

THE CHURCH HYMNARY: THIRD EDITION*

A Look at Some Points of Special Interest

[As the long-awaited Third Edition of *The Church Hymnary* is expected to appear about the same time as this number of the Journal we have asked the Convener of the Revision Committee to outline some of the new and special features made available in the new publication – Ed.]

The Church Hymnary was first published in 1898 to serve the needs of the Church of Scotland and other churches of Presbyterian order in the British Isles and in many parts of the Empire.

Its successor *The Church Hymnary (Revised)* appeared in 1927, the general structure being still credal, sacramental, devotional, but with a much stronger infusion of hymns of social concern – a book moreover incomparably richer both verbally and musically. It ran to 728 items. The so-called Scottish metrical psalter could be secured separately or bound within the same cover, a variety of tunes being available for most of the psalms through the cut-leaf system.

The Church Hymnary: Third Edition is, strictly speaking, not a revision but a new conception in modern hymn-books. It runs to 695 items, but this figure includes 79 psalms or psalm portions.

The Liturgical Pattern

Since a hymnal for church use is essentially a liturgical handbook, it seemed to the Committee authorized to prepare the volume (representing the Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Churches in England, Ireland and Wales as well as the United Free Church of Scotland) that the natural arrangement of the contents was the order of the Church's common worship, bearing in mind that, even where there is no regular weekly celebration of Holy Communion, the eucharistic pattern nevertheless remains normative.

The Hymnary therefore is divided into eight parts, each introduced by a 'half-title' page bearing the main title of that part and an index of the sub-sections.

Thus the first part APPROACH TO GOD provides, for the opening actions of the service, hymns acknowledging God in the varied modes of his self-manifestation, proceeding to hymns confessing ourselves to be his sinful children, with supplication, invocation, and

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hymns which ask for illumination as we prepare to hear the Word of God in Scripture and sermon.

The second part **THE WORD OF GOD: HIS MIGHTY ACTS** moves from the theme of Creation and Providence to the Promise of the Messiah, the Incarnation, Christ's Life and Ministry and so through the entire sequence of the Biblical events, the kind of hymns in fact from which a minister will select items suited to the theme of the day or season, and which will be sung in association with lections and sermon.

The third part **RESPONSE TO THE WORD OF GOD** opens with Adoration, Thanksgiving and Affirmation; continues with dedication under various sub-headings; followed by a varied range of intercessory hymns; concluding with joyous remembrance of the Church Triumphant.

The above indications are probably enough to make the pattern and the liturgical purpose clear. Suffice it to say that the main titles of the succeeding parts are:

IV: THE SACRAMENTS

V: OTHER ORDINANCES (Confirmation, ordination etc.)

VI: TIMES AND SEASONS (New Year, Spring etc.)

VII: CLOSE OF SERVICE (including such evening hymns as are not included in Part I)

VIII: PERSONAL FAITH AND DEVOTION (a gathering together of devotional hymns, some of which may be, and some of which certainly will be, used in public worship, but most of which are more properly suited for private devotion).

INTRODUCTORY MATTER. At the beginning of the book will be found a brief Preface followed by an Introduction, four and a half pages in length, outlining the theology and pattern of Christian worship as illustrated in the pages of the Hymnary.

Three and a half further pages offer Introductory Notes to the Music, providing guidance to organists, choirmasters and singers in the management of the diverse elements of the Church's age-long musical inheritance.

INDEXES. The full range of normal indexes is provided, with one addition of special significance.

While assurance has been given to the Church that the unabridged metrical psalter will still be available, it is recognized that a great part of the metrical psalter is not and never will be sung. The Revision Committee therefore early decided to include in the Hymnary itself a very complete list of psalms regarded as in any way serviceable, distributing these in the same way as the hymns and other material according to their subject-matter in the various sections of the book. As the volume also includes various forms of

prose psalmody, a special index is provided, arranging the psalms in their Biblical order, with clear indication as to the type of version. All psalm portions are also included in the Index of First Lines.

The wider problem of psalmody is discussed below.

The Implications of Denominationalism

Denominational considerations necessarily impose certain limits upon editorial freedom. An entirely novel hymnal, placed in the hands of the average congregation, would be quite unacceptable because largely unworkable. To be acceptable any new edition must at the same moment look new – else why go to the trouble and expense of a new book? – and yet be not radically unfamiliar.

The Revision Committee found that in practice this problem largely solved itself.

For one thing, a certain standard had already been set by the music of the 1927 edition, which had made familiar a bulk of classic and often noble hymns about which there could be no question. Ministers and organists have only to make a list of tunes known through *The Church Hymnary (Revised)* and examine the index of tunes in the new book to find (unless indeed their musical use has been tenuous already) a reasonable wealth of tunes ready to their hand, even if sometimes to other words.

A Question of Tone

In contrast to this it was not always easy to find new hymns which rose above the level of the banal, the trite, the tedious or the hideously overworked idiom. For what the Church requires by the very nature of worship is a lyrical utterance with positive Christian content, expressed nobly in language felt to be natural for people of the twentieth century yet suited to the august offices of the Church – in short, hymns with that charismatic quality that is instinct with the atmosphere of worship.

A considerable proportion of modern ‘hymns’ prove on examination to be manifestos of social concern or protest. It is not impossible for such hymns to have this charismatic quality, but not many do.

Editors of hymn-books are therefore wise to consider to what extent topicality should be allowed a place in the pages of a hymnal with a reasonable expectation of life. The inclusion in *The Church Hymnary (Revised)* of a hymn under the caption ‘The League of Nations’ constitutes a standing warning to all compilers except those who publish merely to meet a passing need. Topicalities are too vulnerable. Before many years have passed, the topical lyric has become a sad memorial to a dead jargon.

But greatness survives. And God is great; and God is ultimate. This is the theme of worship. The pulpit and discussion group can be trusted to look after the topics of the time. A hymn-book must mind its own business.

Its business is quite clear. For worship by its nature demands a song, and that a very particular kind of song. Whether it is incantation, chant, motet or hymn, always in the truly characteristic song of the Church there is a polarity of moods and attitudes resolved in the song and in the singer himself only in the very moment of utterance — on the one hand that chastened sense of reserve which acknowledges that we approach the Holiest by grace alone; and on the other hand the highly conditioned exultation of the child utterly forgiven and in joyful communion with the Father. Together these constitute adoration, that moment of fulfilment which God gives us for a moment but not for too long lest we come to love the moment and not himself.

Since we are children of earth we cannot expect to write heavenly hymns. Yet, as a redeemed earth is a foretaste of heaven, so surely the hymn of adoration is a foretaste of the heavenly praise. By this the standard is set, and it is in the sacramental sections, if anywhere at all, that we may expect to look for it. With what confidence of expectation?

Holy Baptism

It has to be admitted that Baptism, perhaps because it has been so long humanized or mythologized, and most certainly sentimentalized, has inspired no body of hymnody comparable with the great eucharistic hymns.

Fifty years ago, when the previous edition was being prepared, the hymns used by the churches were largely devotional and evangelistic (not necessarily in any cheap sense). The evangelistic hymn — in its original intention a vehicle of missionary proclamation or of the convert's first response — treated of God's action in Christ's cross as being alone the 'full Gospel', ignoring much else that is part of Biblical and therefore of authentic catholic truth. The devotional hymn, on the other hand, tended to transfer what was properly an apparatus of private devotion into the domain of public worship (indeed, in non-liturgical churches this was equally true of private prayers).

Whether all this was the result of infrequent, inadequately understood sacraments or the explanation of their continuing infrequency, a connection exists.

Comparison of periods brings out the change for the better that has taken place.

In the 1927 Hymnary – in many other respects a volume to be deeply grateful for – the baptismal hymns were tender, somewhat subjective. The essential objectivity of baptism as God's action bringing the baptized into his holy community by his act of grace – this was not clearly apparent. Indeed, it is still necessary to go back to hymns of Martin Luther or to the often florid Latin hymns of the first Christian millennium to find really significant reference to Jesus' baptism in Jordan and its relation to ours; and unfortunately these ancient expositions are too discursive for modern use. Even in this new 1973 edition attention is drawn to our Lord's baptism only by cross-reference to the famous 'St. Patrick's Breastplate' – 'I bind unto myself today his baptism in the Jordan river'.

Nevertheless the baptismal section, though still limited, is unquestionably richer, numbering fourteen items in all, with cross-reference to four others, in all eighteen, a total sufficient for practical purposes. It commences with the baptismal (Apostles') Creed (rightly without music) and ends with the Aaronic blessing, of which the former settings drop out and three new settings in highly contrasted styles take their place: a gentle, essentially popular one by an anonymous composer; a characteristically strong one by Thomas Wilson with modern harmony which gives a first impression of being self-defeating, until you bring out the melody and discover how clean-cut and simple it is; and a setting to Tone ii, ending 1, attractive, quite uncomplicated and (perhaps surprisingly to people unfamiliar with the *genre*) entirely accessible.

Holy Communion

The Eucharistic section includes thirty-three items, as against sixteen in the previous hymnary (including the Nicene Creed and the Lord's Prayer in both counts). By comparison, here is something like riches.

It should always be remembered that it is the book as a whole that patterns the eucharistic order; therefore *Kyrie* and *Gloria in Excelsis* (Kenneth Leighton) appear where they are appropriate, in the first part of the book *APPROACH TO GOD*. The Holy Communion section begins with the *Nicene Creed*, the *Salutation* and *Sursum Corda* (all intended to be said, not sung, and therefore without music). It continues with the *Sanctus* and *Benedictus qui venit* (again from Dr. Leighton's splendid service), the Lord's Prayer (quite properly without music), followed by Dr. Leighton's *Agnus Dei*.

The psalms and hymns that follow come from many centuries, countries and branches of the Church.

The moving 'The Bread of life for all men broken' (words and melody from twentieth-century Chinese sources; original hymns and

new translations by James Quinn, S.J.; several parts of Thomas Aquinas' great *Pange lingua* hymn to the 'proper' melody or to Picardy (RCH, 636) including 'Therefore we, before him bending' to the above tunes or to the equally familiar *Tantum ergo sacramentum* (RCH, 207); 'Strengthen for service, Lord, the hands, that holy things have taken' (based on the famous passage from the liturgy of Malabar); John MacLeod's 'In love, from love, thou goest forth' — from nineteenth century Scotland; 'Let all mortal flesh keep silence'; as well as most of the items already known through the 'Revised' *Church Hymnary* and a good deal of other material not listed above: this, in every sense, catholic selection is matched by music from most of the corresponding centuries, including several contemporary tunes specially composed for this book.

Psalms and Liturgical Items in Prose and Metre

The Church's original connection with the synagogue meant that from the beginning psalmody was the mainstay of the Church's song at both the Eucharist and the daily offices. Long may the psalter continue to be cherished!

Nevertheless in the course of the centuries psalmody — considered as the people's praise — has become the Church's problem, as the record of continual experiment indicates.

(1) The 1650 metrical psalter which we still use — a joint English-Scottish production — is marred by literary crudity stemming from the authors' strict principle that the *ipsissima verba* of the Authorized Version should simply be metred; while musical difficulties are due to changes that have come about in pronunciation (the word 'nation' for instance was sung as three syllables in 1650).

In the new Hymnary certain modest repairs have been carried out in the more disorderly parts of the 1650 text, while in certain instances verses have been replaced by better versions in the same literary tradition, taken from the revision in use in the Irish Presbyterian Church.

It is to be hoped that critical judgement will approve these changes.

(2) Equally serious is the dullness which is inevitable when the overwhelming majority of psalms are in common metre with tunes invariably 'ironed out' in a weary succession of equal notes.

Unfortunately reversion to the rhythmic vigour and melodic interest of the sixteenth century prototypes is no longer possible since too few of them match the ballad metres of 1650. Some of these earlier tunes from the great Genevan psalters have of course long been wedded to hymns. But the problem of the psalm remains.

(3) The prose psalters are in not much better case. Authorities on the Anglican chant have long agonized about achieving a pointing

both acceptable to a cultivated literary and musical taste and accessible to the ordinary worshipper, who naturally very much wants to 'join in'.

Nevertheless the Anglican chant, retaining as it does that quality of objectivity we much need to recover in our Reformed worship, has many devotees. The compilers of the new Hymnary have therefore included a number of prose psalms to Anglican chants. A much simplified pointing ought to make it fairly easy for congregations to join in and enjoy it. As in so much else, the proof will be 'in the precin'.

(4) Within the contemporary Roman Church Joseph Gelineau has created his own characteristic musical idiom in giving a new lease of life to the Biblical method (cf. Ps. 136 in AV) of responsorial chanting, in which choir or cantor sing the psalm verse and the congregation the antiphon or refrain. These attractive settings, several of which are included in the Hymnary, add a fresh idiomatic dimension to the music of psalmody.

The congregation's part, however, is relatively limited, and might with use be felt as somewhat repetitious.

(5) Again, the practice of singing an English version of the Psalter to 'Gregorian' Tones (inaccurately so-called) was always bound to be only partially successful, since the Tones in their classical codification are a vehicle for Latin words. This in itself is not fatal, since all church music for popular participation is by that token a system of compromises.

More material is the relationship between architectural and musical styles, yet there are many churches, even among those in no way inured to modal uses, which may experience a deepened experience of worship through this music on certain days of the Church's year, for example during Holy Week. The Hymnary therefore includes nine psalm-portions set to Tones for the great days of the year.

Tones for English

It is as a result of the considerations mentioned regarding language that Dom Gregory Murray several years ago published his own contribution in this field, a new set of Tones devised for use with English words. Any attempt is important which seeks to solve the problem not by a new *literary* approach (for example, reshaping the English to suit the music – a formidable assignment indeed!) but by a fresh appraisal of the *musical* possibilities, to ensure that the musical stresses fall in the proper place to suit the words, or negatively, that they do not fall in the wrong place.

Applying the principles he has worked out along these lines, Dom

Gregory Murray has written for the Hymnary a chanted setting of the Reproaches – anciently a part of the Gallican liturgy for Good Friday – ‘O my people, what have I done to thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? Answer me’ for choir or cantor, interlarded with the *Trisagion*, metred and harmonized as the response of the congregation – ‘Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy upon us’.

The music is in no way difficult and may be one more among a number of pointers towards a recovery much to be desired – the recovery of speech-rhythms in a church music that for far too long has been too heavily metricized.

(6) Finally, there are new methods of prose psalmody which reduce the pointing (that is to say the printed symbols which direct the singer to quit one reciting note and move to the next) to its ultimate simplicity.

The Hymnary includes two psalms to such simple chants devised by John Currie. For example, a chant of six notes is used to cover the normal two lines of the psalm verse, each of the six being a chanting note. The sole pointing is a tick above a syllable which tells the singer to quit the note he is on and begin chanting on the next note of the series.

The notes of the chant are harmonized, and for an extended psalm portion the interest may to some extent depend on the organist, if he is competent in this field, varying the harmonization. Sung with intelligence and accompanied with imagination, the effect can be even exciting.

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The above comments are designed to draw attention to the more novel and interesting features of the new Hymnary. It is hardly necessary to say that the book is mainly a compilation of hymns in the usual styles (including above thirty tunes specially commissioned), which congregations will take into their hands and use very fully from the start, since they will quickly discover that whole tracts of the book are already familiar. There seemed little point in commenting here on such well-known material.

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