*Hold your hands fast, whatever your nation;
The servant of the holy Father is surely my companion.
(Col. 3:11; Mark 3:35)*

*In Christ, the whole world is found;
A reflection of the Redeemer's love for His one people.*

The lyrics of the song above are a hymn commonly found in Christian church liturgies. It has a moderate tempo with a melody that flows steadily. The tempo and character of this song symbolize the ministry's steady progress. Musicologically, this song has dynamic intervals between one note and another. The lyrics "all hearts are melted in His Body" symbolize an inseparable unity and total loyalty to Christ and a willingness to bear witness throughout the world. The lyrics of this song illustrate the experience of faith that Christ's love is not just directed to a specific group, but to the entire world; Christ's love is universal. And because of His love, believers are called to spread love throughout the world, in accordance with God's Great Commission.

Creation as 'Aesthetical Insight'

A composer's musical ideas do not fall from the sky but are rooted in their diverse experiences—whether social, ideological, aesthetic, psychological, political, or otherwise. Or, as Wolff (1993) puts it, a work of art is fundamentally a social and ideological construction of its creator. In music, these experiences are transformed into symbolic forms. In other words, these symbols represent the composer's feelings and experiences. For example, chord symbols within a musical composition: Augmented chords depict anxiety, minor chords tend to evoke sadness, and major chords depict joy or elation; similarly, consonant sounds evoke a sense of comfort, while dissonant

sounds express anger, and so on (Ratner, 1980). The same applies to dynamic markings in music, such as crescendo, decrescendo, and tempo indications like *largissimo*, *largo*, or *lento*. According to Langer, the result of musical creation is not discursive but presentational, and thus holistic. A work of art cannot be further divided into smaller elements. Because it is expressive—that is, it involves the composer's feelings and emotions—something “beautiful” is revealed within the composition. Through “the beautiful,” people are not invited to “think,” but rather to “be moved.”

So, does church music produce aesthetic insights that lead the congregation toward an experience of faith? In the account of human creation in the Book of Genesis, the use of symbols is evident. The numbers in the creation story are essentially symbols. For example, the numbers six and one. For six days, the Lord God provided time for humans to work, and one day to worship God (Gen. 1:1-31; Gen. 2:1-25). There is also the symbol of the serpent. The serpent is the embodiment of the devil. The Bible describes this creature as “the craftiest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made” (Gen. 3:1). God used this symbolic model to help humanity understand certain ideas or concepts. In addition, a female figure appears who crushes the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). Many interpret this woman as Mary, the mother of Jesus, who would later give birth to the Messiah. This verse contains a prophecy, albeit an indirect one.

Based on Langer's categories, church music has the aesthetic power to lead the congregation into an experience of faith. Thus, church music is more than just music, but more than that, it is a means of proclaiming the saving Word. Through its symbols and musicological aspects (rhythm, melody, and harmony), church music can lead the congregation to behavioral change because it conveys a message of salvation.

Conclusion

Church music has a unique quality compared to other types of music, primarily because of its distinctive connection to the Word of God itself, since the primary source of church music is the Bible. In other words, the Bible serves as the source of inspiration and creation for church music composers. This uniqueness manifests in patterns and characteristics similar to those found on the account of human creation, as described in the Book of Genesis. These characteristics can be detailed as follows. First, both are creative processes that bring something into existence from nothing, resulting in a “true creation.” Second, both involve primary and secondary illusions. Third, both are created according to a plan, namely the image and likeness of God Himself. Fourth, both are present in the form of symbols. Fifth, both produce results that are “beautiful.” Church music is beautiful because its creator, the composer, possesses a legacy from God Himself, namely creativity. However, even though both are “artists,” God and humans remain distinct. God created something “out of nothing,” while humans have limitations; the musical compositions created by composers are still based on existing musical material, faith experience, biblical texts, Church tradition, and liturgical context. In other words, human creativity is a limited form of participation in divine creativity, not a form of creation equal to divine action.

The practical implications of this study are to provide a theological-aesthetic foundation for church musicians and composers to understand musical composition

as a creative and spiritual calling rather than merely a technical artistic activity. Meanwhile, the limitations of this study lie in its reliance solely on textual and philosophical analysis without involving empirical research; therefore, future research could expand the discussion by incorporating field research, musical analysis of specific compositions, or a comparative approach using other philosophical frameworks in theology and aesthetics.

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