

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

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

**A thesis presented
in partial fulfilment
of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in English at Massey University**

Robert Andrew Ferguson

1989

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	2
CHAPTER ONE	5
SING A NEW SONG!	
CHAPTER TWO	34
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORDS AND MUSIC	
CHAPTER THREE	49
IN SEARCH OF RELEVANCE	
CHAPTER FOUR	73
THE DILEMMA OF THE MODERN	
BIBLIOGRAPHY	111

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

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.