Introduction to Volume 2

From Catholic Europe to Protestant Europe

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SAMPLE

The three hundred years between the beginning of the sixteenth century and the end of the eighteenth century were the most momentous for the development of congregational hymnody. At the beginning of the sixteenth century only those in Catholic religious communities sang hymns (in Latin) within the liturgy. By the end of the century many Protestant congregations were singing in various vernacular forms of worship across Europe in High and Low German, French, Danish, Swedish, English, etc., expressing theologies that were differently nuanced and confessionally expressed, such as Lutheran, Calvinist/Reformed, Anabaptist, Anglican, Bohemian Brethren, etc. But by this time Roman Catholics had also begun to sing vernacular hymnody, influenced by Protestant hymnody, in non-Eucharistic worship and privately. The seventeenth century was marked by a gradual expansion of the hymn repertories in each of these linguistic and confessional groupings that were significantly expanded during the eighteenth century, becoming the primary feature of the evangelical revival that brought into existence new denominations such as Moravian (in succession to the Bohemeian Brethen of earlier times) and Methodist, denominations in which hymnody predominated and was enthusiastically promoted, which in many ways shaped their theology and formed a major part of their liturgies.

Wittenberg under the leadership of Martin Luther was the catalyst for the development of vernacular hymnody in the early sixteenth century. But hymns in German, in the form of religious folk-songs, had been flourishing for many decades, especially being sung on major feasts and other celebrations of the church year. What Luther did was revise and expand some of these earlier hymns, often translations from Latin, made new translations of other Latin hymns and liturgical chants, as well as writing new strophic hymns. What was radical and really new was that in the past vernacular religious folk-songs were sung extra-liturgically, during the appropriate seasons of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, etc., but Luther made such hymnody an integral part of worship. The hymns enshrined the new understanding of evangelical theology, as in the Scripture proofs of every line of Paul Speratus's hymns in their early imprints, and in the specific catechism hymns that Luther wrote. The key period was the winter of 1523/24 when many of the key hymns emanated from Wittenberg. But Luther did not work single-handedly, though he was clearly the leader and the most prolific. There was a significant group of colleagues who joined him (and Speratus) in writing new hymns, among them Elisabeth Cruciger, Michael Stiefel, Justus Jonas, Erhalt Hegenwalt, and Michael Agricola. A distinctive genre created by Luther, which was to have an enormous impact across Europe and beyond in the following centuries, was the psalm-hymn, or metrical psalm, that is, the substance of the biblical psalm in rhymed strophic form.

From 1523 the Wittenberg hymns, originally circulating on individual broadsides, were reprinted, almost immediately, in other towns and cities, and modest collections of these hymns were gathered together in small booklets. Notable among them were: Nuremberg, with its hymn-writers inspired by those in Wittenberg, such as Hans Sachs and Lazarus Spengler; Erfurt, where two printer/publishers vied with each other to publish collections of the Wittenberg hymns; Rostock, which published Low German and Danish versions of the Wittenberg hymns; and Malmö, which did the same for Lutheran hymns in Swedish. Strasbourg, then in a predominantly German-speaking area, reprinted the Wittenberg hymns as soon as they became available. But the Strasbourgers frequently set Luther's texts to their own melodies, notably by Matthias Greiter, together with new texts by Greiter and Wolfgang Dachstein. These new texts were mostly metrical psalms, following Luther's models, which became emulated elsewhere, contributing to the adoption of the metrical psalm as the primary hymnic form sung by generations of Protestants across Europe and beyond. Roman Catholics produced a number of hymnals, clearly modeled on Lutheran hymnals, in order to express their theology in corporate song, though the singing was usually restricted to the Offices rather than the Mass, or to domestic circles. Two prominent examples are the hymnals of Michael Vehe (Leipzig, 1537) and Johann Leisentritt (Bautzen, 1567).

SAMPLE

Ulrich Zwingli in German-speaking Zurich directed that, on theological grounds, corporate singing was unnecessary and therefore worship comprised only the spoken word in German in and around Zurich—a state of affairs that continued until almost the end of the century. But this did not stop the Zurich publisher Christoph Froschauer publishing a hymnal for use in nearby Constance. The primary section of the various editions of this hymnal comprised more than eighty metrical psalms, with additional versions by Ludwig Oeler and Thomas Blaurer.

The pastor of the small French-speaking community in Strasbourg was Jean Calvin, who was charged by the magistrates to conform the worship of the French congregation to the content and form of the worship of the German congregations. This included metrical psalmody and thus Calvin created his first collection of French metrical psalms in Strasbourg in 1539. Two years later he was called to serve the churches in Geneva, where, working with Clement Marot and Theodore Beza, he created the Genevan Psalter, with the melodies successively composed by Louis Bourgeois and Claude Goudimel, published in its complete form in 1562. For Calvin the restriction to singing almost exclusively metrical psalms was a theological issue. For him these Scriptural songs, biblical psalms rendered into verse, were to be the primary, almost exclusive, song of the Reformed churches. The French Psalter emanating from Geneva became the model for Reformed churches throughout Europe, usually vernacular versions using the Genevan melodies for the respective psalms, notably in Dutch, German, and in the Scottish psalters (from 1564–65), which are closer to the Genevan model than the English psalter that appeared a few years earlier.

English hymnody following the Wittenberg tradition began in the mid-1530s with Miles Coverdale's *Goostly Psalmes*, translations of Wittenberg hymns with their associated melodies. But the political climate was unstable under Henry VIII, when Reformation theology was being considered, and the collection was probably not known much outside of London. When Edward VI succeeded his father as king in 1547 the Reformation became an open affair and one of the earliest publications that marked the changing climate was the publication of a small collection of metrical psalms by Thomas Sternhold. A few years later the collection was enlarged with psalms written by John Hopkins but any further development was curtailed when in 1553 Edward VI died at a young age, and his half-sister Mary came to the throne. She reversed all the Protestant gains of Edward's reign and also the few Protestant influences of the late Henry VIII years. Catholicism was reintroduced, and Protestants, if they wanted to survive, either went into hiding or into exile. Significant families chose exile in Germany and Switzerland, where they came into contact with the Genevan psalms sung in

SAMPLE

French, German, and Dutch Reformed congregations. The exiles had taken with them their small booklets of the psalms of Sternhold and Hopkins, to which were added English versions of metrical psalms and hymns, which, when Mary died in 1558 and they could return, they brought back their expanded and revised editions of Sternhold and Hopkins. These formed the nucleus of the complete Psalter of 150 psalms, plus a few hymns, published in London in 1562. Although it did not use many of the Genevan melodies it nevertheless conformed to Reformed theology that required that the substance of each psalm—no more, no less—be expressed in strophic form. *The Whole Book of Psalmes* of Sternhold and Hopkins, in its numerous editions, became the only congregational song heard in Anglican parish churches for centuries. Indeed, it was thought that only such metrical psalms were legal in the worship of the Church of England, but it was a false assumption that was only fully revealed in the early nineteenth century. Over the generations the antique language and the generally poor poetry were criticized, as often as not by those who wanted their own versions of metrical psalms to be published. But there was a problem. Copyright of the Sternhold and Hopkins psalms was held by the Stationers' Company of London, and the company resisted any attempt to usurp a significant part of its income.

In the seventeenth century Europe was devastated during the Thirty Years War, especially in Germany, which was laid waste and took a long time to recover. When the world around you is being destroyed the compensation is to withdraw into your inner self. Many devotional books were published in Germany, much of them strongly influenced by medieval mysticism. At the same time a new form of intensive, highly personal hymnody flourished by such writers as Martin Rinkart, Johann Heermann, Johann Rist, and supremely Paul Gerhardt, whose texts were set to a new form of melody, especially by Johann Georg Ebeling and Johann Crüger, whose hymnal, *Praxis pietatis melica*, in its many editions, was the most widely used hymnal of the seventeenth century. Such personal hymns, set to somewhat freer melodies, led to the specific Pietist style of hymnody epitomized in the *Geist-reiches Gesangbuch* of Johann Anastasius Freylinghausen, first published in 1704, that was enormously influential throughout the eighteenth century.

In England the power of the Stationers' Company was circumvented by poets with royal connections: Nahum Tate, poet laureate, and Nicholas Brady, chaplain to King William III. They produced *A New Version of the Psalms of David* (1696/98), which was issued in effect with a royal warrant. The theological principle remained the same as that of the Sternhold and Hopkins psalter—thereafter known as the "Old Version"—that only the substance of the biblical psalms was to be expressed in poetic form. Although intended to replace the "Old Version" it was only used in parish churches

SAMPLE

in towns and cities; in rural areas the congregations continued singing the "Old Version" well into the nineteenth century. The New Version fostered a new kind of freer melody than the old psalm tunes, a development that continued throughout the eighteenth century.

Congregationalist (or Independents) were not as restricted as Anglicans thought they were, and thus they could freely sing hymns. But Isaac Watts went further than writing hymns—some of the finest in the English language—he also wrote metrical psalms that introduced a new theological hermeneutic. Watts argued that the Reformed tradition of reproducing the substance of the Hebrew psalms without reference to the New Testament was theologically unacceptable. So in his versions of the psalms he drew on the whole Bible. It was a revolution that did not go unchallenged. Anglicans would not sing either his hymns or his psalms, even though their quality was exceptional. But little by little, toward the end of the eighteenth century Anglicans became familiar with a few of Watts's psalms and hymns since a few of them were slipped into the supplements that were appended to the Tate and Brady psalms.

Watts's influence in the earlier part of the century was more than significant, since John Wesley and his Holy Club in Oxford sang the hymns and psalms of Watts. Then John Wesley went to Georgia, and on the ship taking him across the Atlantic he encountered the singing of German Moravians. Following their conversion both Wesleys, John and Charles, were influenced by the London Moravian church in Fetter Lane, and the distinctive hymnody heard there. Charles's response to his conversion was to begin to write hymns and poetry, a small stream that soon began as a river but then became an amazing flood. The evangelical revival in England in the eighteenth century in many ways emulated and was significantly influenced by European Pietism. The hymnody of Count Zinzendorf's Moravians had a great impact on the Wesley brothers who effectively created Methodism and produced their own hymns. The piety sounded the same, but the theology was different. Welsh Methodists, as well as many Anglican Evangelicals, were Calvinist in their theology and in their singing, whereas the Wesleyan Methodists were uncompromisingly Arminian in belief and song.

The three hundred years between 1500 and 1800 saw an astonishing expansion and diversification, as new poetic forms and different melodic styles came into use. But these poetic and musical forms were developed to express particular theologies that were expressed in the corporate singing. Even though different denominations borrowed hymns from each other, each adapted them to their own different theological environment and liturgical usage. This is the substance of the essays of this volume, in which

SAMPLE

the bare bones of this extraordinary three hundred years reviewed in this introduction are fleshed out in the detail of these insightful essays that follow.

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