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How Shall We Sing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land?

**A thesis presented
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ABSTRACT

Hymns have always been part of Christian liturgy, expressing the faith in congregational song. The NZ hymnwriter of the late twentieth century writes within a secular society which increasingly questions the relevance of religion. This thesis examines and describes issues with which modern hymnwriters are confronted in the practice of their work, the intention being to produce a work of practical benefit to those using hymns in some way.

The thesis begins with an historical overview of the ways hymnology has developed. From this background it is possible to ascertain a working definition of a hymn, and to discover how hymns have been used over the centuries to express certain theological points of view about the nature of the church, particularly as it relates to society as a whole.

Hymns are a combination of doctrine and song. How words and music combine to form the complex experience of a hymn is discussed in Chapter two. Music has always been a contentious issue within the church for it brings the possibility of the "secular" into worship. Music style is an expression of a church's theology of church in the world. The choice of music as part of the experience of a hymn is a crucial issue.

In a secular society, the charge of irrelevance is levelled at religion in general, and hymns in particular. Chapter Three discusses the meaning of "relevance" for hymnology. This is related to hermeneutics, liturgy, and tradition, with particular focus on Reader-Response Criticism as a tool for understanding the dynamics of the texts relationship to the reader/singer.

The modern hymnwriter must overcome the conservatism of hymnbook collections. The quest for relevance and the exploration of new styles takes place largely outside the confines of hymnbooks. As liturgy is the milieu within which hymns are experienced and for which they are written, the thesis raises four questions by which to test the effectiveness of hymns in worship.

During the writing of this thesis an issue arose several times which is more properly the province of religious sociology or theology; the way in which hymns express the power struggle between the "organisation" and the people. Many music forms used in the church began as people's songs and dances, but church use has dampened the original liveliness of these forms. I have addressed this issue in passing without exploring it fully.

Because I am a Methodist presbyter, there are times when my Methodist bias shows. I make no apology for that. The NZ context from which I write is also an important factor in the choosing of illustrative material. I have deliberately used With One Voice as a source book for most hymn quotations as it is used in many NZ churches and can therefore add to the practical nature of this work. The thesis is not a critique of With One Voice.

CHAPTER ONE

SING A NEW SONG!

"Nothing is more difficult than to determine what a child takes in and does not take in, of its environment and its teaching. This fact is brought home to me by the hymns which I learned as a child, and never forget. They mean to me almost more than the finest poetry, and they have for me a more permanent value, somehow or other." ¹

Thus recollects D.H.Lawrence. V.De Sola Pinto declares that "The importance of Hymns in a Man's Life lies in the fact that it is a revelation of Lawrence's awareness of his debt to this persistent "cultural tradition", a living tradition of popular poetry, which, in his own phrase, was 'woven deep' into his consciousness and gave his art a strength and a vitality unparalleled in the English literature of the twentieth century."²

Popular poetry or obscure religious verse? Hymns have been an integral part of Christian liturgy from the beginnings of the faith. Yet they have also had an impact on generations of folk beyond the confines of sanctuary walls. Times are changing however; old patterns no longer hold true.

C.Henry Phillips was able to write in 1946: "Someone has called hymns modern folk-songs, and it is true that the 'man in the street' knows and loves certain hymns better

1 Lawrence, D.H. "Hymns In A Man's Life" in Moore, H.T. (ed). A D.H.Lawrence Miscellany. London. Heinemann. 1959. p.104

2 De Sola Pinto, V. "Lawrence and the Non-Conformist Hymns" in Moore, H.T.(ed) p.104.

than any other music. They are indeed the only music in which he ever takes part."³

As the twentieth century has progressed the 'man in the street' has become more secular, seldom encountering hymns as part of liturgy. Christmas carols provide perhaps the only common exception. NZ church statistics have shown a steady decrease in numbers, while the number of people refusing to answer the census question on religious affiliation has risen. Hymns, along with church, have become for the majority of the population quaint reminders of a past religious glory, an anachronism in style and content. In short, hymns in the late twentieth century are seldom sung or experienced by the majority of the population.

Yet they remain, vital elements of Christian liturgy, and are still being written and sung. Hymns are literature of a specialist sort - the literature of a worshipping congregation. Hymns live when they are used, finding expression in a variety of ways and in many settings. Hymns reflect the values and beliefs of those who write and use them, also embodying something of the values and beliefs of society as a whole.

With such a long tradition, it should be possible to state simply what a hymn is. However, a diversity of definitions becomes apparent. The Concise Oxford Dictionary 7th Edition describes a hymn: "Song of praise to God, esp metrical composition sung in religious service; song of praise in honour of a god or other exalted being or thing."⁴ The Oxford Companion to Music is less forthright, beginning its large section "Hymns and Hymn Tunes (including Metrical Psalms)" with the words: "Many definitions of the hymn are possible, such as would include

³ Phillips, C.Henry. The Singing Church. Faber and Faber. London. 1946. p.214.

⁴ Sykes, J.B.(ed). The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English, 7th edition. Oxford University Press. 1982. p.490.

or exclude various classes of practical production." ⁵ But then the Companion adopts for the purposes of its article St Augustine's definition:

"A hymn is the praise of God by singing. A hymn is a song embodying the praise of God. If there be merely praise but not praise of God it is not a hymn. If there be praise, and praise of God, but not sung, it is not a hymn. For it to be a hymn, it is needful, therefore, for it to have three things - praise, praise of God, and these sung." ⁶

Donald Grout, also taking an historical perspective, writes that by the eleventh century "the meaning of hymn had been narrowed to denote a poem in strophic form, all the stanzas of which were intended to be sung to the same melody ... As to subject matter, the hymn is limited only by its general purpose of "celebrating Christian truths or events"; thus it need not be scriptural." ⁷

Erik Routley adds a twentieth century voice to Augustine's when writing of the hymnwriter:

"His completed work needs to be a combination of doctrine and experience. What he says needs to be based on doctrine. He is writing about God, or about God's works. He is also writing about the church's experience of God - about the forgiveness of sins or the communion of saints or the duty of man in society as in the sight of God. What he writes is not a hymn if it is simply about mankind." ⁸

The "official" definition by the Hymn Society of America stresses the poetic nature of a hymn: "A hymn is a lyric poem, reverently and devotionally conceived, which is designed to be sung, and which expresses the worshippers' attitude toward God or God's purposes in human life." ⁹

5 Scholes, Percy A. The Oxford Companion to Music. London. Oxford University Press. 1950. p448.

6 Scholes, Percy A. p.448

7 Grout, Donald Jay. A History of Western Music. 3rd Edition. New York. W.W.Norton and Co. 1980. p.18

8 Routley, Erik. Hymns Today and Tomorrow. London. Darton, Longman & Todd. 1966. p.20.

9 Price, Carl F. What is a Hymn?. Paper VI of the Hymn Society of America. New York. 1937. p.8

The editors of Hymns and Songs (1969) tried to make a distinction, which they do not clearly spell out, between two types of sung literature for worship:

"... there are sets of words which do not conform to the more usual patterns but which Christians who are responsive to new creative impulses ought to receive with sympathy. For this reason a section entitled Songs has been included. This contains a representative selection of words and music which can be used in worship, but which are not immediately identifiable as hymns." ¹⁰

This particular section of the Preface of Hymns and Songs is significant for it assumes an unstated definition of a hymn, determined presumably by the "more usual patterns", and exposes one of the difficulties of contemporary hymnwriters: modern is suspect in hymnbooks, for as Hymns and Songs states elsewhere in the Preface "it would question their suitability for a collection intended to serve for some years." ¹¹ The definition of a hymn it would seem has to do with "traditional" form and usage!

These definitions hint at the constraints within which hymnwriters have developed their art throughout the history of the church. What began with a seemingly narrow focus, "praise of God sung", broadens by the late 20th Century, into "celebrating Christian truths or events". Tensions arise: between the need to sing doctrine, and the strictures of poetic form; between what is understood as "church", and "world". Within these dynamics hymns continue to be written and sung. The modern hymnwriter may have a broad canvas available on which to paint, but he must still choose a particular brush with which to do it. This thesis describes some of the tensions through which modern hymnwriting must work, and offers some criteria by which the effectiveness of hymns may be considered.

¹⁰ Hymns and Songs. London. Methodist Publishing House. 1969. Preface.

¹¹ Hymns and Songs. Preface.

To examine 20th Century hymns we must go beyond "definition". Hymnology has developed into a different form in the twentieth century. Routley and Augustine are not mutually exclusive in their definitions yet they are discernably different. This development is important background to the modern problems. We begin with history.

Christian worship in its beginnings owes much to the synagogue worship of Judaism. The origins of Christian hymnology are not surprisingly found in the Old Testament, and in particular, in the Psalms.

Artur Weiser writes:

"The Psalter is that book of the Old Testament which the Christian community found the easiest one to approach in a direct and personal way. The writers of Christian hymns have drawn from the inexhaustible well of the psalms at all times, and especially in the age of the Reformation, so that in this way their sentiments and ideas continue to live in the Christian community alongside the individual psalms or portions of psalms used liturgically in public worship. From the very beginning of Christianity right up to the present day worship has continually created and cultivated a particularly intimate relationship of the worshipping congregation to the psalms."¹²

Weiser draws our attention to the ways in which psalms have been an integral part of the worship of the Christian community from the beginning. While the psalms in the original Hebraic use may all have been set to music and used on various liturgical and devotional occasions, not all the psalms are considered by Weiser and other modern scholars to be hymns. Weiser considers that there are three broad types of psalms: Hymns, Laments, and Thanksgivings. For the purposes of this study we will explore only the characteristics of those psalms which Weiser classifies as hymns.

¹² Weiser, Artur. The Psalms. London. SCM Press Ltd. 1962. p19

There is a pattern to the Hymn Psalms. Each begins with a call to sing the praise of Yahweh. This opening call is followed by expressions of actual praise of God. There follows a conclusion which leads back to the beginning call to praise. Psalm 117 is a clear example of the psalm hymn structure:

A. Invocation to worship

Praise Yahweh, all nations!

Extol him, all peoples!

B. Motive for Praise

For great is his steadfast love toward us,
And the faithfulness of Yahweh endures for ever.

C. Recapitulation

Praise Yahweh! ¹³

The origin of the Hebrew hymns is found in the cultus of the Jewish people. There are allusions to the sanctuary, mention of festive processions, dancing and music which accompany the singing of hymns, and direct reference to the order of the feast and to the prescribed custom of pilgrimage. It is especially with the Covenant Festival that the hymn is originally linked:

"It is here that we find the key to the understanding of the Old Testament hymn. It is that cultic rite by means of which the congregation "co-operates" in the divine dispensation of salvation; again it is man's response which presupposes the actio Dei as a sacramental cultic event and appropriates the salvation which is offered by God in that action. The two terms most frequently used for the hymn in the Old Testament - tehilla = praise (of God) and toda = testimony- express the same thought.... The hymn is the Amen of the congregation following the divine revelation." ¹⁴.

13 The form of psalm quoted is part of Anderson's discussion on this topic: Anderson, Bernhard W. The living World of the Old Testament, 3rd Edition. Harlow. Longman. 1978. p510.

14 Weiser, Artur. p.55

Nested within the New Testament are several ancient hymn fragments and allusions to the use of hymns within the church. One allusion which straddles the Jewish and Christian contexts is found in the accounts of the Last Supper: " And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." ¹⁵ It is assumed by commentators that the hymn referred to is the Passover hymn, the Hallel, (Psalm 114 - 118 or 115-118) sung at the end of the meal.¹⁶

Weiser's comment that the context and origin of the Psalms is the cultus of the Jewish people can be extended to the Christian use of the hymn form inherited through the psalms and the traditions of synagogue worship. The word hymn (in its Greek form) occurs only twice in the New Testament, in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 where Paul exhorts his readers to "Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs; sing to God with thanksgiving in your hearts" ¹⁷ One Bible Dictionary cautions:

"The threefold division of psalms, hymns and sacred songs must not be pressed too closely, as the terms overlap, but two distinct styles of composition can be observed. The first followed the form and style of the Old Testament psalm and was a Christian counterpart of the psalmodic writing exemplified by the 1st-century B.C. Psalms of Solomon...In this category may be included the canticles: Lk 1:46-55 (Magnificat), 1:68-79 (Benedictus), 2:29-32 (Nunc Dimittis). The second group consists of doxologies (as Lk 2:14; 1Tim. 1:17 etc), many of which were doubtless used in corporate worship." ¹⁸

Such comments are conjectural but not without foundation. Paul and Silas when in prison sing hymns of praise (see Acts 16:25), and Paul's letters to the young churches are peppered with doxologies. We have ample New Testament evidence to suppose that hymns were a regular part of worship, but we have no direct evidence to be sure of how

15 Mark 14:26 (RSV).

16 See for example the discussion in Nineham, D.E. Saint Mark. Harmondsworth. Penguin Books 1963 p.387

17 Colossians 3:16

18 Douglas, J.D. (ed) The New Bible Dictionary. London. The Intervarsity Fellowship. 1962 p.549

these were used. All the surviving hymns from the first three centuries are Greek. One of them "O gladsome light" is found in With One Voice.(No.121). We note the emphasis of Augustine's definition of a hymn as praise, and the predominance of doxology in early writing. Here is the clue which best describes the way hymns were used in the early church.

One reason that the Church was able to spread so easily throughout Europe and the Middle East in the first four centuries AD was Christianity's cultural eclecticism which affected both worship and hermeneutics. Musically, the Church accumulated ideas and styles from many sources. "It is likely that some of the hymns of the early Church were sung to what would now be called folk melodies, and it is possible that some of these melodies eventually found their way into the official chant repertoire." ¹⁹ In an ironic vein, E.W.Broome wrote of Rev. Rowland Hill (1744-1833): "He did not see any reason why the devil should have all the good tunes." ²⁰ A moderating influence on the eclectic spirit however was the distrust of music prevalent in the early Church.

"One important aspect of the ethos of the early church was its steady rejection of instrumental music in religious observances. In actuality, instruments are mentioned so frequently in ecclesiastical writings that they must have been used continually, although the majority opinion was against such practices. Both church and synagogue probably held such an attitude in reaction to the widespread use of instruments in pagan rituals.... Clement of Alexandria(c.150-c.215) condemned these "instruments of frenzy" and the superstitious men who played them. He urged Christians to banish such instruments, even from nonreligious activities." ²¹

Hymnology developed differently in the Eastern and Western (Roman) Churches. The Eastern churches, centred on

¹⁹ Grout, Donald Jay. p13

²⁰ The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Quotations 2nd Edition. London. Book Club Associates. 1981 p.119

²¹ Scholl, Sharon & Sylvia White. Music and the Culture of Man New York. Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc. 1970 p.25

Byzantium, embraced a hymn style which originated from the short responses between verses of the psalms. As these insertions became more important they eventually developed into independent hymns.

"These Byzantine hymns had an elaborate structure which was in contrast to the hymns of the Western Church. A kanon consisted usually of eight divisions (called odes), each of several strophes. Each of the eight odes ... was sung to its own melody, which remained the same for every stanza of the ode. Each ode corresponded to a specific Biblical canticleThe texts of the Byzantine kanones were not wholly original creations, but rather commentaries or variations on the scriptural models." ²²

Romanos, known by the eastern Church as the father of hymnographers, "reformulated existing hymns by restructuring them with rhyme into the kontakia form. Rhyme, a common element in Jewish hymns, had not been apparent in Byzantine practice." ²³ The kontakia, being based on biblical passages, are described often as "metrical sermons" ²⁴ which gives a clear indication of their character. However, the Byzantine church was a diverse institution encompassing peoples whose "nationalism (was) too ingrained, and their ethnic habits too strong" ²⁵ for uniformity to be accomplished. "In addition, many hymns were sung and were not considered extralitururgical as they were in the Roman liturgy. The fact that the Byzantine Mass was essentially dramatic in concept prevented the use of music not intrinsic to the ritual." ²⁶ Poetic allusion and allegory were acceptable practice within the Byzantine Church as they had been in the synagogue, allowing a diversity and, it must be admitted, an obscurity stemming from a mystical understanding of faith, to develop into the richness of Eastern hymnology. "The God worshipped was a ... figure of vast mystery. He

22 Grout, Donald Jay. p.14

23 Scholl, Sharon & Sylvia White. .p.32

24 See Livingston, E.A.(ed). The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church. London. Oxford University Press. 1977. p.444 "Romanos, St."

25 Scholl, Sharon & Sylvia White. p.32

26 Scholl, Sharon & Sylvia White. p.32

was a God become flesh, not a man become God. His Deity was celebrated poetically by John Chrysostom (c.347-407) as one whose power is inconceivable, glory incomprehensible, mercy unmeasurable, and tenderness to man, unspeakable." ²⁷ A similar expression of praise is found in the ancient Greek hymn "O Gladsome Light":

O gladsome light, O grace
of God the Father's face,
the eternal splendour wearing;
celestial, holy, blest,
our saviour Jesus Christ,
joyful in thine appearing. (WOV 121,v.1)

Such sublime epithets express the joyous mystery of the Byzantine worship of God. Contrasting with such language however is the simplicity of a 4th century Greek hymn by Synesius of Cyrene:

Lord Jesus, think on me,
and purge away my sin;
from earthbound passions set me free,
and make me pure within. (WOV 122,v.1)

Here the sentiments are direct without the sense of mystery apparent in "O Gladsome Light". These two hymns represent the diversity of Byzantine hymnology.

Within the Western Church, hymnology developed in a less diverse manner than in the Byzantine Church. "Latin hymns appeared later than Greek, the real impetus coming from St Ambrose (c339-97). Though only three hymns can certainly be ascribed to him, he laid down the lines of development of Latin hymnody as simple, devotional and direct." ²⁸ Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, heard hymns sung on his travels to the east, and "on his return to Milan, he wrote hymns in

²⁷ Scholl, Sharon & Sylvia White. p.31

²⁸ Livingston, E.A.(ed). p.253

uniform stanzas for antiphonal and congregational singing; we owe to him the recognition of hymns as an integral part of worship in the Western Church, and the setting of the type of the mediaeval office hymn." ²⁹ The hymn "The Eternal Gifts of Christ the King", attributed to Ambrose, is often assigned to the office of matins on feasts of the apostles. It reflects a directness and simplicity noted in the Greek hymn by Synesius:

The eternal gifts of Christ the king,
the apostles' glory, let us sing,
and all with hearts of gladness raise
due hymns of thankful love and praise.

(WOV 342,v.1)

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church recounts that "although hymns were not admitted into the Roman office until the 13th century, their development came to be towards an ordered sequence for use at different times and seasons, designed to express not the feelings of individual worshippers, but the meaning of the feast or office." ³⁰ Scholl and White point out also that while Ambrose was a bridge between the hymnology of the Eastern and Western Churches, his achievements were largely frowned upon by Rome: "Both the synagogue and the eastern churches encouraged expansion of the basic texts by poetic allusion and allegory. The Roman church remained unsympathetic to the cultivation of such a hymn literature as that sponsored by Ambrose of Milan." ³¹

Western hymnology evolved in relation to the offices of the Roman church until the Carolingian period after which hymn singing sequences related to the mass.

29 Milgate, Wesley. Songs of the People of God. London. Collins. 1982. p214:
"Ambrose"

30 Livingston, E.A. p.253

31 Scholl, Sharon & Sylvia White. p.23

"Liturgically and musically, these arose from the Alleluia with which the variable scriptural passage ended; on festive occasions, the last syllable was extended over a long musical phrase, and gradually words were substituted for the syllable. When independent hymns were written to fulfil the same functions in the Mass, they were also called the sequence.³²

Come, O Spirit, from on high,
 shine upon our inward eye,
 pierce the blindness of our sight.
 Come, O kinsman, to our aid,
 come with gifts that never fade,
 come and bathe us in thy light. (WOV 326,v.1)

This hymn in modern translation is an example of one such sequence. As "Come Thou Holy Paraclete" it was known as the Golden Sequence, appointed for use in the Mass on Whitsunday and throughout the ensuing week.

While it is apparent that hymn form differed in its development within the Eastern and Western churches, there is an important common factor. Up until the Reformation hymnology was associated with, and grew out of, the celebration of the liturgy which took its origins from synagogue worship. Therefore hymns were "generally restricted in church to those who sang the offices and the Mass."³³ In the eastern church, there was no uniform practice; individual improvisation was possible. Congregational singing was usually limited to either responses or antiphonal singing, but even these were often performed by trained choirs as they were in the western church also. In the Western Church Pope Gregory I (c540-604) organised the whole church, including liturgical practice, into a uniform system. "So the first stage of Western music seems to have been one in which an early emphasis on ecstasy and individual liberty was succeeded by

32 Dunstan, Alan. "Hymnody in Christian Worship" Ed. Jones, C. and others. The Study of Liturgy. London. SPCK. 1978. p.455

33 Dunstan, Alan. p.456

emphasis on order and discipline." ³⁴ Congregational singing, the people's response to God, did not play an important part in the Western church until the Reformation. "The layman was not expected to do more than participate passively in the Mass and receive instruction and absolution from his parish priest. Hymn singing, therefore, was not the layman's business at all." ³⁵

Some exceptions are notable; they are fore-runners of post-Reformation hymnology as Routley points out, writing of the Middle Ages:

"We have examples of every sort of hymnody that we shall find in later times. We have liturgical hymnody, ecstatic hymnody, controversial hymnody and devotional hymnody, the last three over and against the first, and firmly excluded from the offices of the Church. What the Reformation did was to harness the forces which produced the hymnody of devotion and controversy and ecstasy, and develop a new kind of congregational hymnody, sternly disciplined and immensely powerful. It was the medievals who showed us what hymns could do; it was the Reformers who showed us how to use them." ³⁶

Protestant worship forms grew from the centuries of western liturgical tradition which preceded the Reformation. While the Reformation was, by definition, a reforming movement, it was essentially conservative in nature, remoulding rather than beginning again.

"The "modern" features of the Reformation should not be overstressed. While it may be justly regarded as a watershed in the history of European life, paradoxically the Reformation appears more and more to be the last of the great medieval movements, the sequel to Hildebrandine reform, to the monastic renaissance, to the rise of the friars, and to the outbreak of the Lollard and Hussite heresies. The Reformation did not inaugurate the modern age but rather terminated the Middle Ages." ³⁷

34 Grout, Donald Jay. p.23

35 Routley, Erik. Hymns and Human Life. London. John Murray. 1952. pp24-5

36 Routley, Erik. Hymns and Human Life. pp31-2

37 Green, V.H.H. Luther and the Reformation. London. New English Library. 1974. p15

An important result of the Reformation was the development of many religious groups or sects - "individualistic, biblical in their teaching and often perpetrating a revolutionary social teaching; they encouraged democratic developments in the churches as in the political and social life of the community."³⁸

From the time of the Reformation each of these groups developed its own distinctive liturgical style including congregational hymn-singing traditions. The Reformation had the effect of encouraging full congregational participation in worship for which hymns were vital. While Luther was not the first to use hymns in this way, he was certainly the most influential force behind this movement. "The conservative nature of Lutheran liturgical revision facilitated the use of hymns. For in general the Sunday morning service consisted of the Ante-Communion; an Introit and Gradual were retained, but in the place of the old Propers, German hymns were sung."³⁹

Luther's strong motivation was to make liturgy (the work of the people) accessible to the people once more. Instead of the mass being celebrated in Latin by the priest, with the people as spectators, he rewrote the liturgy in the vernacular.

"Luther and his associates set out to collect, adapt, or compose music for the new service. At the core of their production lies a body of sacred songs in the vernacular known as chorales, which were simple enough to be sung by the congregation... The sources of Luther's hymns were five: the psalter, paraphrases from other portions of Scripture, transcriptions of Latin office hymns and antiphons, pre-Reformation Leisen recast, and original hymns."⁴⁰

Luther's original hymns create a new dimension in hymnology, for like Arius before him, Luther used them to

38 Green V.H.H. Pg 14

39 Dunstan, Alan, Pg 456.

40 Davidson, James Robert. A Dictionary of Protestant Church Music. N.J. The Scarecrow Press Inc. 1975. p163

both instruct the congregation in his doctrines and unite the people in the cause.

"Luther's reforms of liturgy and practice grew from the triple root of these views of church music: as a praise of God, as an offering by the congregation, and as a means for the Christian education of man in a comprehensive sense. They grew into their characteristic combination of basic principles and pragmatic decisions, basing the organisation of a Protestant church music on liturgical unison singing in the tradition of Gregorian chant, German songs of a primarily monophonic nature, and polyphony." ⁴¹

Luther's most famous hymn "Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott" has been called the Marseillaise of the Reformation. Based on Psalm 46, the hymn begins innocuously enough:

A mighty stronghold is our God,
a sure defence and weapon.
He'll help us out of every need
Whatever now may happen.
The ancient evil fiend
has deadly ill in mind;
great power and craft are his,
his armour gruesome is,
on earth is not his equal.

The hymn, in the next two verses, develops the theme that Christ is the one able to fight "the ancient evil fiend." The fourth verse however throws down the gauntlet in thinly veiled terms. Milgate writes of this verse quoting Professor Markus Jenny: "The defiant tone of the stanza suggests a patriotic song; and the enemy is not the devil but 'they' who can only be the Catholic authorities." ⁴²

The Word they must allow to stand -
for this they win no merit;
upon the field, so near at hand,

41 Blume, Friedrich. Protestant Church Music. London. Victor Gollancz Ltd. 1975.
p14

42 Milgate, Wesley. p23-4

he gives to us his Spirit.
 And though they take our life,
 goods, honour, child and wife,
 though we must let all go,
 they will not profit so:
 to us remains the Kingdom. (WOV 8 vv1,4)

This stanza is a long way from the Augustinian definition of a hymn! Luther used scripture as a base and jumping-off point to enable him to be free to write and sing about the "reforming" he considered necessary. His cause was firmly placed in a particular historical context. Other German writers followed his lead. Rinkart used his own situation to write, not a call to battle, but a hymn of triumph over incredible hardship. Nun danket alle Gott began as a household grace, is based on Ecclesiasticus 50:22-24, and reflects the faithfulness of Rinkart as a pastor, burying thousands in the Plague, and mediating in the Thirty Years War.

Now thank we all our God,
 With hearts and hands and voices,
 who wondrous things hath done,
 in whom his world rejoices;
 who from our mother's arms
 hath blest us on our way
 with countless gifts of love,
 and still is ours today. (WOV 14 v.1)

The Lutheran practice of hymns being a free expression of faith, beyond the Biblical words, using a variety of popular tunes from secular sources, was not followed by the Genevan Calvinist stream of Protestantism. Calvin, following Zwingli, was suspicious of music in worship. He believed "popular" music was too frivolous for worship. His dilemma was that he had discovered a scriptural foundation for congregational singing, yet he believed that the hymns found in the Latin Breviary could contain false

doctrine. "He adopted the strict proposition that there could be no better songs than the inspired songs of scripture, especially and almost exclusively the psalms. Thus, as the Calvinist doctrine spread throughout the world, the metrical psalm which accompanied it became its characteristic song." ⁴³

The Reformation gave rise to opposing understandings of the content, style, and necessity of congregational singing. Luther, Zwingli and Calvin agreed in their need to reform the Catholic Mass into the vernacular. They disagreed passionately about music. Calvin's own attitude towards music was

"conditioned by his strict obedience to the Word of God....He took the certainty of the divine origin of music from Genesis 4:21....This also meant to him that music had a duty to fulfil as a spiritual power. In spite of this basic conception which Calvin shared with Luther, (both relied in this connection mainly on St. Augustine), he was far from sympathetic to Luther's unsophisticated pleasure in the power of music....For Calvin the function of service music derived from the recognition of its essential nature. Because music has great power and force to move and to inflame the heart of man, it should drive him to invoke and to praise God....The music's appropriateness to the text should prevent the song of the service from succumbing to the danger of sensualism....This was a view diametrically opposed to Luther's wish that secular love songs be adapted for the service....The sacred style, Calvin held, may evoke joy, to be sure, but a joy that is chaste, not sensual. Finally according to Calvin, the task of the service song necessitated a strong tie to the only text admissible in the service, the text of the Bible." ⁴⁴

Calvin and Luther illustrate graphically one tension implicit in the Reformation. They stand for reform with equal vehemence, but in their use of music and hymns, they also reveal widely differing views on the nature of the church. It is expressed as a debate about what is

43 Davidson, James Robert. p257

44 Blankenburg, Walter. "Church Music in Reformed Europe". in Blume, Friedrich. pp516-7

allowable in worship and what is not. The intersection between "sacred" and "secular" is also the intersection between "church" and "world". It is a debate we will explore more fully in the next chapter. By adopting Augustine's definition of a hymn, Calvin confined himself to a narrow range of material - the 150 psalms of the Psalter. It is a view of the church which sets God and the church as distinct from "the affairs of men". Praise of God - sung, is the essence of Augustine's definition of a hymn. It was not in the definition per se that Calvin and Luther differed, but in the manner of singing.

One could be led to a caricature of Calvinist psalmody as austere, with Lutheran hymnody as rich and vibrant. Such a view is false, however, as Routley points out: "...out of this sternness and turmoil and distraction that was Presbyterian Geneva came the most gracious and serene hymn music that the world ever saw....In Calvin's Psalters, from the first (1539) to the last (1562), we have the cream of hymn-music, the archetypal hymn-tunes, the tunes which inspired the great English and Scottish psalm-tunes, and which are therefore the foundation of English hymnody. We owe the passion of words to Luther, but we owe the poise and simplicity of our best hymn-tunes to Calvin." ⁴⁵

More importantly for this study of hymnology, Calvin is not seen as an hymnographer. There is no entry for Calvin in Julian's Dictionary of Hymnology, and Routley, in his discussion of the history of hymns in Hymns and Human Life, refers his reader to Lord Ernle's book on Psalmody. Clearly a distinction is being made by these authorities between hymns and psalms as a congregational sung activity. Calvin's importance in this study is not as a hymnographer, but as an initial reformer whose ideas about the nature of the church, expressed in his reforms of church music, typify the way in which hymns and church music have been at the forefront of the struggle between conflicting views

45 Routley, Erik. Hymns and Human Life. p.39

about the church, and the nature of worship. The tensions between understandings of sacred and secular and the church's function in the world become explicit in the words and musical styles chosen to sing the faith.

The success of Calvin's reforms in Geneva gave rise, in time, to a similar emphasis in England and Scotland. The English Reformation however was achieved by legislation. Henry VIII's "Act of Uniformity for the use of the Common Prayer in English" authorising the first Book of Common Prayer (1549) allowed only psalm singing. Day's The Whole Book of Psalms (1562) was the accepted worship book until the "New Version" of Tate and Brady in 1696. In Britain, the "ascendancy of Puritanism ... saw to it that there was no serious competition against the Psalter as a vehicle of public praise before 1700. Independent hymnody was a small and furtive trickle, no more." ⁴⁶ This success, as Routley points out, was in no small way due to the parallel political and church struggles. Puritanism stood for the "divine right of Kings". However, it is ironic that Calvinist reforms should have become so entrenched, for in time, Calvin's reforms were themselves reformed! Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the metrical psalmody gradually gave way to the hymn which often appropriated popular metrical psalm tunes.

In Elizabethan times, a great deal of devotional lyric poetry was written, often under the name "hymn", but this work was never intended for congregational singing. By the latter part of the 17th Century psalmody was on the wane; some small hymn collections were appearing. It is with Isaac Watts, often referred to as the Father of English hymnody, that the full force of hymn reform of psalmody takes shape. He was a prolific writer; often his hymns were written to illustrate or reinforce his sermon.

"Watts's basic philosophy was founded on the conviction that the song of the New Testament church

should express the gospel of the New Testament, whether in psalm versions or in freely composed hymns. He was further persuaded that Christian song should not be forced to maintain the Calvinist standards of strict adherence to literal scripture, and he freely composed expressions of praise and devotion. Also, he held that Christian song should express the thoughts and feelings of those who sang, rather than merely relate the experiences and circumstances of the psalm writers of the Old Testament...Watts is called the Father of English hymnody not because he vastly improved or reformed the hymns that were already being written in his day, nor because of any radical change in form or structure. It is because he produced a "new song" based on the experiences, thoughts, feelings, and aspirations common to all Christians, expressed in what might be called classic objectivity." ⁴⁷

This is to underestimate the reforming character of Watt's work. For it is the allowance of the possibility of the worshipper having thoughts and feelings generated from contemporary experience that means a "new song" must be continually found and sung. In English tradition Watts forms a bridge between Augustine's definition of a hymn and that of Routley.

The development and subsequent reform of psalmody into metrical vernacular and then into a hymn can be illustrated by comparing three versions of psalm 146.

RSV

1. Praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord, O my soul!
2. I will praise the Lord as long as I live,
I will sing praises to my God while I have being.
3. Put not your trust in princes,
in a son of man, in whom there is no help
4. When his breath departs he returns to his earth;
on that very day his plans perish.
5. Happy is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord his God,

47 Reynolds, William Jensen. A Joyful Sound. Christian Hymnody. 2nd Edition. New York. Holt Rinehart and Winston. 1978. pp42-3

6. who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith forever; ...

METRICAL PSALM

1. Praise God. The Lord praise,
O my soul.
2. I'll praise God while I live;
While I have being to my God
in songs I'll praises give.
3. Trust not in princes, nor man's son,
in whom there is no stay:
4. His breath departs, to's earth he turns
that day his thoughts decay.
5. O happy is that man and blest,
whom Jacob's God doth aid
Whose hope upon the Lord doth rest
and on his God is stay'd.
6. Who made the earth and heavens high,
Who made the swelling deep,
and all that is within the same;
who truth doth ever keep. ... ⁴⁸

ISAAC WATTS

1. I'll praise my maker while I've breath
and when my voice is lost in death
praise shall employ my nobler powers:
my days of praise shall ne'er be past,
while life and thought and being last,
or immortality endures.
2. Happy the man whose hopes rely
on Israel's God! He made the sky,
and earth and sea, with all their train:
his truth forever stands secure:
he saves the oppressed; he feeds the poor,
and none shall find his promise vain. (WOV 44)

48 Scottish Psalter and Church Hymnary, Revised Edition. London. Oxford
University Press. 1929

The most striking, and important, reform Watts has accomplished is the way in which the singer's present personal experience touches the psalmist's ancient experience. It is a hymn of "praise to God" (Augustine), but is also about the "church's experience of God ...or the duty of man in society as in the sight of God" (Routley). In much of Watts' hymnody he enunciates a New Testament Gospel, often in a hymn based on a psalm.

Give to our God immortal praise,
 mercy and truth are all his ways:
 wonders of grace to God belong,
 repeat his mercies in your song.

He sent his Son with power to save
 from guilt and darkness and the grave:
 wonders of grace to God belong,
 repeat his mercies in your song.

(WOV 43,vv1,5:cf ps.136)

While Watts breathed new life into English hymnody, his work employs almost entirely the three simplest metrical forms: common, long and short. He reformed the content of Calvinist psalmody without radically reforming music style. Charles and John Wesley took Watts' initial reforms further. John Wesley "despised the prevalent manner in which the psalms were sung, and he ridiculed the psalmody of the Old Version. He felt keenly the need for revitalisation and reform in the practice of congregational singing."⁴⁹ In his earliest hymn books Wesley used Watts' hymns, along with his translations of German Moravian hymns, thus bringing together again two important streams of hymnody parted by Luther and Calvin. John Wesley, as organiser and translator, and Charles as a writer, changed the hymn significantly in several ways. Watts used three; Charles Wesley wrote in thirty different metres. Variety

49 Reynolds, William Jensen. p44

of tune and music source was therefore encouraged.
Formality in singing was likewise discouraged:

"Beware of formality in singing, or it will creep upon us unawares....The repeating the same word so often, as it shocks all common sense, so it necessarily brings in dead formality, and has no more religion in it than a Lancashire hornpipe....Again, do not suffer the people to sing too slow. This naturally tends to formality, and is brought in by those who have very strong or very weak voices. Is it not possible that all the Methodists in the nation should sing equally quick?" ⁵⁰

Rather than relying only on words of scripture, or even on free composition beginning from a scriptural base, the evangelical emphasis was given free rein in Wesley's hymns. Arminian theology was sung in opposition to Calvinist theology:

Father, whose everlasting love
your only Son for sinners gave,
whose grace to all did freely move,
and sent him down the world to save:

help us your mercy to extol,
immense, unfathomed, unconfined;
to praise the Lamb who died for all,
the general saviour of mankind.

Arise, O God, maintain your cause!
The fullness of the nations call,
lift up the standard of your cross,
and all shall own you died for all.

(WOV 142 vv1,2,5)

The latter verse is not unlike the famous fourth verse of Luther's call to battle quoted above. It is a sign of the times perhaps that this Wesleyan hymn which states clearly the Arminian Methodist point of view in the controversy

⁵⁰ Methodist Conference Minutes. 1768. quoted by Reynolds, William Jensen.
p50

which separated Wesley from Whitfield (and also from Watts) is not "marred by tendentious controversy".⁵¹

Reynolds notes another important development made by Wesley: "Charles Wesley's writings ran the full gamut of Christian experiences - in public worship as well as in private devotion."⁵² Where Watts is objective:

People and realms of every tongue
dwell on his love with sweetest song

Wesley is subjective:

His blood can make the foulest clean,
his blood availed for me.

Wesley consciously strove for literary quality; the preface to the 1779 hymnbook "for use of the people called Methodists", contains these words:

"May I be permitted to add a few words with regard to the poetry? Then I will speak to those who are judges thereof, with all freedom and unreserve. To these I may say without offence, 1. In these hymns there is no doggerel; no botches; nothing put in to patch up the rhyme; no feeble expletives. 2. Here is nothing turgid or bombast, on the one hand, or low and creeping on the other. 3. Here are no cant expressions; no words without meaning....4. Here are, allow me to say, both the purity, the strength, and the elegance of the English language... Lastly, I desire men of taste to judge...whether there be not in some of the following hymns the true Spirit of poetry, such as cannot be acquired by art and labour, but must be the gift of nature."

Clearly there were drawbacks to the vernacular, and standards of taste!

In Watts and later in Wesley we find a reforming of the Calvinist views on the place of music and what is

51 Milgate, Wesley. p75

52 Reynolds, William Jensen. p48

acceptable for a congregation to sing. Watts was a Calvinist in theology, Wesley was Arminian. The point of agreement, like Luther and Calvin before them, was their need to reform the way congregations expressed their contemporary faith experiences, both moving away from Calvinist insistence on the primacy of Scripture to fulfil that purpose, and creating a new way to be contemporary, personal, yet fully rooted in the biblical traditions and words. The Evangelical revival was sung into consciousness. No longer were hymns confined to the historically accepted ways of singing the doctrines of the faith with hymns being seen as taking fixed places within the liturgy as congregational responses. The "new song" was the voice of contemporary experience. The personal went alongside the objective.

Such non-conformist directions began to founder, however, by Victorian times. The early 19th Century saw the flowering of the Romantic movement which had begun in the 18th Century. "This romantic spirit was a revolt against classical restriction. It was a triumph of subjectivity over objectivity, of emotion and imagination over the intellect and judgement... Creative writing immediately took on an emotional and imaginative quality.... Hymnic literature...revealed a higher poetic quality than had been evident before. Hymns of didactic design and utilitarian purpose gave way to hymns of poetic feeling and literary art."⁵³ By Victorian times however much of the "higher poetic quality" had become sentimentalism and trite conventionality. Much of Wesley's stated fears had come true, a century or more later!

But if the Romantic movement of the 18th and 19th centuries was a "revolt against classical restriction", the Oxford movement of the 19th Century was the counter-balance to it within the Church of England.

⁵³ Reynolds, William Jensen. p.57

"The distinctive characteristics of the Oxford Movement were its profound interest in the preservation and incorporation of the sacred traditions from the early Christian Church of the first five centuries; its conception of the church as a divine, holy, catholic society; its objectivity toward accomplishing human salvation; and its reverence of sacramental and liturgical worship... Its impact on Protestant church music has been felt in the hymns written, translated and compiled by the scholarly members of this movement, in the application and incorporation of art and music in the church service, and in the reverence for the organization of the Christian year." ⁵⁴

From this "scholarly" movement two translators stand out - John Mason Neale and Catherine Winkworth. Winkworth's heritage is her translation of German hymns into English. "Her versions are outstanding, not only in the fidelity with which she rendered the German into idiomatic English, but also in the scope of her work." ⁵⁵ John Mason Neale's interest was ancient Greek and Latin hymns. Milgate writes that his translations "revealed for the first time the nature of the ancient sequences, and in the area of Greek hymnody broke new ground." ⁵⁶ Unlike Winkworth who wrote in idiomatic English, Neale's translations were often unsingable, and editors "laid violent hands upon them, notably AM 1861 from which most modern texts of Neale's translations derive." ⁵⁷

Thus a full circle is reached by the mid 19th Century. Early Greek and Latin hymns and ecclesiology are rediscovered and incorporated into Protestant worship, albeit with a struggle. The reformers of the Oxford Movement "considered all Puritanism to be barren of nourishment for the English Church, and therefore ranged themselves implacably against nonconformist practices." ⁵⁸ Like other preceding movements the Oxford Movement produced one battle hymn, of German origin:

54 Davidson, James Robert. p.232

55 Milgate, Wesley. p.345

56 Milgate, Wesley. p.297

57 Milgate, Wesley. p.297

58 Routley, Erik. Hymns and Human Life. p.110

Lord of our life and God of our salvation,
 star of our night and hope of every nation;
 hear and receive your church's supplication;
 Lord God Almighty.

See round your ark the hungry billows curling;
 See how your foes their banners are unfurling
 Lord, while their darts envenomed they are hurling
 You can preserve us.

Grant us your help till backward they are driven,
 grant them your truth that they may be forgiven,
 grant peace on earth, and after we have striven,
 peace in your heaven.

(WOV 345, vv1, 2, 5)

Pusey wrote of this hymn which he translated: "It reflects the state of the church - that is to say, the Church of England in 1834 - assailed from without, enfeebled and distracted within, but on the eve of a great awakening."⁵⁹ Pusey's sentiments reflect perhaps the feelings of "establishment" churchmen from the beginning of the church in the first century. Over the centuries, as reforms have come, been established, and have in turn been reformed again, the debate has been consistent. How is it permissible to celebrate and express the faith? In the nineteenth century the Oxford Movement looked backwards to an early Catholic tradition, re-establishing a clerically based church. This was in the face of post-Reformation movements which had sought to return power through participation, to the people. After the Reformation the question of vernacular language was not raised seriously again in the Protestant churches. Debates in hymnology were now about what could be sung by congregations, and how. Such questions were answered in many ways - each answer dependent on the understanding of liturgy and its

⁵⁹ See Milgate, Wesley. p.143

purpose espoused by particular groups within the Protestant tradition. The answers also changed with time as we have seen, for a vital understanding of the faith meant that a new expression had to be found for each new age. Often this "new song" was achieved in the face of considerable opposition!

Routley, in Hymns and Human Life, sums up the development of hymnology thus:

"I have been at some pains to show that hymns have been written either for the adornment and enrichment of the liturgy of a settled church, or for the heightening of devotion and the enhancing of evangelism, or as the result of controversy on a small or large scale. Hymns have sprung from man's wrath, his piety, and his need of neighbour expressed in churchmanship. Broadly speaking, I doubt if any hymn ever written falls far outside the bounds of these categories." ⁶⁰

The church, as the visible "body of Christ" has, throughout its existence, struggled to find its meaning for the NOW; hymns have become part of that search and expression of meaning. Times change. The twentieth century is patently unlike the first. Modes of expression change. In each century the church has felt the need to express itself in ways relevant to the present. This is particularly true since the Reformation allowed tradition to find new expressions using contemporary music and the vernacular, a living, dynamic language, unlike the unchanging Latin of the pre-Reformation liturgy. The editors of Hymns and Psalms express it thus: "In compiling this hymn book, the committee has sought to respond to our changing times, and to produce a book which articulates the needs, the joys, and the fears of the contemporary world." ⁶¹

60 Routley, Erik. Hymns and Human Life. p122

61 Hymns and Psalms. London. Methodist Publishing House. p.ix

Relevance for today is a cry of the Twentieth Century forcefully expressed by Colin Hodgetts: "Many of the hymns in the standard hymn-books available debase worship by their irrelevance." ⁶² However it is not just a matter of "relevance". Adherence to orthodoxy and acceptability to the group using the hymn are also important factors. And it is precisely because these matters are not static that hymn collections, and hymns themselves, have always been at the forefront of controversy, both within a particular group, and between groups of opposing views. What is allowed to be sung by a congregation is no trivial matter, and typifies the place of the hymnographer in church history. Changing times and the search for contemporary expressions of truth, combined with accepted words and music means that a volume of hymns can include very diverse works:

We praise, we worship thee, O God,
Thy sov'reign power we sound abroad;
all nations bow before thy throne,
and thee the great Jehovah own.

(WOV 1,v1)

Great inventors splitting atoms
energy and power extend,
firing rockets,space exploring,
search his light which has no end.

(WOV 110,v2)

Many centuries separate Ambrosius from William and Inga Bulman, yet together they help twentieth century congregations sing their faith. The question has always been "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

62 Hodgetts, Colin.. Sing True. Oxford. The Religious Education Press Ltd. 1969. Preface.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORDS AND MUSIC

In the history of the Church, what has been sung has shared controversy with how it should be sung: "Why are classical hymns used in so many churches? What relevance has 17th, 18th, and 19th century classical music to my life in the 1980s? Classical music is fine for people from wealthy homes whose parents paid for them to have classical music lessons. I am from a working class background and all that classical stuff is way above me."⁶³

The arguments put forward over the centuries have centred on a distinction made between what is offered to God in worship, and the "ordinary" stuff of life. The New Testament letters of Paul make a distinction between the "world", by his definition the realm of the devil and evil, and the "church", by definition the community of those saved from the "world":

"Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:2)

Hymns, by all definitions, are sung. The words and music together form the experience of a hymn. There is disagreement however about the relationship between words and music. Louis F. Benson writes:

"It is as devotional verse, rather than as song that our hymns have entered into the spiritual experience of a myriad hymn lovers, to whom the church hymnal has meant most as the companion of silent hours, the

63 Totton, Geoffrey. "Letter to the Editor" Crosslink. Presbyterian, Methodist newspaper. Wellington. June 1988.

source of remembered inspirations. It would be as futile to contend that Christian hymns have no office and no message until sung in the congregation as to say that the poetical and spiritual uplift of the Book of Psalms was confined to the comparatively few Jews who participated in the Temple worship." ⁶⁴

The editors of With One Voice also address this stance in passing:

"There is no special section of hymns for private use. It is hoped, however, that all the hymns will serve, not only in the shaping of formal worship, but also as an enrichment of spiritual experience, both in private reading and memory and in meditation during quiet moments before and after services, and at other times, in the church itself." ⁶⁵

On the other hand, David Greene, writing in Theology Today, argues that "if one begins with the assumption that the sounds-as-words and the sounds-as-music are independent entities, each fully comprehensible apart from the other, then one ends without any strong relation between the two. At best the music is irrelevant to the text and its religious significance, and we may as well say rather than sing our hymns. At worst the music is distracting, and we would do far better to say rather than sing our hymns." ⁶⁶

But we do sing our hymns, and have to respond simultaneously to words and music. While the private devotional use of hymns to which Benson refers is undoubtedly one way in which hymns are encountered, by far the most common experience of hymns, and the reason for writing them, is their use in communal worship where they are most commonly associated with music. Indeed, it is the power of music rather than words which has often become the point of debate. Greene states the problem succinctly:

64 Quoted by Scheide, William H. "What should a Congregation Sing?" in Theology Today. Princeton N.J. J1 '63. pp212-41

65 With One Voice. London. Collins. 1982. Preface, p.xiii

66 Greene, David B. "Hymns: Music, Text, and Meaning" in Theology Today. Princeton N.J.. Ja '68. p.487

"When can we be sure that our church music is in fact functioning religiously?" ⁶⁷

In attitudes to music we discern a covert distinction between the "world" and the "church". We noted in Chapter One Clement of Alexandria's rejection of instrumental music because of its association with pagan rituals. St Augustine too writes of his dilemma. Music can distract him from focussing on God:

"Nevertheless, when I find that this music doth aspire to have too high a place in my heart, in virtue of the words themselves, by which it lives and gains admission into me, I then do scarce allow it such a place as is reasonable. Yet sometimes also, methinks, I do the music too much honour, when I find that my mind is more ardently and religiously carried up in the flame of devotion by those holy words when they are so sung, than would be the case if they were not sung;...But the pleasure of my carnal sense - whereunto I should not deliver up my mind to be weakened thereby - doth often deceive me; my ear not accompanying my reason in such wise as patiently to follow after it, but having once gained admission by reason's leave, it striveth ever to run ahead and be the leader. Thus in these things I do sometimes sin at unawares, though later on I am aware of it." ⁶⁸

For Augustine, sometimes the musical effect on his emotions was greater than the religious one!

Two positions regarding the relationship between words and music in hymns are possible. Either the words are unrelated to the music except in that one has to "fit" the other, (in which case it is usually that the music must "fit" the words), or the two are bound totally together. Greene posits three questions which, he says, are the result of an understanding of the relationship between words and music as parallel: "Is the text theologically sound? Is the music good music? Is the music appropriate to the text?" ⁶⁹ No consensus is possible about the third

67 Greene, David B. p.486

68 Augustine. Confessions X:34. (trans) Matthew, Sir Tobie. London. Burns and Oates. 1923. p305

69 Greene, David B. p489

question, he maintains, as long as a parallel relationship is the method used to understand hymns as words and music. In contrast, a musical-verbal phenomenon gives rise to the following statement:

"A hymn will be religiously useless if its music is so undifferentiated that one is bored and stops paying attention to it, or so inchoate that it cannot possibly clarify the use of the words, or if the music does organise the text but the result is nonsense, or if the music organises the text meaningfully but the meaning is trivial, theologically reprehensible, or irrelevant to the worshipping church." ⁷⁰

The music must have an "appropriateness" which is all-embracing - of the words, and the community singing the words.

Musical style, by association, is an important ingredient of appropriateness. The question: "sacred or secular" or "sacredsecular" will be determined by the group using the music and text concerned.

"Many writers have urged that jazz, for example, because of its associations with the world of entertainment, is impossible in Christian worship. Others have argued that precisely because of its associations with spontaneity and re-creation it is marvellously suited for Christian hymn-singing. To both groups a single response may be addressed: if it is something of which the hymn-tune reminds us that makes it religiously useful or reprehensible, then the fact that it serves or fails to serve a religious role is a function not of the music but of something with which the style of tune is associated....Hymn-singing is important because it can be the vehicle of corporate action and not because it is the means of evoking feelings, such as gratitude or devotedness....Moreover, specific feelings... are often aroused in an individual not by the words-and-music as such, but by that with which the music is associated." ⁷¹

John Killinger goes further. He writes that there "ought to be no division made or inferred between church music and

70 Greene, David B. p490

71 Greene, David B. pp494-5

secular music....All music is arranged by human beings, says Igor Stravinsky; that is the most fundamental thing that can be said of it. And we shall not be free in the church to be human, to find the meaning of our mortal identities, until we are free to use any music in the sanctuary, even the music which appears to yield nothing to our constant search for "religious" meaning and moral instruction." ⁷²

Clement of Alexandria and John Killinger represent two ends of a spectrum. At one end is the attitude that instrumental, even perhaps any, music is inappropriate in worship because of its pagan associations; at the other end nothing is inappropriate. In the words of liturgy or hymns the peculiarly religious nature of "church" is acceptable, but when such words are combined with music, the possibility of the "world" intruding means that hymnographers and musicians must take cognizance of the community for whom they are writing. Each community of faith will have its own place along the spectrum. If music has the power to unite, it also has the potential to divide!

The sources of hymn music over the centuries illustrate the way music choice has influenced communities of faith. The issues of the Reformation surface in church music. The forms which have survived have been codified into stereotypes representing ways in which "the people" are isolated from their liveliness as the "church" struggles to keep order separate from "the world". I am distinguishing, for the purposes of this work, between music written for choirs or as instrumental offerings in worship, and that written for a congregation to sing in unison or occasionally in parts. While acknowledging the importance of Gregorian chant, plainsong, and the development of polyphony in the history of church music, it is not my

72 Killinger, John. Leave It To The Spirit. London. SCM Press Ltd. 1971. pp176, 178

intention to give a full history of church music, but rather to trace some important sources for congregational hymnody and to note what happened to them.

The most important musical element for congregational hymnody is folk-song.

The term "folk-song" stems from the nineteenth century. Literally it means "song of the people", and has come to be synonymous with "traditional" in the sense that no composer is traceable. The Oxford Companion to Music reminds us: "It is self-evident that the germ of all music lies in folk-music. Music existed for thousands of years before the coming of the professional and academically trained composer, and has continued to develop since, quite apart from his activities...Every form of vocal and instrumental music we possess has developed out of folk-song or dance."

73

We have already noted the church's eclectic tendency. Folk-song, being the music of a particular localised area, is a carrier of meaning for those people. So, as the church grew and spread, it took upon itself the music of the people, adapting tunes for its own purposes. This is appropriate when the church is a "people's movement". As far back as Jewish Temple worship folk-song was a vital force:

"We may be reasonably certain that folk-song was characteristically used in the Temple psalmody. In Isaiah 65:8 we have such an ancient song quoted, a vintage song: "When wine is found in the cluster, one saith, 'Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it.'" We find the melody of this song, 'Altashhith, "Destroy it not", prescribed in the titles of Psalms 57, 58, 59 and 75." ⁷⁴

73 Scholes, P.A. Oxford Companion to Music. London. Oxford University Press. 1970. p.368

74 Douglas, Winfred. Church Music in History and Practice. London. Faber and Faber. 1963. p.13

The establishment of church doctrine and practice among a particular people by the use of familiar folk-tunes is one of the eclectic strengths historically exploited by the church. Charles Etherington writes of the Celtic church:

"It may be assumed that during the (Roman) occupation, the liturgy and music of the Celtic and Roman churches were similar although not identical. These were the days before Ambrose undertook to reduce church music to an orderly system, and there was no uniformity even in Rome. The influence of folk and secular music was strong, and the folk-music and traditions of the Celtic races were vastly different from those of southern Europeans, who had borrowed most of what culture they possessed from the Greeks....The Celtic became an evangelising church....Kindred to the peoples whom they were seeking to convert, sharing much the same tradition (and much the same type of music incidentally), the Irish probably found their task easier than would have missionaries of an alien race and culture." ⁷⁵

Etherington relegates music to an "incidentally". Folk-music and the spread of the Gospel was not an incidental relationship, but a fully integrated one, consciously used by church authorities because of the intimate relationship between music and culture.

But by its very nature, folk-music is a 'located' music, whose nuances are less obvious to folk from another place or culture. This indeed is one of the limitations of folk-music as the basis for hymn-tunes. Although the folk-tunes tend to be simple, therefore making them easy for a congregation to learn, they are not always easily transferable across cultures.

"Other borrowings, especially from the traditional melodies of other peoples, have not always been happy. Folk music is something like humor in that some of it can be appreciated by everybody, but much of it has a limited appeal. Much folk music has no charm except for the people among whose forbears it originated."⁷⁶

75 Etherington, Charles L. Protestant worship Music. New York. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. 1962. pp43-44

76 Etherington, Charles L. p212

While Etherington makes his point rather more forcefully and subjectively than is strictly necessary, the limitations of folk-music are apparent. Despite these, however, folk-music is the basis for much hymn music. It is significant that at times of greatest clerical control in the church, composed, formalised, standardised, complex forms of music have been the norm, with a consequent lessening of congregational participation in worship, and that times of reformation and popular awakening have used folk-tunes as the basis for a revival of hymn singing.

"The unofficial, so to speak, beginning of the history of Reformed Church music, going back prior to the earliest official Reformed songbooks, clearly shows a connection with folk-song....There is evidence that the Protestants at Meaux were singing sacred songs based on known folk melodies about 1524-5....And as late as 1546 Eustourg de Beaulieu, a friend of Marot, published a collection of three and four part settings entitled Chrestienne resjoyssance, a large part of which consisted of secular tunes taken over, in accord with Luther's views, with the express purpose of removing them from the profane sphere. On the other hand, it is certain that Calvin aimed deliberately at a distinctive melodic style for Reformed congregational song, perceptibly different from folk-song." ⁷⁷

Folk-music became a focus of twentieth century work, especially in the production of The English Hymnal (1906). "The refusal of the proprietors of Hymns Ancient and Modern to grant permission for the use of forty-four copyrighted tunes...caused Ralph Vaughn Williams...to seek other tunes. Fortunately he turned to folk melodies, and perhaps the outstanding contribution of this hymnal was the popularizing of the use of folk material for hymn tunes. (See Kingsfold/Monks Gate)" ⁷⁸

Folk-song, with its simple rhythmic forms and well-known melodies was a natural well from which an evangelising church drew much of its inspiration for tunes. It was part

⁷⁷ Blankenburg, Walter. "Church Music in Reformed Europe". in Blume, Friedrich. Protestant Church Music

⁷⁸ Reynolds, William. A Joyful Sound, Christian Hymnody. p67

of an eclectic assimilation of culture which allowed the church's message to spread amongst peoples. Modern hymnals since The English Hymnal contain several folk melodies from wider than English tradition. Thus the heritage of folk-song lives within church hymnology.

Related to folk-song and very directly to hymnody is the ballad. Davidson recounts the importance of the ballad:

"A song which relates a story in simple verse and tune of anonymous authorship, being sustained through oral tradition is a ballad....While the ballad and its associated dancing were largely expressive of non-Christian themes and attitudes, the Christian ideas slowly made their way into the ballad as Northern Europe experienced the conversion (c.seventh century) by the Roman Catholic Church."⁷⁹

Gregory the Great instructed his missionaries to adapt local customs and to bring Christian teaching to them. Sacred legends in ballad form were therefore developed to inculcate Christian doctrine. But even more important than this is the persistence into modern times of the metrical form of the ballad.

"The most usual metre of the great age of the English ballad was that of a 4-lined stanza, with a two-in-a-measure rhythm, the first and third lines having four measures and the second and fourth having three measures and being rhymed together. This is the same as the 'Common Metre' of the hymn-tune books, which probably derived from it."⁸⁰

Austin Lovelace terms Common Metre "the Workhorse of hymnody."⁸¹ He notes that Double Common Metre is "closer to the ballad line, which was called fourteeners... The following characteristics of Common Metre can be noted: the use of simple, direct words of rarely more than two syllables and mostly of one, the ease with which all hymns in this metre flow, the tendency to teach and to state

79 Davidson, J.R. p.39

80 Scholes, P.A. p72

81 Lovelace, Austin C. The Anatomy of Hymnody. Chicago. G.I.A.Publications Inc.. 1965. p35

facts, to be matter of fact, brief and to the point." ⁸²
 The Common Metre form can tend towards tedium for the very features which Lovelace cites mean that the metre is easy to write. Because of its imbalance of eights and sixes the most common timing is 4/4. Hence this is often called a four-square metre. Ironically what began as a people's dance has become a predictable stately measure!

The third important source of congregational hymnody is the carol. The Oxford Book of Carols defines carols thus: "Carols are songs with a religious impulse that are simple, hilarious, popular, and modern." ⁸³ Carols, like ballads have dancing as a part of their origin. In content they are like folk-music, but have a more religious overtone than either ballads or folk-music. The church has used carols in many ways, not always creatively:

"The carol, in fact, by forsaking the timeless contemplative melodies of the Church, began the era of modern music, which has throughout been based on the dance. But, none the less, joyfulness in the words has been sometimes discarded by those who were professionally afraid of gaiety. Some French carols were rewritten by well-meaning clergymen into frigid expositions of edifying theology; some of the English tunes were used by excellent Methodists of the eighteenth century to preach their favourite doctrines." ⁸⁴

There is a certain subversiveness of "establishment" church order implicit in carols. They were "of the people". They were frequently earthy in their humour. They were "always modern, expressing the manner in which the ordinary man at his best understood the ideas of his age, and bringing traditional conservative religion up to date." ⁸⁵

Carols date from the 1400's, and were part of a growth of a "democratic spirit....The carol was in fact a sign, like

82 Lovelace, Austin C. p35-6

83 Dearmer, Percy and others (eds). Oxford Book of Carols. London. Oxford University Press. 1928. p.v

84 Dearmer, Percy. p.v

85 Dearmer, Percy. p.vi

the mystery play, of the emancipation of the people from the old puritanism which had for so many centuries suppressed the dance and the drama, denounced communal singing, and warred against the tendency of the people to disport themselves in church on the festivals....The carol arose with the ballad in the fifteenth century, because people wanted something less severe than the old Latin office hymns, something more vivacious than the plainsong melodies." ⁸⁶

But over the centuries the carol has languished and was only recovered in its full meaning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Carols have ostensibly become part of Christmas for the community as a whole. They are indeed the only "church" music encountered by many people. Along with the collection of English folk-music, the carol is being restored to its place in the church, a place of fun, gaiety, and innate subversiveness of the seriousness of religion.

Ballads, folk-music and carols are all "people's" music which have influenced hymnody in various ways. Their folk nature restores the people to the centre of hymnic expression. The metres of these forms of music have found their way into common usage. But while this has been assimilated successfully into hymnology, the cost has been the loss of vigour and to a large extent, humour. The dance origins of such music have been partially recaptured by such writers as Sydney Carter, especially with "Lord of the Dance", but the acknowledgement of these three folk-originated forms of music in the hymnbooks is now confined to tunes, often reharmonised to suit the "church". Sacred seriousness it seems may have overtaken the world folk liveliness.

Two important issues relate to the music by which hymn-words are sung. Firstly, there is the relationship between

86 Dearmer, Percy. pp.vii, viii, xi

the words and the music. Secondly, the associations brought to any given music by the community singing it. Both issues have created debate as we have seen. The first issue is a matter of communication and integration; the second a matter of how a community understands worship, God, and the nature of the relationship between "church" and "world". Church communities tend towards conservatism in taste and action, preferring to sing well-worn tunes, regardless of their musical excellence. Learning new hymn-tunes in many congregations is as popular a pastime as pulling teeth without anaesthetic, and almost as painful. This attitude causes Milgate to stand upon a musical soap-box in his Introduction to Songs of the People of God to exclaim:

"The first obligation of those who provide or lead the music in churches, when the use of a new hymnal is begun, is to read through the contents of the book, including the preface, and to play, or listen to, all the music. The first, and disgraceful act of many organists, however, is to go through the book marking in the "well known" tunes to which everything in the hymnal is, by hook or by crook, going to be sung. There is no reason at all for this defeatist and obscurantist attitude. It is true that congregations will resist any novelty, and will complain loudly at being disturbed from a state of inertia." ⁸⁷

Such entrenched congregational attitudes are a far distance from the dynamic borrowing of "peoples'" music upon which so many of our established hymns rely.

Milgate passes a wry reference to Victorian understanding of church-going, projected in his mind into the twentieth century:

"The prevalent tradition of hymn singing is due to the practice of our Victorian fathers of the last century, whose idea was that church going involved dressing in dark foursquare clothes, sitting on sombre coloured foursquare pews, and rising three or four times during the service to sing squared-up melodies to foursquare harmonies." ⁸⁸

87 Milgate, Wesley. p13

88 Milgate, Wesley. p10

Has the taking over of ballad metre by the church brought such predictability and drabness? What has happened to the eclectic indigenous spirit so much a part of church musical history?

One hymn in With One Voice illustrates the contemporary position very well. "When God Almighty came to be one of us" (WOV 214) was originally called "Song and Dance". The original words of the hymn were altered by the author to retain their contemporary cutting edge in Australia and New Zealand, "public servants" replacing the English "civil servants". The hymn tune has also been altered; a new tune being written at the request of the committee.

"Mr Hewlett first considered 'Waltzing Matilda' as a vehicle of the words, but that tune was at the time involved in a controversy in Australia about a National Song. Instead it was set to the Northumbrian folk tune 'The Keel Row'; this has not much currency among younger Australians, and older ones are perhaps not yet ready to accept it as part of a worship service." ⁸⁹

Contrast this attitude with Orlando E. Costas' description of Chilean Protestantism of the twentieth century:

"This community is neither ashamed of nor offended by the musical instruments, songs, and dances of its cultural setting, but rather incorporates them into its worship and consecrates them to God." ⁹⁰

We are back to this chapter's beginning point. Music is not neutral. When we use music, we bring associations with it which affect what is seen to be appropriate in worship. David Greene, whose analysis of the relationship between words and music leads him to see them not as parallel, but integrated into a total experience, is forced ultimately to make a qualifying statement: "A hymn will be religiously useless...if the meaning is trivial, theologically

89 Milgate, Wesley. p100

90 Costas, Orlando E. Christ Outside the Gate. New York. Orbis Books. 1982. p50

reprehensible, or irrelevant to the worshipping church." In other words, while statements can be made about the appropriateness or otherwise of certain music to particular texts, and while acknowledging that music brings into the sanctuary varying and various associations, it is not possible to make a definitive statement about the appropriateness of music to worship precisely because the matter is contextual, related to specific churches, or even to congregations within denominations. The acceptance, or rejection, of music which has "worldly" associations reveals a great deal about that church's understanding of its place in the "world". Music uncovers the unspoken theology of the church. Hymnals are an important clue, for they reveal what is accepted as "orthodox" by those for whom the books were compiled.

John Killinger sums up the matter well:

"Whatever the kind of music used...it is important that the church find musical idioms which permit maximal participation of worshippers, physically as well as vocally and mentally. There is always a reciprocity between a culture and its music. If the music is folk-music, with emphasis on tales, cleverness, irony, and rhythmic movement, it is a reflection of a society with folk virtues - home, history, heroes, humor, etc. If it is sophisticated orchestral music, then the reflection is of a highly genteel, economically established, and probably socially stratified society. And the same reciprocity is seen in the church at various epochs in its history. Medieval Plainsong is usually related to a mystical, sacramental kind of Christianity; Calvinistic psalmody to a severe, methodical, rather dramatic kind; and revivalistic hymnody to a bourgeois, personalistic one. Now, in an age desperately trying to trace its way back - or forward - to the point where man's being was (is, will be) one, a unity of mind and spirit, in order to set him over against a technological environment which necessitates the clarification, the cultural requirement is for music which facilitates this recovery of unity. And the church ignores or repudiates this requirement at its own peril and the peril of its mission, which is to bring redemption into the cultural situation."⁹¹

Indeed, as Geoffrey Totton's letter indicates, music carries meaning as surely as words do. The conjunction of these two spheres of meaning is what communicates through the experience of a hymn. It is important, then, not to separate words from music if we are to assess a hymn. It is not merely a matter of whether the tune "fits" the words, but how the tune and words together communicate within the culture using them, or to whom the hymn is being addressed. This unity, and a conscious understanding of it, is a vital link in the wider unity Killinger writes about. We will miss this link at our peril.

CHAPTER THREE

IN SEARCH OF RELEVANCE

Geoffrey Totton, in his letter to Crosslink quoted above, raises a question crucial to the study of hymnology: "What relevance has 17th, 18th, and 19th century classical music to my life in the 1980's?" While Totton mentions only music in his letter, the issue of relevance pertains also to words. Relevance is more often expressed in the negative than in the positive with frequent claims that hymns are irrelevant, the unstated implication being that there is a notion of relevance. It is vital to the present study of hymnology to explore what is meant by relevance within this limited context.

There are two related spheres of interest: the content of the hymns, and the context of worship itself. Relevance is a relative term. Other questions lurk behind it: relevant to what, and to whom? An exploration of its meaning in hymnology will entail a recognition of hermeneutics, tradition and liturgy.

Hymns by definition use words set to music. The language of hymns is therefore one appropriate place to begin our study. But language is not straightforward as Lewis Carroll points out:

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less."
 "The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."⁹²

"Then you should say what you mean," the March Hare went on.

92 Carroll, Lewis. Alice Through the Looking-Glass. London. W.H.Allen. 1959. p60

"I do," Alice hastily replied; "at least - at least I mean what I say - that's the same thing, you know."

"Not the same thing a bit!" said the Hatter. "Why you might just as well say that "I see what I eat" is the same as "I eat what I see!"⁹³

Alice is confronted by the problem of hermeneutics. Language is intended to communicate, but who determines the meaning of words? Can the intention of the writer be correctly interpreted by the reader? Communication takes place within this minefield. If the meanings of the writer's words are not accessible to the reader, communication cannot take place. Here lies the key to relevance. What cannot be understood will be interpreted as irrelevant. It is a crucial issue for hymns.

Hans-Georg Gadamer outlines the dynamics which give rise to the hermeneutical "problem": "Thus the hermeneutical problem is not one of the correct mastery of the language, but of the proper understanding of that which takes place through the medium of language."⁹⁴

The dynamism arises from the inter-relationship between "author" (in the form of the text) and reader/singer. Gadamer uses the term "hermeneutical conversation" to describe it:

Texts are 'permanently fixed expressions of life' which have to be understood, and that means that one partner in the hermeneutical conversation, the text, is expressed only through the other partner, the interpreter. Only through him are the written marks changed back into meaning. Never the less, by being changed back into intelligible terms, the object of which the text speaks itself finds expression....

Thus it is quite correct to speak of a hermeneutical conversation. But from this it follows that the hermeneutical conversation, like real conversation, finds a common language, and that this

93 Carroll, Lewis. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. London. W.H.Allen. 1958. p58.

94 Gadamer, Hans-Georg. Truth and Method. London. Sheed and Ward. 1975. pp346-7.

finding of a common language is not, any more than in real conversation, the preparation of a tool for the purpose of understanding but rather, coincides with the very act of understanding and reaching agreement. Even between the partners of this 'conversation' a communication takes place, as between two people, that is more than mere adaptation." ⁹⁵

The 'hermeneutical conversation' carried on between the text/author and the reader/singer uses language to promote understanding of intentional meaning. Meaning and understanding are achieved when the participants in this 'conversation' reach agreement. But there is no one definitive meaning. The author has intentions from his point of view, while the reader/singer also has a store of connotations for language. Gadamer therefore goes on to note:

"understanding and interpretation are ultimately the same thing...language is the universal medium in which understanding itself is realised. The mode of realisation of understanding is interpretation. ...Thus the hermeneutical phenomenon proves to be a special case of the general relationship between thinking and speaking, the mysterious intimacy of which is bound up with the way in which speech is contained, in a hidden way, in thinking. Interpretation, like conversation, is a closed circle within the dialectic of question and answer." ⁹⁶

Gadamer states the hermeneutical problem. Relevance is understanding; understanding implies accessibility to the meaning or intention of the writer. The interaction between these dynamics forms the basis of a 'conversation' between author/text and reader/singer. There are two complicating factors: language and interpretation. Understanding is interpretation and has a fundamental connection with language.

It is possible to "talk past each other", in which case language is used, but in such a way that there are no connecting points through which the hermeneutical

95 Gadamer, Hans-Georg. pp349-50.

96 Gadamer, Hans-Georg. pp350-351

conversation can be channelled. In such conversations there is no understanding, and therefore no "relevance" for meanings are unable to be made clear.

Herein lies the real problem of relevance in hymnology. The intersection of the language/thought/meaning of the writer/text and the language/thought/meanings of the reader/singer enables a particular hymn to be relevant. Gadamer also addresses this difficulty:

"In order to be able to express the meaning of a text in its objective content we must translate it into our own language. This, however, involves relating it to the whole complex of possible meanings in which we linguistically move....To interpret means precisely to use one's own preconceptions so that the meaning of the text can really be made to speak for us....The text is to be made to speak through interpretation. But no text and no book speaks if it does not speak the language that reaches the other person. Thus interpretation must find the right language if it really wants to make the text speak. There cannot, therefore, be any one interpretation that is correct 'in itself', precisely because every interpretation is concerned with the text itself. The historical life of a tradition depends on constantly new assimilation and interpretation....Every interpretation has to adapt itself to the hermeneutical situation to which it belongs." ⁹⁷

Jane Parker Huber expresses the same sentiments in more personal language in introducing a booklet of her own hymns:

"So, this is a booklet of hymns for a particular time in history when we are looking at words with a slightly different eye. I have been writing hymns for less than a decade, often for a special occasion of worship and celebration, and equally often because I have found that the language of some of my favourite hymns has become less meaningful to me." ⁹⁸

Compilers of hymnbooks have also acknowledged the truth of hermeneutical interpretation dependent on the contemporary situation in which the modern reader/singer lives:

97 Gadamer, Hans-Georg. p358

98 Huber, Jane Parker. Joy In Singing. The Office of Women and the Joint Office of Worship of the Presbyterian Church. USA. 1983. Foreword

"In other respects the compilers have sought to recognise that many changes have taken place, both inside and outside the Christian church, since the publication of the great 1933 hymnbook. The great and terrifying events which have occurred since then have revolutionised our thinking about the world in which we live and the condition of humankind. The second world war, for instance, put an end to the idea that the 1914-18 war had been a war to end all wars, and the discovery of the concentration camps revealed a systematic and dreadful inhumanity which uncovered hitherto unimagined possibilities of evil in men and women....In compiling this hymnbook, the committee has sought to respond to our changing times, and to produce a book which articulates the needs, the joys, and the fears of the contemporary world." ⁹⁹

Gadamer has drawn attention to a crucial element of relevance - the historicity of both the writer/text and the reader/singer. If relevance is accessibility to meaning and therefore understanding, some intersection between these two historical realities must be present. Brian Wren, a hymnwriter, acknowledges the importance of this:

"It works if what we write is something which is in tune with the hearts of those within the community. It doesn't work if we write in a way that is too far away from people's experience or searching. Then the words will not ring true and will have no meaning." ¹⁰⁰

Timothy Dudley-Smith reminds us that the meaning of words is not the be-all and end-all in hymnology.

"I offer you...an unassuming rhyme, told to me many years ago, which all hymn-writers would do well to heed:

There were two little birds in a wood
 who sang hymns whenever they could;
 what the words were about
 they could never make out,
 but they thought it was doing them good.

It serves to remind us that the popularity of hymns does not imply any great understanding of what the writer is trying to say; and that all our efforts at

99 Hymns and Psalms. Methodist Publishing House. London. 1983. ppviii-ix

100 Pratt-Green, F. and others. "New Hymnody:Some Problems and Prospects". in Duty And Delight. Leaver, Robin A. and James H. Litton.(eds). Carol Stream. Hope Publishing Co. 1985. p222.

simplicity, vividness, and the communication of truth may be lost upon the worshipper, who never the less enjoys what he or she calls 'a good sing', and feels the better for it." ¹⁰¹

Dudley-Smith's frivolity, while a reminder, masks the very real concern of modern hymnology. The Psalmist, in rather a different context, expressed it thus: "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" (Ps 137) What words are appropriate carriers of meaning now to sing of contemporary experience?

Two elements must be recognised: tradition and liturgy. Hymns occur within the specific context of worship. It is within this particular context that relevance occurs, or does not occur. Relevance, accessibility to meaning, is not just a matter of updating hymns to cast old language in contemporary equivalents.

"So in hymnody, it is absurd to imagine that by filling our songs of worship with tractors, pylons, concrete, town halls, motorways, supermarkets, and council flats, we somehow bring God nearer to those who use such things." ¹⁰²

Idle writes of the links between Christian tradition and language:

"The Christian Church has a tradition of language enriched by Scripture, history, and experience; think of the 'feel' these words have in worship as distinct from their secular connotations; Jerusalem, ... grace, righteous, church, preaching, sermon, body, bread, wine, crucifixion. None of these words can be accurately 'translated' into any other English ones. None can be dropped, however liable to misunderstanding. To those who would like to see these distinctions abolished, I can only say that this is nonsense, both linguistically (since meanings cannot be controlled by dogmatic utterances), and theologically. When the sacred and secular are equated, in language as elsewhere, the latter invariably destroys the former....

Worship demands a definite 'timbre' of Godward

101 Dudley-Smith, Timothy. Lift Every Heart. London. Collins. 1984. p3

102 Idle, Christopher. Hymns in Today's Language? Notts. Grove Books. 1982. p10

approach, whether we address God directly or not. But that is not the same as forming a secret language known to fewer and fewer people, describing an inner world unrelated to anything outside it....We can accept the admonition of J.R.R.Tolkien not to imagine that what is new is somehow more authentic....But we need not believe either, that antiquity conveys authority." ¹⁰³

The interplay between "antiquity" and modernity gives rise to the dynamic of tradition in hymnology. Idle notes a "tradition of language enriched by Scripture, history and experience", but also makes it plain that he is not for an esoteric language decipherable only to those initiated into the company of believers. In a hymnological context tradition is a set of basic concepts and images sourced primarily in the Bible, along with a "traditional" poetic, metrical method of expressing these in language. Tradition does not relate solely to the past, but has a present and future orientation also, as Gadamer points out:

"Linguistic tradition is tradition in the literal sense of the word, ie something handed down. It is not just something that has been left over, to be investigated and interpreted as a remnant of the past....
In the form of writing all tradition is simultaneous with any present time. Moreover, it involves a unique co-existence of past and present, insofar as present consciousness has the possibility of a free access to all that is handed down in writing....A written tradition is not a fragment of a past world, but has always raised itself beyond this into the sphere of the meaning that it expresses. It is the ideality of the word, which raises linguistic objects beyond the finiteness and transience of other remnants of past existence. It is not this document, as coming from the past, that is the bearer of tradition, but the continuity of memory. Through memory tradition becomes part of our own world, and so what it communicates can be directly expressed." ¹⁰⁴

Tradition is not concerned with preservation of words or customs, but with the conservation of meaning and memory. Fred Kaan, a modern hymnwriter, speaks of tradition as "a

103 Idle, Christopher. pp10-11

104 Gadamer, Hans-Georg. pp351-2

living process in which we ourselves are involved, and therefore it doesn't arrive on our desk, so to speak, or on our lectern, as a rounded off gift." ¹⁰⁵ It is not the forms which carry the weight of tradition, but the memory implicit in the content expressed. Because Christianity is deeply rooted in one set of Scriptures, it is natural that the predominant images and forms in many hymns are biblical in origin. In this case the distinction drawn between memory as the carrier of tradition and the preservation of form is less clear. For example, there is a real sense in which the Trinitarian "memory" is conserved by both biblical language and the poetic form.

Father most holy, merciful and tender,
 Jesus our saviour, with the Father reigning,
 Spirit all kindly, advocate, defender,
 Light never waning.

Trinity sacred, Unity unshaken,
 Deity perfect, giving and forgiving,
 Light of the angels, life of the forsaken,
 Hope of all living. (WOV 4,vv 1,2)

This Latin hymn of the tenth century uses the Trinitarian words. The memory is conserved, and preserved, in a set formula: Father, Son, Spirit. A twentieth century hymn uses the same formula as the basis of poetic structure:

Father in heaven,
 grant to your children,
 mercy and blessing,
 songs never ceasing,
 love to unite us,
 grace to redeem us -
 Father in heaven,
 Father our God.

Jesus redeemer,
 may we remember
 your gracious passion,
 your resurrection.
 Worship we bring you,
 praise we shall sing you -
 Jesus, redeemer,
 Jesus our Lord.

Spirit descending
 whose is the blessing,
 strength for the weary,
 help for the needy,
 sealed in our sonship
 yours be the worship -
 Spirit descending,
 Spirit adored. (WOV 399)

Although ten centuries separate these hymns the principle of conservation inherent in tradition applies. The same basic images are used in the same order. There is a direct link between these hymns and biblical imagery. D.T.Niles makes no attempt to "modernise" the biblical images for his twentieth century congregations, or to express these images in new forms. Words like "redeem", "grace", "passion", "resurrection", and "sonship" retain their restricted biblical sense. The meaning will accordingly be greatest for those reader/singers who have had previous access to the meanings of these words.

Fred Kaan takes a different approach to twentieth century hymnwriting:

"English is not my mother-tongue, and therefore I use English as something of a new discovery, and I didn't grow up as a Christian....So I didn't grow up with the traditional language of the church, and even if I had, in making the transition from one country to another, from one language to another - Dutch to English - I

was not familiar with the traditional expressions of the faith." ¹⁰⁶

Kaan writes from a biblical perspective, but unlike Niles, adopts a modern language style of expression:

Sing we a song of high revolt;
make great the Lord, his name exalt;
Sing we the song that Mary sang
of God at war with human wrong.

Sing we of him who deeply cares
and still with us our burden bears,
he who with strength the proud disowns,
brings down the mighty from their thrones.

By him the poor are lifted up;
he satisfies with bread and cup
the hungry folk of many lands:
the rich must go with empty hands.

He calls us to revolt and fight
with him for what is just and right
to live and sing magnificat
in crowded street and council flat. (WOV643)

Within the four verses of this hymn are few 'religious' terms. But the principle of conservation of memory in tradition is observable in allusions to biblical images: "bread and cup". The "song that Mary sang" is clearly the Magnificat named in verse four, where it is linked with the reader/singer's life in "crowded street or council flat." Kaan has not attempted to redefine the terms of Luke 1:46-55, but recasts the meaning as a meditation or paraphrase appropriate to his time and place. The images of verses 2 and 3 are distinctly biblical, direct allusions to Luke's words, and differ from those used by Niles who does not

106 Pratt-Green, F. and others. p227

change the biblical words at all. Kaan's allusions are 'open': the proud, the poor, thrones, bread and cup. Such words are accessible (relevant) to a reader/singer without any knowledge of biblical phraseology, yet a reader/singer familiar with the biblical context will bring this knowledge to Kaan's words. While Kaan's hymn is based on Luke's words the form of expression is different. Kaan takes the themes of the Magnificat and recasts them in modern style. He preserves the memory in this approach, but not the form.

In contrast, Timothy Dudley-Smith has attempted to rewrite the Magnificat in singable poetry, leaving the style and thought progression of Luke's words intact as much as possible:

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his word,
in God my saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;
his mercy sure, from age to age the same;
his holy name - the Lord the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by.
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and for evermore. (WOV 109)

Comparing Dudley-Smith's and Kaan's hymn with Luke 1:46-55 in the New English Bible version from which Dudley-Smith's inspiration comes shows the principle of conservation of memory in operation. The forms are different, the meanings are similar, but there are differences in the way a reader/singer is expected to deal with Luke's words. Kaan is exhorting the reader/singer to apply the themes of justice and mercy implicit in Luke to his own life, while

Dudley-Smith is offering a faithful rendition of Mary's song without overt 'modern' application.

While tradition conserves and uses a basic set of images and language, for Christian hymnody biblical in origin, this causes a creative tension between accessibility to meaning and incomprehensibility to all but a few. The hymn must be able to be understood by the present reader/singer (whenever the 'present' is). John Webster Grant outlines the reasons for this creative tension being a problem in the late twentieth century:

"I recognise at once a difficulty of which we became acutely aware in compiling our hymnbook some years ago. The contents of the Bible are no longer part of our common stock of general knowledge. Its language, even in modern translation, is not readily comprehended. The processes of thinking it represents are far removed from those of our technological society. It is easier, temptingly easier, to base our hymnody almost exclusively on current experiences, problems, and enthusiasms, illustrating it occasionally with snippets from the tradition that are still passably familiar. Indeed, a biblically informed hymnody will be viable today only if accompanied by a thorough and sustained program of education. Yet there can be no substitute for it if our stories are to be related to the centre from which alone they derive their coherence."¹⁰⁷

The dominance of the Bible as a source for imagery, typology and phraseology in hymnody is marked. Because of the centrality of the Bible in Christian teaching it is natural that this is so. Colin Gibson observes:

"Biblical imagery is not only superlatively good in itself and therefore attractive to any poet; it enjoys a special preeminence because of the supreme religious authority given to all the words of scripture, and because through centuries of use it has imprinted on the minds of all those who speak the English language. It is therefore not surprising that despite the fact that hymns are by definition new compositions a very large number of them are still founded on passages of scripture. The editors of the most recent standard hymnbook, With One Voice, have been able to identify

107 Grant, John Webster. "The Hymn as a Theological Statement". in The Hymn. New York. Hymn Society of America. October 1986. p10

scriptural bases for nearly ninety of the 600 hymns included in that collection. Hymnbooks with a more conservative and fundamentalist bias would show a much higher proportion of Bible-based hymns. Whatever changes in the knowledge of the Bible social developments and the decline of religion may bring about in the future, the present generation of hymnwriters cannot escape the influence of the language of the Bible." ¹⁰⁸

Here then is an important source of the creative tension between relevance and irrelevance. The tradition of biblical images and language is conserved, yet the Bible is becoming less and less well known. How then can the new hymnwriters conserve the primacy of Biblical understanding and allow the reader/singer of today accessibility to its meaning?

Part of the answer lies not in the language used in hymns, but in the context in which hymns are experienced. While it is possible to experience hymns as private devotional poetry, they are intended for liturgy, worship in a congregational, communal setting. It is this limited context which helped to define a hymn and which bears on relevance as accessibility to meaning. The meaning of a hymn is related directly to its context. Outside that context, the full meaning of a hymn is not apparent. Hymns are not written as religious poetry but as congregational responses. When congregations sing they stand up, they sing in unison, or occasionally in parts, they read words and articulate them to music. Singing hymns is a distinctive activity. The meaning and relevance of this activity must be looked for in the meaning of liturgy which forms the wider context of the hymn. Philip Wheelwright recognises the necessity of searching for meaning within the limited context implied by hymn singing:

"...religious, poetic, and mythic utterances at their best really mean something, make a kind of trans-subjective reference, although their methods of

108 Gibson, C.A. "Quaint Words and Trim Inventions: Style in the Modern Hymn". Colloquium. 16. No 1. O '83. Auckland. St. Johns College... p10.

referring and the nature of what is referred to need to be understood and judged on their own merits, not by standards of meaning imported from outside." ¹⁰⁹

Joseph Gelineau, writing from a Roman Catholic point of view, makes this more concrete. Liturgy is "the particular symbolic action of a particular community." ¹¹⁰

We have already noted particularity as an important factor in understanding what a hymn is. Liturgy is local too, even if it is done using a common service book:

"Obviously the reformed liturgical books could not give the rites a living face and flesh, colour and style. Only particular assemblies can do that. Posture, actions, dance, voice, singing, poetry, music, clothes, images, buildings are the flesh and face of the liturgy, which can only be embodied in a group in a particular place, time and culture." ¹¹¹

Historically, within the traditions and practices of the Eastern and Western churches, there are some significant differences in hymnic and liturgical style. The Eastern hymn practice grew out of an elaboration of the short responses between verses of the psalms. Hymns within that tradition were not considered extraliturgical (see p.6 Chapter 1) as the self-limiting factor was the drama of the Byzantine Mass which precluded music not intrinsic to the ritual. Within the Western Church, however, hymnology was more tightly controlled, less regional in expression, "an ordered sequence for use at different times and seasons, designed to express not the feelings of individual worshippers, but the meaning of the feast or office."

From the Reformation onwards liturgical styles proliferated, becoming more particularised as different denominations developed their own styles. Much Protestant

109 Wheelwright, Philip. The Burning Fountain. Bloomington. Indiana University Press. 1968. p4

110 Gelineau, Joseph. The Liturgy Today and Tomorrow. London. Darton Longman and Todd. 1978. p15

111 Gelineau, Joseph. p16

worship relies on an extempore style, without a service book, the structure remaining similar, but the content varying week by week. It is not surprising to find Denis Towner quoting Bernard Manning: "Hymns are for us Dissenters what the liturgy is for the Anglicans. They are the framework, the setting, the conventional, the traditional part of the service as we use it....Our hymns are our liturgy, an excellent liturgy." ¹¹²

Clearly 'liturgy' here has a different meaning in practice from Gelineau's Roman Catholic understanding of the term. But a clue to the significance of Manning's words is provided by Towner in a chapter entitled "Introducing New Hymns":

"New hymns can really be a problem. Nothing can so inhibit a congregation from enjoying worship as to be inflicted with a lot of unknown hymns. After all, they are expected to sing them, and in many congregations that is all the opportunity the people have to express their own worship." ¹¹³

The root meaning of 'liturgy' is "the people's work". (An irony to note in passing is the way in which the Dissenting tradition in its dissent has gone so far from a set form of words in its liturgy that the "minister" now has the words again, and the people participate mostly in the hymns, one of the very things the Reformation attempted to reform.) For Protestant worship hymns are liturgy in the root meaning of that word. They are where the congregation participates most actively (works hardest perhaps). But that is not what Manning means. Hymns are the people's responses to God. The way in which a hymn is used within the overall liturgy determines what sort of response is being made. It is in this sense that hymns can be described as liturgy in Protestant worship. It is in this sense too that their relevance or irrelevance becomes an important issue. If I am participating, for example, in a

112 Quoted in Towner, Denis. A Preacher's Guide to the Australian Hymn Book. Sydney. Unichurch Publishing. n.d. p12

113 Towner, Denis. p37

response of praise to God, my emotional response ideally will match my intellectual response if I am to enter fully into this experience. If I am denied access to the meaning of the response I am asked to make as a member of the congregation, this experience will seem at best inadequate and at worst irrelevant.

Towner provides a clear example of the way in which hymns in one Protestant liturgical tradition act as different responses to what he calls the "movement of the whole service":

"Ordinarily the service should begin (perhaps after a call to worship or sentence from scripture) with a hymn of praise and adoration, or perhaps of invocation. This is the note with which Christian worship commences, not a hymn of confession or commitment.

The second hymn may precede the readings, in which case it may be a hymn asking for pardon or responding to God's grace in forgiveness. It may be a hymn on the Bible or invoke the Holy Spirit. If it intersperses the readings, it may be the psalm for the day, or reflect the theme of one of the early readings. If it follows the lessons, it should lead into the sermon.

The hymn following the sermon should take up the point of the message. It might be a direct act of commitment, it may be credal in character, or it may connect with the offertory or the following service of the eucharist.

A communion hymn may occur later, sometimes during the distribution, where great care should be observed that it does not interfere with the mood of that moment....

The final hymn should not be unknown or too restrained. It may recapitulate the note of praise, it could be a brief doxology; it may be a hymn of thanksgiving or a further commitment to service." ¹¹⁴

Implicit in Towner's list of "shoulds and mays" is a set structure. Liturgy takes a particular form. There is a perceptible movement from praise, through confession, teaching, response and commitment, to praise, recalling the structure of hymn psalms. The hymns are intended to be appropriate responses determined by that movement. Towner mentions three other complicating factors he believes must

be taken into account when selecting hymns: they must suit the theme of the Bible readings, the season of the christian year, and speak to the current spiritual needs of the people. Here is a concise understanding of relevance in liturgy.

In this common Protestant understanding of liturgy hymns carry the weight of appropriate congregational response. They link the movement of worship. Often this is disparagingly referred to as the 'four hymn sandwich' (perhaps because sustenance is needed by the people to enable them to do the work of liturgy?).

Erik Routley, while also stressing the place of hymns in Protestant liturgy, argues vigorously for variety, rather than variations on the same. Worship is drama and music has a special part to play in that drama:

"Church music is part of the drama of worship, and the question for us is what part we can expect it to play in the developments of the drama of worship....Church music is at the same time the most powerful generator of a sense of remoteness and scale, and also the most useful medium for congregational participation, being both rhythmical and rational.... The Catholics can still basically turn to their liturgies, but the Protestants are entirely uneasy about their forms of worship, and this is why. There seems to be very little connection between a reasonably prosperous and well-ordered service of Protestant worship and anything whatever. If the sermon is central, we now ask what question in the common life of the worshipper it is supposed to be answering....The one thing that can be done with a normal Protestant service is to see that, at least on the level of mental drama, and if at all possible on a more visible level than that, it has integrity and sense. A Protestant service is from one to the next a new creation. It is strictly existential. It is an occasion when the eternal gospel is made new not only in preaching but also in the ordering of every word, including especially the choice of the congregational hymns. The ideal choice of hymn, psalm, or anthem, is that which puts in the congregation's mouth the very word it was waiting to express." ¹¹⁵

115 Routley, Erik. Words, Music and the Church. London. Herbert Jenkins. 1968. P155

Routley and Towner, though writing from different perspectives, bring into focus through liturgy the question of relevance. They, like Gelineau, draw attention to the fact that if the congregation is to respond with meaning, liturgy and therefore hymns must have a meaning accessible locally. This does not mean idiosyncratic worship, but points to a tension implicit in local understandings of a universal faith, layered onto the questions of historicity of the documents being used and the congregation using them. Gadamer is helpful in understanding this issue: "It is not this document, as coming from the past, that is the bearer of tradition, but the continuity of memory. Through memory tradition becomes part of our own world, and so what it communicates can be directly expressed." The one constant in the discussion of Christian hymnology is the shared memory of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus along with the Bible as the shared "memory-jogger" about God from the Judeo-Christian tradition. Thus it is this story, rehearsed locally, and in a particular time in history, but rooted in universality which ties all liturgies together and which calls for a particular response in hymns. Gelineau reminds us:

"We must therefore expect that if Christian rites put down real roots in different cultures, the liturgical expression of the faith and even the faith itself will take on a more individualised expression, style and character." ¹¹⁶

It is the "more individualised expression, style and character" which is the concern of the hymnwriter. If there is to be as complete a response as possible by the congregation within liturgy it is hymns which provide meaningful opportunity for it. Relevance, accessibility to meaning, is therefore affected by the local context.

The question of historicity is indispensable here. There is ample evidence to show that the themes of hymnology have

116 Gelineau, Joseph. p17

changed over the years as understandings of faith and the philosophies of different ages have prevailed, but the memory is conserved as we have noted. C. Henry Phillips writes:

"The theme varies from generation to generation; from congregation to congregation; in the missionary time of Ambrose the emphasis was laid on the fundamentals of religion, the nature of the Trinity, the attitude of God to man and man to God, the purpose of the incarnation and so forth. As one would expect, later hymns dealt more with details like the mass, the saints, the incidents of the incarnation, commemorations. The Wesleys wrote enough hymns to treat all these subjects and to add a number of exhortation hymns calling men to a change of motives or to faith and thanksgiving. During the nineteenth century hymns were preoccupied with the aspirations and difficulties, the weaknesses and strength of men... In our own time the most popular hymns seem to sing of service to one's fellow men." ¹¹⁷

Since Phillips wrote those words in 1946 other changes have been pressing forward:

"At present the Australian Hymn Book is being revised. This is partly because some of the theology of our hymns is no longer relevant to our present understanding of God. Also our language has changed - we no longer use words like "thee" and "thou" - and so it may be appropriate to alter some hymns. We believe that hymns need to affirm the people of God, and their language must be changed to include all of the people of God: women, men, and children." ¹¹⁸

Inclusiveness is one major emphasis in the latter part of the twentieth century as hymnwriters strive to be relevant to the present age. Culture is another which is currently assuming greater importance in NZ. Sometimes a hymn written within one set of cultural associations loses its intended meanings when used in another cultural context. In the NZ supplement to With One Voice, there is a hymn by Sydney Carter - "Every Star Shall Sing a Carol". (WOV 640)

117 Phillips, C. Henry. p216

118 Ford, Frances and others. (eds). Out of the Darkness. Sydney. Australian Council of Churches. 1986. p71

Written from a North American perspective there was no problem with the wording of verse 5:

Who can tell what other body
 he will hallow for his own?
 I will praise the son of Mary,
 brother of my blood and bone.

That is not how it is printed in With One Voice. There the last line of verse 5 reads "Brother of my flesh and bone." with a footnote giving the original line. The reason for the change is contextual-cultural. In NZ, "blood and bone" has connotations as a well known fertiliser. After correspondence with Carter, he would not change the line, but it was of sufficient concern to the editors for them to change it in order that the hymn's intended meaning would not be ruined by local connotations.

For NZ hymnwriter Colin Gibson, the local context is not a peripheral issue, but the heart of the matter. Writing from within a congregation in Dunedin, his hymns attempt to express the faith in NZ images in order that the memory implicit in Christian tradition can have a local relevance and impact:

"I really wanted to write hymns with a distinct NZ element, using images that create NZ pictures. So I've tried to use images of our roads and landscape like the albatross instead of the dove for the image of the Holy Spirit and dolphins instead of the fish for Jesus Christ." ¹¹⁹

Where the road runs out and the signposts end
 Where we come to the edge of today,
 be the God of Abraham for us;
 send us out upon our way

Lord you were our beginning
 the faith that gave us birth.
 We look to you our ending,
 our hope for heaven and earth

When the coast is left and we journey on
 to the rim of the sky and the sea,

119 A conversation with Colin Gibson printed in Otago Daily Times. Dunedin. Allied Press. October 4. 1988. p1

be the sailors friend, be the dolphin Christ;
lead us on to eternity

When the clouds are low and the wind is strong,
when tomorrow's storm draws near,
be the spirit bird hov'ring overhead
who will take away our fear. (WOV 672)

Local context, as Gelineau points out, gives rise to the possibility of individualised responses and interpretations. Individual in this context means a localised community rather than an individual person.

The possibility of individual interpretation of texts is a basic element of Reader-Response Criticism which can assist us to understand the dynamics of local contexts and communities of faith which use new images and yet conserve the memory inherent in tradition as Gadamer has described it. Jane Tompkins believes that Reader-Response Criticism and New Criticism, while seemingly at odds with each other, are really operating from the same basic assumption: "that the specification of meaning is the aim of the critical act."¹²⁰ The thrust of Reader-Response Criticism is the "belief that meaning inheres completely and exclusively in the literary text....In the literature of the Reader-Response movement...the responses of individual readers are declared the true object of literary study."¹²¹ Tompkins sums up the seeming conflict between New Criticism and Reader-Response Criticism as "whether meaning is to be located in the text or the reader". Gadamer, as we have already noted, does not imply any sense of either/or in his analysis of hermeneutics. The conversation metaphor he employs implies that both text and reader make a contribution to meaning, understanding and therefore to relevance. For hymns there is the context of liturgy which also becomes part of this conversation, for hymns are not individual experiences between a reader and a text, but

120 Tompkins, Jane P. "The Reader in History:the Changing Shape of Literary Response." in Reader-Response Criticism. J.P.Tompkins (ed). Baltimore. John Hopkins University Press. 1980. p201

121 Tompkins, Jane P. p201

group experiences where the reader is also singer. Each reader/singer however, must encounter the experience as an individual, one among many.

Stanley Fish addresses this dynamic. In "Interpreting the Variorum" Fish posits two idealised readers who bring different associations to the same text. They will have quite different experiences, equally real, but palpably different. "It is not a discrimination based simply on information, because what is important is not the information itself, but the action of the mind which its possession makes possible for one reader and impossible for the other."¹²² Thus there is the possibility of many interpretations happening at once if the text is the only experience-provoker, (which in the case of liturgy, it is not). Echoing Gadamer, Fish believes that reading means interpretation: "The moral is clear, the choice is never between objectivity and interpretation but between an interpretation that is unacknowledged as such and an interpretation that is at least aware of itself."¹²³ Yet Fish acknowledges that reading is not such an idiosyncratic activity that meaning, understanding and relevance are impossible within a group:

"Both the stability of interpretation among readers and the variety of interpretation in the career of a single reader would seem to argue for the existence of something independent of and prior to interpretive acts, something which produces them. I will answer this challenge by asserting that both the stability and the variety are functions of interpretive strategies rather than texts."¹²⁴

These "interpretive strategies" are, according to Fish, the results of some prior learning which condition the range of strategies which will be employed by a reader, and which, furthermore, ensure that group of people will use the same

122 Fish, Stanley. Is There a Text in this Class?. Massachusetts. Harvard University Press. 1980 p160

123 Fish, Stanley. p167

124 Fish, Stanley. pp167-8

strategies, leading to a stability of interpretation within the group. It is this that is the counter to idiosyncrasy:

"What is the explanation on the one hand of the stability of interpretation (at least among certain groups at certain times) and on the other of the orderly variety of interpretation if it is not the stability and variety of texts. The answer to all of these questions is to be found in a notion that has been implicit in my argument, the notion of interpretive communities. Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way round. If it is an article of faith in a particular community that there are a variety of texts, its members will boast a repertoire of strategies for making them. And if a community believes in the existence of only one text, then the single strategy its members employ will be forever writing it....Each perceives the text (or texts) its interpretive strategies demand and call into being....Interpretive communities are no more stable than texts because interpretive strategies are not natural or universal, but learned....The ability to interpret is not acquired; it is constitutive of being human. What is acquired are the ways of interpreting and those same ways can also be forgotten or supplanted, or complicated or dropped from favour ("no-one reads that way anymore."). When any of these things happens, there is a corresponding change in texts, not because they are being read differently, but because they are being written differently." ¹²⁵

Fish reconciles the individual reader with the community context in which the reading is done. His description of an interpretive community and the ways it determines texts and meanings applies easily to the church. Like Gadamer, Fish acknowledges the process of change inherent in historicity. We have already noted the way in which tradition in the Christian faith conserves the memory implicit in the teachings of the Bible, and the unique place the Bible has in the church as a source book of language and imagery. In the historical overview of hymnology I noted also that there have been times in the

125 Fish, Stanley. pp171-2

church when interpretive strategies have been used to define a particular group against another. A clear example is the differences between Luther and Calvin seen in what words and forms became allowable and what was excluded. Luther had an inclusive view, Calvin exclusive. Luther allowed German folk tunes and forms, Calvin allowed only psalms.

The work of Fish and Gadamer together lay an important base in our study of relevance. Gadamer outlines the hermeneutical problem inherent in written communication while Fish gives a communal determining structure within which the individual experiences the text. The modern hymnwriter must take all this into account if the work is to be saved from the charge of irrelevancy. The inspiration of the faith must be tempered by the reality of the situation in which the hymn is to be used.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DILEMMA OF THE MODERN

"Although the gospel of Christ is the same today as ever, the language in which it is expressed and the social situation in which it is experienced do change. To communicate the truth with a minimum of ambiguity it is necessary to reconsider the words we choose to convey this ageless gospel."¹²⁶

The editor of With One Voice expresses in these words the dilemma of the contemporary hymnwriter: how to write words to be set to tunes which "communicate the truth with a minimum of ambiguity" for the people of his time. Michael Baughen, consultant editor of Hymns For Today's Church similarly sounds a note of challenge to hymnwriters in his Preface:

"In many churches the most old-fashioned part of worship is the hymnody with its unrevised language. Yet hymnody is an essential part of 'addressing one another' and of worshipping God. That is often hampered by not being in the language of the present day."¹²⁷

How to write "relevant" hymns is the challenge and task of the contemporary hymnwriter. It is a task inherently Christian. In Christian tradition and practice the words, and the Word, are not seen or experienced as static, just as the congregation is not caught in some old-fashioned time warp in worship. Jane Parker Huber introduces her own hymns by reminding the reader/singer of the significance of the words and the Word:

"Language shapes our thinking...As Christians we are a people of THE WORD, and therefore, I believe, have a peculiar responsibility in our use of words. This is especially true as words assist our worship of God, the Word incarnate for our sakes.

126 With One Voice. Editor's Preface. p.xi

127 Hymns for Today's Church. London. Hodder and Stoughton. 1982

So this is a booklet of hymns for a particular time in history when we are looking at words with a slightly different eye." ¹²⁸

Using words which have meanings accessible to a contemporary congregation is more than simply a task of updating for communication's sake. There is also a theological principle ably articulated by M.H.Micks quoting Martin Heidegger:

"...to call Jesus Christ "Word of God" is not to talk about some supernatural substance. It is to talk about a word event that is the medium of God's presence in the world. If, as Martin Heidegger said, "language is the 'house of being', so is word the event of being itself." Thus according to Christian tradition, Word of God "seeks to be understood as a word event that does not go out of date, but constantly renews itself, does not create closed areas of special interest but opens up the world, does not enforce uniformity but is linguistically creative." ¹²⁹

Thus the continuing quest of the hymnwriter, and the request of congregations, for words which speak to and from contemporary experience come about because of the often unexpressed understanding that God is the God "who was, and is, and is to be." (WQV 7) Incarnation cannot be other than contemporary. Each generation of hymnwriters has therefore to find the words to enable another generation of worshippers to do liturgy. It has always been so and theologically must always be so.

But theology and editing hymnbooks are not so easily reconciled. Hymnbooks by nature are conservative collections. They tend to publish the hymns that have endured; which are "popular". They represent in large part the lasting qualities of the 'past' heritage of hymnwriting. Yet most denominational hymnbooks published in the twentieth century have found it necessary to either offer a supplement, or to produce an entirely new edition,

128 Huber, Jane Parker. Foreword.

129 Micks, M.H. Our Search For Identity. Philadelphia. Fortress Press. 1982

or even as in the case of the British Methodist Hymn Book, to do both within twenty years. The supplements are typically introduced with a comment about the need to be "contemporary":

"When the Australian Hymnbook/With One Voice was being formed, the committee sought to meet the needs of congregations entering the final decades of this century. A range of new hymns together with well-known hymns was assembled. A decade has passed since then, and with the passing of time new needs and new emphases have emerged. The church has discovered new insights in worship, and some of these have provoked new music. Indeed, new material is being produced each year and the church does well to take it seriously and be refreshed by it....Whilst the golden age of hymnody may have been associated with the names of Watts and Wesley, a renaissance has occurred in the last forty years. It is stimulating to find so many authors and composers serving the church in this way, and our difficulty has been not in finding new hymns, but rather in selecting a modest number from a large field." ¹³⁰

However the same foreword carries a note of caution also typical of such supplementary collections:

"In addition to the more formal 'hymns' and 'psalms', there is now a wide range of Christian song being used in the church. Whilst many of these may not be durable, there are some here and there which have been widely accepted and which have enriched the worship of many congregations." ¹³¹

These words echo those written almost twenty years previously in the Preface of a 1969 Anglican supplement, 100 Hymns For Today:

"Although this book is a collection of hymns for our own time, it does not go so far in the direction of modernity as to include those written in an idiom likely to be so shortlived that any book containing them will be dated within months of publication. We have tried to steer a middle course, therefore between restatements of the traditional and ephemeral or 'pop' productions." ¹³²

130 Sing Alleluia. London. Collins. 1987 p.vii

131 Sing Alleluia. p.vii

132 100 Hymns For Today. London. Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd. 1980. Preface.

In 1980, the same editorial board was expressing a similar note of caution as it published yet another supplement:

"Like its predecessor the book seeks to be forward looking without abandoning ordered restraint; to be sensitive to the changing needs and renewed vitality of the Church in a turbulent world, while being rooted in the long, living tradition of the people of God."
133

It is worth noting these expressions of caution about publishing contemporary hymns (or are they still songs?) for they are indicative of the struggle of the present to be free to express current experience while remaining firmly within the tradition represented by and in the past - a tension already noted in chapter three. Clearly the editors of such collections are dubious about the form in which the memory or tradition is currently expressed. This reticence must be examined and challenged for it bears on the struggle of the contemporary hymnwriter.

If an acknowledged aim of a hymn is, in Routley's words, to "put in the congregation's mouth the very word it was waiting to express", why is it that a book will be dated if it uses an idiom "likely to be so short-lived", relating that phrase to modern rather than past idioms. Part of the acknowledged renaissance of modern hymnwriting has come about in reaction to such cautious editorial policy, where lasting is proof of worth and modern therefore suspect until it has proved itself by long use. For example, Jane Parker Huber gives as one reason for her writing the need for contemporary expression. Thus hymnbooks continue to be published containing a wealth of hymns which use language and idioms now outlived, giving rise to the charge of irrelevancy. But the reality is that for most hymnbook editors the tried and tested hymns will usually outweigh the risk of the contemporary.

Yet every hymn was contemporary once, subject perhaps to the same misgivings of the modern. Some endured, others have not. It would be optimistic to suggest that what has endured is uniformly good, for such is not the case, a point recognised by Timothy Dudley-Smith in a 1984 lecture. He quotes Archbishop Benson:

"A great many of our hymns are nonsense, irritating nonsense, if you regard them simply as literature, and yet they undoubtedly awaken the conscience or raise the soul to God. It is a great puzzle, the badness of most really effective and stirring hymns." ¹³⁴

It truly is a puzzle, the badness of some really effective and stirring hymns. The puzzle thus stated serves to remind us of the complex dynamics involved in singing hymns for they are not literature in the usual sense of that word. Hymn singing involves the liturgy, the writer's word pictures interacting with the singer/reader's associations with that language, overlaid by the singer/reader's feelings generated by the emotional content of the musical accompaniment. Moreover, each person is singing the hymn with others, being influenced, consciously or unconsciously by the feelings being aroused in them. Thus a hymn is not "literature" in the sense that a book or a poem is thus designated, but is a complex experience of all these interactions happening simultaneously. The reason some hymns survive by being "popular" is due therefore not necessarily to their poetic quality, or to the tune or the theology expressed in the text, but to an intangible feeling on the part of the worshippers. Every congregation has its own favourite hymns which may differ from those of a neighbouring congregation even though they are using the same hymnbook. Sentiment, association with important events in an individual or congregation's life, jingle rhymes, (making a hymn 'rememberable' but not necessarily memorable), the constancy of the well worn, are some of the

134 Dudley-Smith, Timothy. "What Makes a Good Hymn Text". in The Hymn. Vol 36. Ja'85. p14

reasons "bad" hymns survive. Some in fact have survived despite the author's intention, as Dudley-Smith points out about "Once in Royal David's City" (WOV 237):

"Would a writer today feel able to use the word 'lowly' three times in three consecutive verses, and again in the final verse? It is applied in turn to the stable, the poor, and to Mary herself. And had the author known that what she was writing for children (to illustrate the Article of the Creed, 'who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary') would achieve such popularity, would she not have wrestled longer ... to remove all hint of bathos, and achieve a better climax, in the closing couplet of the hymn?" ¹³⁵

The continued popularity of such hymns is a reminder of the complex nature of hymnology. Hymns exist for functional reasons. They are part of a congregation's liturgical apparatus. Liturgy is a hymn's raison d'etre. Hymns are a congregational response to God, unlike anthems which may also be a sung response to God, without the intention that they are to be sung by the whole assembly, but rather by a choir or small group. A hymn's function within the liturgy is different in each tradition. The typical non-conformist liturgical use of hymns has already been described. A writer writes from a personal liturgical understanding, with the intention that the work be useful to the celebration of the liturgy. Fred Pratt Green has called the hymn writer "a servant of the church." In the same way, hymns are the servants of liturgy.

What are the implications of this understanding of hymns? Liturgy is the work of the church. We have already noted the tension between the 'church' and the 'world', and the way in which music in particular is a focus for this tension in a way that words are not. Liturgy is the church doing its own business with God. In business jargon, liturgy is an "in-house" activity, and hymns, as part of that, are "in-house" documents. This is one reason why the language of the Bible is so important in hymns. The

concern is already noted that Church and Bible knowledge are increasingly minority activities, but the nature of liturgy remains despite that:

"Each of the animals had six wings and had eyes all the way round as well as inside; and day and night they never stopped singing: 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God, the Almighty he was, he is and he is to come.'" (Rev 4:8)

The Jerusalem Bible notes: "The liturgical Trisagion or Sanctus echoes this doxology. It is said that the Church thus shares in the worship of the heavenly court, but it is also possible that John's vision of heaven reproduces the worship of the Church on earth."

It is from this point of view that the Augustinian definition of a hymn was developed. Praise of God in the sanctuary means an inevitable tension between the daily life of the worshipper, and the set-apartness of the sanctuary itself. Routley, as he defined the role of a hymnwriter, showed how the twentieth century has attempted to unite the two: "He is writing about God, or about God's works. He is also writing about the church's experience of God ... or the duty of man in society as in the sight of God."

But however it is put, there is no escaping that liturgy, and therefore hymns as part of liturgy are the church's in-housework. The language of liturgy and hymns, and indeed the music, as Totton's letter demonstrates, is felt by many to separate church and world rather than unite them. Other writers agree:

"The practice of Christianity has become more and more cultic...(by which) I mean that it has become more and more focussed on things like going to church, where you hear about, talk about and pray to a God who is described in special language which becomes increasingly peculiar to the cultic groups concerned....People have to know quite a lot about God before they can stand up to going to church.... Traditional Christian language has largely gone dead

on us. Internally it has gone dead on us: it is a sort of communal chanting which cheers some people up, anaesthetizes others, but does not actually allow us to relate it to real life and does not look much further into life outside or do much about deepening spiritual life." ¹³⁶

Don Cupitt puts this cultic practice into a rather less provocative context:

"...religious beliefs should be understood not in the realist way, but rather as being more like moral convictions. They are not universal truths but community-truths, and they guide lives rather than describe facts. They belong together in systems, and each system in turn belongs to just one community. They express what it means to belong to that community, to share its way of life and to owe allegiance to its values. No religious beliefs are free-floating; they are all tied to communities, in such a way that every member of a community may be expected to accept a whole set of them, and those who do not belong to the community are not expected to accept any of them." ¹³⁷

This reinforces the "in-house" nature of worship with the attendant attitudes of them/us which can easily develop. The church becomes the celebration of the "saved" over against those who have not been, a point also noted by John Webster Grant: "Sin came into the picture all right, but normally as their sins rather than ours, or perhaps sins of which a zealous leader of worship was trying to convict an apathetic congregation." ¹³⁸

An honest expression of the "best" intentions of the church as seen by those within it can be found in the 4th verse of the hymn "Songs of praise the angels sang" (WOV 62):

And shall man alone be dumb
Till that glorious kingdom come?

136 Jenkins, David E. God, Jesus and Life in the Spirit. London. SCM Press. pp21-24.

137 Cupitt, Don. The Sea of Faith. London. British Broadcasting Corporation. 1984. p19

138 Grant, John Webster. "The Hymn as Theological Statement". in The Hymn. October 1986. p9

No, the church delights to raise
psalms and hymns and songs of praise.

The church's function in this verse is a rather more representative one for humanity than Cupitt suggests is reality.

We have noted too that throughout the history of the church there has been a discernable tension between the needs of the people and the controlling tendency of the clergy or church hierarchy which has shown itself in hymnology. One of the facts of life confronted by hymnwriters is that once the work is in the public domain, they have no control over the way in which the hymn will be used. To write a hymn attentive to the felt or expressed needs of the people is no guarantee of use, even if the hymn is outstanding. The person who chooses what hymns will be used within the liturgy also has a controlling function which must be recognised:

"To note what people choose to sing, indeed, is to learn a good deal about what they believe. More often than not, the hymns sung in church reflect what ministers believe and may bear little relation to the convictions of most members of the congregation." ¹³⁹

With such a complex set of restraints it may seem a wonder that anything is written at all. Yet hymns are being written and sung. To grasp the dilemma of the modern further, it is necessary to return to the original question: What is a hymn? To it we add another: By what criteria can the effectiveness of a hymn be evaluated?

My definition of 'hymn' which has emerged from the study of the previous three chapters and the discussion above is:

A hymn is a written text arising from an issue of faith in God, in verse form, designed to be sung by the whole congregation within the context of liturgy.

It is within the limits set by this definition that I believe evaluation of hymns is possible and necessary. Archbishop Benson, quoted by Dudley-Smith, used the word "bad" when speaking disparagingly of some hymns but then spoke of the "effectiveness" of those bad hymns. Bad, and its correlative, good, are subjective terms. As Benson posed the puzzle, part of the answer is that because hymns have a feeling content for people then good and bad are related to those feelings, not to any objective criteria. D.H. Lawrence, for example, writes of hymns having for him an indefinable "more permanent value" than the "finest poetry".

The term 'effective' however is a more helpful one when attempting to evaluate hymns. This word will also contain some subjective element as does any criticism, but it recognises that hymns are composed for a specific purpose, and can therefore be evaluated in some measure by their success or failure to do the job for which they were composed. I have proposed throughout this chapter a utilitarian view of hymns as part of the "tools of the trade" for liturgy. I recognise that formal liturgy is not the only setting in which hymns are used, but would argue strongly that liturgy is the primary milieu for hymns.

By what criteria then can the effectiveness of a hymn be examined? I believe we should ask four questions:

1. What is the relationship of this hymn to its liturgical setting?
2. How 'relevant' is the language, tune, and theology of this hymn?
3. What level of poetic competence is expressed in the words?
4. How does this hymn convey the meaning of the tradition of which it is an expression?

There is another rather subjective question to be asked of a hymn too. Even if a particular hymn fulfils the above criteria perfectly, finally, the overall question is: does the writer actually have something significant to say, or to add to the body of hymnology in existence already? This is not a plea for originality per se, but a warning that triteness and formula writing is just as possible in hymnology as in advertising or pulp fiction.

Colin Gibson states the problem in lively fashion:

"What troubles contemporary hymnographers, as it disturbs all poets, is the sheer mass of conventional imagery accumulated over the centuries. How tempting in a metrical crisis to reach for the nearest cliché; how easy to be oppressed to the point of paralysis by thinking too much on the vast store laid up by tradition. How common to expend precious imaginative energy on a fruitless search for the new, the truly original poetic image. Hymn writers labour under a special handicap in this respect. I mean the tyranny of the poetically rich language of the Bible...Many (hymn writers)...are content to cobble together familiar words and phrases, both biblical and liturgical into structures which satisfy them. There are literally thousands of hymns written and published every year which are new only to their assemblers."¹⁴⁰

This caution can be applied to all hymns, but especially to hymns written for children, where the writer is striving consciously for simplicity. It is easy for such hymns to be very banal, with jingle rhyme and jingle ideas. Granton Douglas Hay's hymn is a reminder of this:

"Like a father watching over me,
 God will show his goodness;
 love that's like a mother's tender care
 God gives to his children everywhere;
 in their joys and in their sorrows
 God is there.
 When I'm happy, when I'm sad,
 God still loves me and I am glad. (WOV 119 v1)

140 Gibson, C.A.. "Quaint Words and Trim Inventions; Style in the Modern Hymn." in *Colloquium* 16 No.1. O'83. Auckland. St John's College. pp9-10

A more successful attempt is Margaret Cropper's hymn:

Jesus' hands were kind hands, doing good to all,
 healing pain and sickness, blessing children small,
 washing tired feet, and saving those who fall:
 Jesus' hands were kind hands, doing good to all.

Take my hands, Lord Jesus, let them work for you,
 make them strong and gentle, kind in all I do;
 let me watch you, Jesus, till I'm gentle too,
 till my hands are kind hands, quick to work for you.

(WOV 178)

The difference between these two hymns, both striving for simplicity, is that Cropper allows the Biblical stories of the first verse to flow naturally into the lives of the singers in the second. The rhyme scheme is simple, but less obtrusive than lines like "when I'm happy, when I'm sad/God still loves me and I am glad." Hay's hymn, in the second verse also becomes didactically moralistic: "He taught us the way we ought to live, /and he showed the love we ought to give". Here is a hymn of no great originality or merit which in a hymnbook sits alongside the classics of Wesley and Watts.

Given the warning about unoriginality which applies to all the criteria of effectiveness, I will examine the critical four questions in more detail in order that their interrelationship can be made explicit, for they are not distinct and different 'categories' but flow into and out of each other.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE HYMN AND ITS LITURGICAL SETTING

As Towner points out, there is a movement within worship. In simple terms liturgy involves the gathering of people;

the focussing of attention on the reason or object of gathering, that is God, in praise, thanksgiving, and confession; the hearing of the Word, in readings from the Bible; and response to the Word. Such is the usual flow of non-conformist Protestant worship. When the liturgy is a celebration of the sacraments of Baptism or Holy Communion, those elements are added at the appropriate points in the liturgy. Within the Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions liturgy always includes the celebration of the Eucharist, but the basic flow of the liturgical order is as for Protestant worship. A hymn has an appropriate place within this worship.

Hymn Books are variously arranged in orders reflecting the liturgical styles of the denomination using them. With One Voice is arranged in a 'Free Church' order rather than according to the church year which means that hymns are grouped in 13 categories expressing that tradition. The order is Trinitarian: I God: in Creation, Providence and Redemption; II-VI Jesus Christ; VII The Holy Spirit. These sections are followed by The Scriptures and several on the Church's various aspects of life and order. However a hymnbook is arranged, the purpose of the arrangement is to assist those planning worship to choose hymns appropriate to the style of liturgy of that tradition, and to enable hymns suited to the appropriate movement of liturgy to be found quickly.

When evaluating the effectiveness of a hymn therefore, account must be made of the place within the liturgy suggested by the hymn content. Towner indeed lays down what he sees as necessary 'rules' for using certain types of hymns. Some hymns are written for one part of liturgy only, for example, communion or baptism, but others are written in such a way that their use is more flexible. The difference lies in the defining nature of the language used, in the first instance, and in the allusive nature of the language used in the second. Fred Kaan's hymn "Now let

us from this table rise" is an example of a hymn written for one part of the liturgy only.

Now let us from this table rise
renewed in body, mind and soul;
with Christ we die and live again
his selfless love has made us whole. (WOV 450 v1)

The first line of this verse designates the hymn as a post-communion response. So too Kaan's hymn "As we break the bread and drink the life of wine".

As we break the bread
and drink the life of wine
we bring to mind our Lord,
man of all time.

Pass from hand to hand
the living love of Christ!
Machine and man provide
bread for this feast.

Having shared the bread
that died to rise again,
we rise to serve the world,
scattered as grain. (WOV 449, vv1, 3, 5)

Compared to these two Kaan hymns the Appleford hymn which follows them in With One Voice is less anchored to one liturgical place, for its language is not defining in the way that "table" and "bread for this feast" are. Of the four verses of "Living Lord", only one makes any reference to the eucharist and that is allusive:

Lord Jesus Christ,
now and every day
teach us how to pray,
Son of God.

You have commanded us to do
 this, in remembrance, Lord of you:
 into our lives your power breaks through,
 living Lord. (WOV 451 v2)

Luke's Gospel in some manuscripts has the words of the Last Supper, in part: "And he took bread, gave thanks, and broke it; and he gave it to them, with the words: 'this is my body which is given for you; do this as a memorial of me.'" (Luke 22:19-20). Yet the allusion in Appleford's hymn to a commandment can as easily be interpreted as referring to some other words of Jesus: "I give you a new commandment: love one another; as I have loved you, so you are to love one another." (John 13:34-35). It is this ambiguity which allows Appleford's hymn to be used effectively in any place in the liturgy where commitment is being evoked in the worshippers, for the hymn is a celebration of commitment:

Lord Jesus Christ,
 I would come to you,
 live my life for you,
 Son of God. (WOV 451 v4)

The point here is not that communion is an appropriate or inappropriate part of the liturgy to express commitment, but that there is a fundamental difference in the language of these hymns of Kaan and Appleford which enables "Living Lord" to be used more freely within the context of liturgy than those of Kaan.

In terms of effectiveness, a hymn must be able to be used appropriately somewhere in the liturgy if it is to fulfil its function as a vehicle for congregational response. It is entirely appropriate that some hymns address specific parts of liturgy. It is necessary too that others retain the flexibility shown by "Living Lord". It is in fact almost impossible to find a hymn that is unable to be used

in some way in liturgy. Effectiveness is to be measured more importantly in criteria other than this.

HOW 'RELEVANT' IS THE LANGUAGE, THEOLOGY, AND TUNE?

In the discussion on the meaning of 'relevance' I defined it as "accessibility to meaning". If the singer/reader is unable to relate the words of the hymn to personal experience, then the hymn is "irrelevant." There are several blocks to communication of meaning. Language used, and theology expressed are related issues and not always easy to separate. Nor is it important always to do so. An example is the issue of sexist language. The theology of inclusiveness is expressed in the use of inclusive language. Compare this with the theology of the dignity of humanity in the sight of God which is expressed in images or in propositions.

Theology is language about God. At times attempting to separate the relevance of language from the relevance of theology is impossible.

The companion volume to With One Voice, Songs of the People of God, in an introductory section on the texts of the hymns, raises three language issues and explains how the editors dealt with them: "the use of archaic language", "unsuitable imagery or outdated conceptions", and sexist language.

Archaic language is a block to relevance in the 20th century:

"An unfortunate consequence of an archaic 'poetic' style might be that hymns do not come intimately home to the hearts of modern worshippers; and there is a danger that the hymnbook will be regarded in the same way as ancient richly-brocaded vestments that are taken out for a brief airing during times of worship and locked away in a cupboard and forgotten for the rest of the week." ¹⁴¹

The preface to With One Voice justifies "updating" language by the occasional "fairly radical rewriting" of some hymns "in which what is still of value has been distorted or made ineffective by changes in sentiment or in the English language itself over the years." ¹⁴²

The editors of Hymns For Today's Church are more full in their reasons for modernising language in their collection. Apart from the justification that "many hymns have been revised in earlier hymnbooks and that some famous texts are significantly different from the original versions", there is the realisation that the language of hymns must be consistent with the language used in the rest of liturgy:

"The last few years have seen a major transformation in Christian worship. Liturgies and bibles have been as radically translated as in the 16th century, and only the hymns have remained in the language of previous eras. To leave them unrevised in that situation is to create a verbal and cultural gulf which cannot be to the long-term advantage of Christians at worship."

The editors then spell out the two changes they have made in modernising: to language forms, and style of language. Attention to language forms has involved changing archaic endings such as -est, -eth, and "thee" to "you". Such changes are now "such a liturgical commonplace that no justification seems necessary." However, a more difficult change has been the issue of language style:

"many hymns...have reflected a style of emotive language which is not easily accepted by contemporary congregations...We have tried to save the best of them for future generations by a judicious rewriting of the more sentimental sections. This has demanded further skills to avoid the intrusion of one century's style into that of another."

The problems of language and style are part of the dynamic of historicity already discussed. Language is not static;

142 With One Voice. Preface, p.x

meanings change. Hymn books are collections spanning many centuries. Editorial policy-differences mean it is possible to find the same hymn in several versions, depending on the hymnal and its date of publication. Michael Seward, words editor of Hymns For Today's Church remarks in the preface that " 'Lo he comes' could not be sung in contemporary churches without shock or laughter if Cennick's original words were used." The version to be found in hymnbooks is usually a version revised by Charles Wesley, but this revision has in turn been revised giving a clear indication of the way in which language is modernised, attempting to keep the "memory" intact, while finding a relevant contemporary form.

Every eye shall now behold him
 Robed in dreadful majesty;
 Those who set at naught and sold him,
 pierced and nailed him to the Tree,
 Deeply wailing,
 shall the true Messiah see. (MHB 264 v2)

This, the second verse of the Wesley/Cennick hymn, has been the standard text. With One Voice with its editorial policy has modernised the text by removing "dreadful" and replacing it with a contemporary equivalent "awesome", restoring an unambiguous meaning to the lines for a modern reader/singer. (WOV 201)

In Hymns For Today's Church the hymn appears with even more changes:

Every eye shall then behold him
 robed in awesome majesty;
 those who jeered at him and sold him,
 pierced and nailed him to the tree,
 shamed and grieving,
 shall their true Messiah see. (HFTC 196)

The necessity to update language and style is not a task that is finished! The need to do it is in order that the language and concepts thus expressed are not out of keeping with the surrounding liturgy, but enable worshippers to make their sung response with comprehension, meaning and feeling.

A more subtle issue related to relevance of language is not mentioned by the editors of these hymnbooks but is alluded to in an English review of With One Voice:

"Among the Christmas carols we do not of course expect 'In the bleak mid-winter'; by the same token John Wheeler's attractive 'The north wind is tossing the leaves' is suitable only for the southern hemisphere."¹⁴³

Colin Gibson similarly states the issue: "I really wanted to write hymns with a distinct NZ element, using images that create NZ pictures." The worshipper's local culture has an important impact on meaning. To sing a Christmas hymn such as 'In the bleak midwinter' when the temperature is at midsummer swelter means that the reader/singers are continually having to make mental transitions to connect the images of the hymn with their own reality. It is important that such seasonal hymns reflect the "memory" of Christmas, but are imaged in contextually appropriate ways if they are to be relevant.

The north wind is tossing the leaves
 the red dust is over the town,
 the sparrows are under the eaves
 and the grass in the paddock is brown
 as we lift up our voices and sing
 to the Christ-child, the heavenly King. (WOV 246)

A 'down-under' hymn, but for NZ singers images of 'red dust and brown paddocks' reflect Australian, not local landscape. Shirley Murray writes a carol for the NZ

143 Bulletin. Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland. 146, Sept 1979. p.108

context. It bears resemblances to the Australian hymn above, but describes recognisably NZ landscape features:

Carol our Christmas, an upside down Christmas -
 snow is not falling and trees are not bare:
 carol the summer and welcome the Christ child,
 warm in our sunshine and sweetness of air.

Sing of the gold and the green and the sparkle
 of water and river and lure of the beach,
 sing in the happiness of open spaces,
 sing a nativity summer can reach.

It is not coincidental that landscape images resonate with the singer/reader of these southern hemisphere hymns. Landscape has a particular part to play in local cultures, and in the coincidence between words and meaning that give relevance. Barry Lopez, writing of story, discusses the significance of landscape as a primal image:

"I think of two landscapes - one outside the self, the other within. The external landscape is the one we see - not only the line and colour of the land ... but also its plants and animals in season, its weather, its geology, the record of its climate and evolution....The second landscape I think of is an interior one, a kind of projection within a person of a part of the exterior landscape. Relationships in the exterior landscape include those that are named and discernable...and others that are uncodified or ineffable...The shape and character of these relationships in a person's thinking, I believe, are deeply influenced by where on earth one goes, what one touches, the patterns one observes in nature...With certain stories individuals may experience a deeper, more profound sense of well-being...It results from bringing two landscapes together...The listener who "takes the story to heart" will feel a pervasive sense of congruence within himself and also with the world."
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Charles Brasch uses the same ideas of congruence between an inner and outer landscape:

144 Lopez, Barry. "Landscape and Narrative" in Crossing Open Ground. London. Macmillan London Ltd. 1988. pp64-66

"I grew to know most of the country around Dunedin in all its variousness. It impressed itself on me so strongly that it seemed to accompany me always, becoming an interior landscape of my mind or imagination, unchanging, archetypal, the setting of what I read about as well as of all the life of the present." ¹⁴⁵

The congruence between the inner and outer landscapes help to shape the thought and image patterns of the culture of local worshippers. It explains why 'In the bleak midwinter' simply cannot be sung with real meaning in a southern Christmas celebration. So too for NZers "gold, green and sparkle of water, river and beach" resonate more harmoniously than "red dust and brown paddocks".

The images do not have to be as specific as those above. The juxtaposition of familiar elements can be enough:

"The love of God is broad like beach and mountain wide as the wind, and our eternal home." (WOV 667)

Beach and mountain together make this Swedish hymn satisfying for NZers. It has the 'feel' of the recognisable. It is therefore effective in the terms we are here discussing.

While style and language are obvious features of the effectiveness of a hymn, an important yet subtle aspect is the congruence between inner and outer landscapes. This is a matter of the 'feel' rather than the obvious but must not be overlooked when assessing the effectiveness of a hymn for any specific group of people.

As language changes, so too does theology. What is accepted in one generation is questioned in another. Sexist and exclusive language have already been discussed. It is less acceptable in the 1980's to sing 'Oh brother man, fold to thy heart thy brother' (WOV 503) than it was

145 Brasch, Charles. Indirections. London. Oxford University Press. p20

in the 1960's. Triumphalism and militaristic words are also less acceptable now than in preceding generations, even if the language used is biblical in origin, for example "Soldiers of Christ arise and put your armour on". (Compare Ephesians 6:10-17). It must be recognised however that some streams of modern Christianity find all of the above acceptable. Here I must own to my Methodist bias.

Likewise the image of heaven as skywards, or up, has less meaning in an age which clearly knows the limits of a flat earth world view.

A charge to keep I have,
 a God to glorify,
 a never-dying soul to save,
 and fit it for the sky. (WOV 487 v1)

Such words push credulity to the limit in the space age. But so steeped in the language of the bible is hymnology that such images are hard to discard, as a 20th century hymn by James McAuley shows:

In faith and hope and love
 with joyful trust we move
 towards our Father's home above. (WOV 555)

The ideas and theology of a hymn can be updated while leaving it recognisably the same work. With One Voice has retained 'Jesus loves me' using a rewritten form by David McGuire:

Jesus loves me, this I know,
 and the bible tells me so;
 little ones to him belong
 in his love we shall be strong.

Jesus loves me, this I know,
 as he loved so long ago,

taking children on his knee,
saying, 'Let them come to me.'

Jesus loves me still today,
walking with me on my way,
wanting as a friend to give
light and love to all who live. (WOV 166)

Milgate writes of this hymn: "Millions of people have piously taught this hymn to their children without considering carefully what it says or what a child would make of the words." ¹⁴⁶ McGuire's rewriting shows a late twentieth century bias towards the affirmation of our humanity while the original declares the sinfulness of humanity coupled with a preoccupation with the 'next world':

Jesus loves me, this I know
For the bible tells me so;
little ones to him belong
They are weak, but he is strong.

Jesus loves me. He who died
Heaven's gate to open wide;
He will wash away my sin,
Let his little child come in.

Jesus loves me. He will stay
Close beside me all the way;
Then his little child will take
Up to heaven, for his dear sake.

Another version of this hymn sung by past generations is conditional in its approach to the 'next world':

Jesus loves me. He will stay
Close beside me all the way;

146 Milgate, Wesley, p85.

If I love him, when I die
He will take me home on high.

The theology of hymnody is not static, but reflects and affects the understandings of a cultural grouping at the time of writing. John Webster Grant reminds us that just as the Bible contains more than a single emphasis:

"There would seem to be no reason why our hymnody should not be equally broad and diverse in its theological content. Some things will appeal more to one congregation or denomination than another. The deciding factor is that congregations sing with a sense of reality."¹⁴⁷

Jane Parker Huber defends her own collection of hymns:

"I hope these hymns build bridges into inclusive ways of using language in worship. I hope they stretch our understanding of God. If they disturb us, it may be because an ancient truth, stated in a fresh way, is meant to be disturbing. Honesty in biblical references and integrity in theology are important to me...I hope, however, that my purposes are sufficiently integrated so that singers will not be distracted, but will simply find joy in singing praise to God."¹⁴⁸

Reality, relevance, and congruence of person and image giving rise to integrity for the reader/singer are key insights into what makes a hymn effective in terms of its language and theology.

POETIC COMPETENCE AND HYMNS.

John Wesley was careful to warn that hymns were more than theology sung; they were also to be good poetry:

"Lastly, I desire men of good taste to judge...whether there be not in some of the following hymns the true spirit of poetry, such as cannot be acquired by art and labour, but must be the gift of nature."¹⁴⁹

147 Grant, John Webster. p.10

148 Huber, Jane Parker. Preface.

149 Wesley, John. "A Collection of Hymns for Use of the People Called Methodist". in Methodist Hymn Book. London. Methodist Conference Office. 1933. pvi.

Rosemary Haughton stresses the links between poetry and theology in a way which bears on the hymn-writer's task:

"The languages of poetry and of theology ... are always searching for words which will convey a truth whose essence is (so the poet and the theologian know) infinitely precise yet never capable of complete articulation. Poetry is not 'illustration' of prose by adding imagery; it is rather the most accurate way in which some inkling of an incommunicable experience can be communicated, and theology is exactly that also. It is in the struggle to articulate truthfully that the words become capable of actually communicating truth, for if they are the right words they take to themselves some of the power of the experience and break through into the mind that listens, creating a communion of experience." ¹⁵⁰

There is not universal support for this high view of the poetic quality of hymns; the editors of The Christian Hymnary for use of Churches of Christ quote with approval the words of James Wallis:

"In preparing the following selection of Psalms and Hymns, we have aimed at correctness of sentiment, rather than beauty of poetry; believing that our ascriptions of praise are much more acceptable to our Heavenly Father, when founded on what he has done, is doing, and has promised to do, rather than what is only the offspring of poetical imagination....The chief consideration in the selection of hymns is correctness of doctrine." ¹⁵¹

The craft of the hymnwriter is exercised within these two limits. Doctrine and poetry are not mutually exclusive. The imaginative combination of the two gives rise to an effective hymn. Wesley knew the value of the combination:

"Methodism was born in song. Charles Wesley wrote the first hymns of the Evangelical Revival during the great Whitsuntide of 1738 when his brother and he were "filled with the Spirit", and from that time onwards the Methodists have never ceased to sing. He is the

150 Haughton, Rosemary. The Passionate God. London. Darton, Longman and Todd. 1981. p.6

151 The Christian Hymnary for Use of Churches of Christ. Birmingham. The Berean Press. 1938. p.iii

poet of the Evangelical faith. In consequence Methodism has always been able to sing its creed." ¹⁵²

Brian Wren, a contemporary English hymnwriter, in a 1988 lecture in Wellington, sets out the restrictions hymns place upon the poet:

"A hymn is a poem - with memorable words to delight in, but under the three hymnodic vows of discipline: clarity, simplicity, and obedience to strict rhythm."

It is important to note that just as hymns are not simply sung doctrine, nor are they poems sung. The art of writing an effective hymn has different requirements from that of religious verse. The motivation to write may be the same religious impulse, but the end use to which the poetry is put determines the form in which it must be written. Wren's three hymnodic vows are a reminder of the fact that hymns are set to music, they must communicate at first reading, and must bear repetition in a variety of liturgical settings. With One Voice contains four hymns by George Herbert who is the only recognised "religious poet" represented. The religious poet's domain is other than the hymn book.

There have been many articles written within the specialist literature of the hymn about the problems and pleasures of writing poetry in relation to hymns. It is not within the scope of this work to review this literature in depth. Rather it is important here to point out the importance of poetic quality in the effectiveness of a hymn.

Poetic quality is related to the issues already discussed. Relevance, images which resonate with the reader/singer, simple, clear language are vital. A new collection of hymns is a chance to ensure that the chosen works are poetically competent. With One Voice has followed the

trend of modern books by omitting hymns such as William Cowper's;

There is a fountain filled with blood,
drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
lose all their guilty stains.

Such hymns of bad taste and medieval rather than biblical imagery are unlikely to appear in collections of the late twentieth century. However modern hymns are not exempt from poetry more akin to prose:

Pass from hand to hand
the living love of Christ!
machine and man provide
bread for this feast. (WOV 449 v3)

or irregularity of metre along with preaching ideas lacking in poetic devices:

What can we do to work God's work,
to prosper and increase
the fellowship of all mankind,
the reign of the Prince of Peace?
What can we do to hasten the time,
the time that shall surely be,
when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God
as the waters cover the sea? (WOV 652 v2)

Colin Gibson expresses the same idea in a more positive manner with directness and simplicity; a more effective hymn results:

He came singing love
and he lived singing love;
he died, singing love.
He arose in silence.

For the love to go on
 we must make it our song:
 you and I be the singers.

Hymns, by definition, are poetic works. Worship, the setting for hymns, is often described as offering to God the best that can be offered. The poetry of the hymn has a distinct part to play in this offering; it is the vehicle of congregational response. The successful blend of doctrine and poetry in the strictures imposed by the hymn as a work of art make memorable hymns effective vehicles for the 'work of the people' and enhance the uplifting nature of effective worship while binding the congregation together in "communicating truth while creating a communion of experience."

TRADITION.

In an age of ecumenism, it is no longer true that each denomination reflects rigidly one portion of "Christian tradition". Stereotypes such as Wesleyan Methodist = Arminian, and Presbyterian = Calvinist, and so on, have little validity in NZ and Australia today. In Australia the Uniting Church has begun to bring these two denominations together in a structural way. The same structural unity is expressed in NZ in the large number of Union and Co-operating Parishes.

This has important implications for the hymnbook which expresses for each denomination, and thus for the congregations which use it, the "canon" of hymns which represent a particular doctrinal point of view within the Christian tradition of the Holy Catholic Church. The emphasis of one denomination loses its particularity when hymnbooks are compiled ecumenically as is With One Voice.

This book is extolled as "the most considerable ecumenical cooperation yet seen in hymnody; an ambitious and trail-

blazing project." ¹⁵³ What the reviewer regards as 'trail-blazing' is the ecumenical endeavour, not the selection of hymns and tunes about which he cautions:

"What this type of approach could have produced of course is a kind of lowest common denominator from all the contributing traditions. Inevitably no doubt, it introduces some bias towards conservatism - which on the musical side at least, the editors here have not entirely overcome." ¹⁵⁴

Such ecumenical cooperation in hymnbook production means that the beginning point of the collection is what is regarded as common, rather than what is the cherished heritage of a given denomination. This implies a broader meaning of "tradition" than is usual in a denominational hymnbook. The ecumenical dimension of hymnbooks like With One Voice makes the distinction between the elements of tradition, form and memory, even more important to grasp. The common denominator has always been the "memory" of the Christian faith. What differed in denominational hymnbooks were the accepted forms of expressing that memory. Hence the predominance of metrical psalms in early Presbyterian worship while the Methodist tradition tended to include a large number of hymns from the Arminian tradition focusing on the grace of God available to all people.

Such denominational tendencies were also shown in the arrangement of the hymnbooks. Wesley's original scheme was based on his understanding of the progression of the Christian life from conversion to service in the world. The 1933 Methodist Hymnbook followed a Trinitarian structure based loosely on the previous Wesleyan scheme of Christian progression in that it began with God and progressed through The Christian Life to Church order hymns for Baptism, Communion etc. The same basic order is followed in the Presbyterian hymnbook The Psalms and Church Hymnary second and third editions. Hymns Ancient and

153 Massey, Bernard S. "A Review of With One Voice" in Bulletin 146. Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland. Sept 1979. pp103, 108.

154 Massey, Bernard S. p103-4

Modern, however, follows a scheme whereby hymns are set out according to the church year.

The question "How does this hymn convey the meaning of the tradition of which it is an expression?" in an ecumenical age must be answered ecumenically. The tradition cannot be simply understood as what is denominationally held to be acceptable, but must now take into account the 'traditions' of the denominations working jointly to produce the hymnbook.

What must be borne in mind at the same time is that there is always a canon within a canon for the local congregation which consists of the hymns favoured by them. This will be based on local attitudes to the issues discussed above, such as sexist language, biblical origin of words, and so on. The strength of ecumenical endeavours in hymnology is that the collections can lay different 'traditions' side by side in such a way that a Church Tradition becomes not only discernable, but singable.

However, given the conservative and conserving nature of hymnbooks, the continual search for new and relevant forms must, by implication, be largely carried out beyond the scope of the hymnbook. There are small indications of this search within With One Voice. Contrast two twentieth century hymns:

When I needed a neighbour, were you there, were you
there?

When I needed a neighbour were you there?
And the creed and the colour and the name won't
matter, were you there?

I was hungry and thirsty, were you there...

I was cold, I was naked, were you there...

When I needed a shelter, were you there...

When I needed a healer, were you there ...

When they put me in prison, were you there...

Wherever you travel I'll be there,... (WOV 558)

O Jesus Christ, to thee may hymns be rising
in every city for thy love and care;
inspire our worship, grant the glad surprising
that thy blest Spirit brings men everywhere.

Grant us new courage, sacrificial, humble,
strong in thy strength to venture and to dare,
to lift the fallen, guide the feet that stumble,
seek out the lonely and God's mercy share.

Show us thy Spirit, brooding o'er each city,
as thou didst weep above Jerusalem,
seeking to gather all in love and pity
and healing those who touch thy garment's hem.

(WOV 553)

Bradford Webster's hymn (553) is "traditional" in its language, using archaisms and allusions to scripture. It is sung to Jesus, interchanging God, Jesus and the Spirit in ways which reflect orthodox Trinitarian theology. The hymn, first sung to the tune 'O perfect love', is measured in its structure, language and tune. The tone is formal using words like "sacrificial" and "humble"; it is generalised - "to lift the fallen, guide the feet that stumble, / seek out the lonely...". While it is a prayer to "venture and to dare", it is clear that in 1954 such sentiments were directed to action in society rather than to the search for innovative hymn forms.

In contrast, Sydney Carter's hymn (558) is informal, using a folk music style, relying on simple repetition and a tune lending itself to guitar accompaniment rather than organ or piano. The hymn is ambiguous. To whom is the hymn addressed? The "I" is elusive. The hymn relies for its scriptural base on Matthew 25:35-46, and 1 Corinthians 12:13, but the allusions are not obvious. The last verse is an allusion to Matthew 28:20. The singer is deliberately asked to participate in particular situations with the "I" referring either to Jesus or to the singer.

Both hymns are about caring, practical concern within the world. They address the subject in quite different ways even though there is only a decade between their composition. Carter is an indication of a search for a new way of expressing the old demand to love God and neighbour.

Hymnbooks are not documents of new searching. They embody the considered remembrance of the church in poetry and tune. Experimenting with new forms of expression is a vital task and the continual quest of the hymnwriter, but by the time the hymns that are today's experiments come to be accepted into hymnbooks they are tried and true and run the risk of being "old" and possibly "irrelevant".

I have raised four questions which lead to an assessment of the effectiveness of new hymns. The art of hymnwriting continues to be exercised and plays a vital role within contemporary worship. The challenge to congregations and the compilers of hymnbooks is to allow the new to inform the old with as much integrity as they allow the old to inform the new.

Some words from the Order of Service for the Induction of a Methodist Presbyterian serve as the plea of the modern hymnwriter:

"Forgive us when we forget Jesus is our contemporary and lock him up in forms and customs, words and structures."

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