

Last week we talked a little bit about how music can be evaluated as faithful to God or not. Then I outlined what I think our standards should be for evaluating church music. In other words, how we should choose between all our options. And the guidelines are, very simply: About the words, we have to decide whether we believe it, and whether it's appropriate for the occasion. About the music, is it appropriate to the words? About the performance, is it appropriate to the music and the words?

But now, what are our options? What do we have to choose from?

By this point in history, we have quite a lot of options. More than you may realize. Every one of these options has been used for many years by hundreds of thousands of Christians, if not more.

Now, today we'll look in detail at how Christians through the ages have chosen among those options. Hopefully we'll be able to understand why certain choices were made, and respect them even if we would choose differently.

Instead of just listing all our options, I want to put them in historical context.

Now in this survey I face the same problem I faced before, in that I have about 10 hours of lecture material on this subject which I need to condense to about 60 minutes. If something doesn't make sense, that's probably the reason. Not because I was running a fever when I wrote it.

There are four things I want to emphasize during this survey.

--First, each era and each area (each time and place) which produced a new kind of text, or a new kind of music, did so for a reason. It wasn't chance, or whim. And that reason was the prevailing theology. The church's theology dictated its song. I hope to show how you can see, in the music and the text and the performance, the mysticism of the middle ages, the sturdy world-affirming Sovereignty-consciousness of the reformation, the man-centered-ness of the second great awakening, and the entertainment mentality of the late 20th century, for instance.

--Second, note what part the Biblical Psalms have in each era. I'll talk about them this afternoon.

--Third, each era and each area produced a huge amount of new material. And very little of it survived. In another era, or another area, something else was emphasized, and only a few examples from other times and places continued to be used. But, something always survived. Each movement passes away, but each movement leaves a legacy behind. Usually, what's left behind is the best of that movement. Or, hopefully.

--Fourth, the present day is a little different. Today, we have virtually abandoned the music of all previous eras. Most Christians under 20 don't know a dozen Church Music texts or tunes from before 1950, much less before 1850. Our little reformed communities are an exception, but even we know far less than we could, and should. The last century is a great discontinuity, a radical break.

Groups of Christians have always sung praise to God the Father and God the Son, and most of the texts we have, from every time and place, are hymns of praise. But the hymns of each era reflect the doctrinal and practical emphases of that era. Throughout the centuries, and up to the present day, the church's sung texts have varied in reflection to the thinking of the times, because of the choices of the writers and the singers. And the choices have varied in several ways, namely: The texts have been based on inspired or uninspired sources, or both. (The inspired texts are mostly from the Psalms, but from other passages as well.)

The texts have varied between subjective and objective: that is, we find hymns about what is true outside the singer, the objective reality of God and the world, and others about what may be true inside the singer, about his personal experiences and feelings.

Related to that, the texts have varied in their emphasis on praise, or doctrine, or testimony. And that's quite proper. Those are the three elements of Discipleship, and by my conviction, should all be present and all kept in balance. [diagram again]

These variations are all still with us. If they're kept in balance, all of them have a place as part of corporate discipleship. Other variations have been merely those which showed, in content, the specific doctrine of the group that originated it, or which showed the average personality or attitude of the place or time, as for instance one certain era may be more concerned with holy living, or another with the sovereignty of God, or the future of the church, etc.

However, in the 1800s, additional variations began to show up: between simplicity and complexity, and between formality and spontaneity. But more about that when we get to it. For now, let me start at the beginning, and give a quick history to put these choices into perspective.

We don't know much about the early church's singing, other than that the Jewish Christians continued singing Psalms, though probably not exclusively, and the Gentiles continued with the NT tradition of making new compositions, but also sang Psalms. As the early church began to distance itself from Judaism, the emphasis on the psalms was somewhat reduced, although Psalms have remained a major influence on church song up to very recently.

During the 300s, the followers of Arius, who denied the deity of Jesus, spread their doctrine by setting it to music. Orthodox churches, following the lead of Ambrose, began doing the same with their doctrine. In the centuries following, the Eastern church and the Western church began to separate. (The Eastern church being Byzantium, what we'd now call Eastern Orthodox, and the Western church being Europe.) In the east, texts became more mystical. In the west, texts became more regimented.

However, in both places, through the centuries, music in the church meeting was gradually removed from the congregation, and given to the professionals. Eventually it was all in Latin sung by choirs. An established yearly liturgy was set up. All this was complete by 900, and from about that time, there were no new texts used in the church for half a thousand years. Whoa. That's a long time.

During this time, texts were written and sung by Christians apart from the official church, of course, but they were in such a tiny minority, there is almost no record of them, and they have no influence on what's available to us. The real history of congregational song pauses in this period, and doesn't start again until the Reformation in Western Europe, in the early 1500s. As I understand it, there was no Reformation in the East, and thus their singing has remained choir-led, up to very recently.

By the way, on this subject, I need to refine something I said last time. I said that both choir music and congregational music are appropriate in formal corporate discipleship. Both can direct the people to God, and can bring the word of God to the people, and both can show the people addressing each other. Obviously. I then said that the only question was how much of each. That's not the only question. Choir singing is appropriate, I believe, but nothing in Scripture requires it. The Scripture does require the congregation to sing, I believe. So if you're going to leave something out, it can't be the congregational singing. It's all right to have the congregational and not the choir. It's not all right to have the choir sing and not the congregation.

In saying that, of course, I'm revealing my own theology. I'm reformed, and one of the reformed distinctives is the Priesthood of All Believers. Every disciple is equal before God. We're not equal in authority, but we all have equal access to God. This Biblical belief had been lost, and it was recovered in the Reformation.

Almost immediately, this belief was demonstrated, or distilled, in the church meeting, by congregational singing. In European churches during the 1500s, many doctrines and practices were changed. And this was always one of them. You can have a choir if you want, but the congregation must sing.

In the Reformation this practice separated into three distinct streams of congregational song: the Lutheran tradition in Germany (which produced a form of hymn call the chorale), the Anabaptist tradition in Germany (their hymnal was called the *Ausbund*), and the Calvinist tradition, in France and Switzerland (the psalter). The Lutheran and Calvinist traditions had great effects on hymnody for the next 300 years. Their influences combined in various ways to form the English tradition, the Scottish tradition, the Dutch tradition, and eventually the American tradition of congregational song. Together, they form our heritage. They eventually influenced even the Roman Catholics. The Anabaptist hymns have played only a very minor role. Their tradition remained virtually unaltered until the 1800s. In some places it is unaltered to the present. But most Anabaptists have abandoned their own tradition in favor of the Lutheran/Calvinist and its successors. In church music history studies, the Anabaptist stream is usually ignored.

They wouldn't like to hear it, but formally, the Lutheran and Anabaptist traditions were formally similar. Now, each musical tradition did reflect their own doctrinal emphases, which were quite different. The Lutheran tended to be more at home with old testament teaching and imagery than the Anabaptist. But both were balanced between

objectivity and subjectivity, between praise, doctrine, and testimony. Both were in the language of the people, and both used concepts and style which represented the highest that the common people were capable of.

The Calvinist tradition, which strongly influenced Britain and the Netherlands, and eventually America, was very much different. It was all Psalms! Calvin concluded from his study that the music used in the meetings of the church should be simple, congregational, vigorous, disciplined, and inspired.

In other words, the whole congregation, men and women and children, should sing the Psalms, and everyone should sing the melody. This is the Calvinist ideal of church music. [write on board] Calvin is often accused of severity for limiting congregational singing to the Psalms. Calvin himself, however, did not argue for exclusive Psalmody as the Scottish later did under Knox. He merely contended that the Bible is all that's necessary for church singing. This was not an artistic restriction; Calvin actually went to great lengths to assure that the Scripture portions used in his Psalter (called the Genevan Psalter) were rendered in the most beautiful poetry possible. The Psalm-settings he commissioned set a standard for all of French poetry for years to come. The same is true of the tunes: Though they don't show much stylistic variety, these tunes are among the sturdiest and most serviceable tunes ever written, and they've had a profound influence on all church music since. The restriction to Psalms, however, is the only thing that migrated to other nations. Reformers from all over Europe spent time in Geneva and later returned to their countries with what they had learned: exclusive Psalmody.

Unfortunately, the other cultures didn't achieve the same quality of poetry or music, and though the texts remained formally adequate, the quality of congregational song suffered and declined pretty seriously through the 1600s.

By the way, as a historical footnote: throughout history singing the Psalms always leads to a dilemma. Over time, when the Psalms are rendered literally, they become too hard to sing and soon lead away from congregational participation. And if they are rendered in paraphrase, they soon lead away from singing Psalms. We see both of those things happening in the post-reformation era. I think this can be avoided with hard work and by using a variety of settings. But more on that this afternoon.

Attempts made to rejuvenate congregational song and also to introduce non-inspired hymns, in the English-speaking world, were generally ineffective until the Great Awakening in England and America, in the 1740s. By that time, the world was ready for Isaac Watts. Have you heard of him? He introduced non-inspired hymnody to the English-speaking world. He almost single-handedly, in the early 1700s, blurred the distinction between Psalms and hymns with his hundreds of Psalm paraphrases and hymns based on Psalms. He and others like him provided a clear and balanced congregational song strongly influenced by the metrical Psalms, and also by the Lutheran chorales. A generation or so later, John & Charles Wesley produced an even more wide-ranging and varied type of hymn, which inspired more hymn-writers for the next half-century. All were characterized by a strong emphasis on doctrine, praise, and testimony, objectivity and subjectivity. Just like the Psalms.

After the War for Independence (the 1770s) British and American traditions diverged. In Britain, the Romantic movement in literature (early 1800s) produced a number of much more expressive and imaginative texts. The balances are still respected and the expressiveness never becomes sentimental. Over against that tradition, with a number of overlaps of course, was the Oxford movement, (beginning 1840s) which pushed the Anglican church toward Roman Catholicism. This movement produced many translations from ancient German and Latin hymns, as well as new texts, which were highly liturgical and formal. (In fact, any hymns we have based on old Greek, German or Latin texts came from this period, and especially from Catherine Winkworth & John Mason Neale.)

In America, something completely different was happening. The churches were still singing the same type of lyric they always had. Most churches used metrical Psalms, or the Watts-type hymn, or the Wesley-type hymn, depending on their heritage. And the Anabaptists were still singing their *Ausbund*. In fact, bound so tightly by their tradition, they only produced one more hymnal in their first 350 years: The *Unparteiliche Gesangbuch*. Again, since this was not influential, it is usually ignored.

But meanwhile, in another part of town, a type of religious song was developing which would eventually take over the entire protestant tradition. It was founded on three informal movements, that is, non-church movements.

First, in the 1770s and 80s, as civilization became established and there was more time to develop the finer things in life like singing, the Singing School movement began, to try to increase the quality of congregational song. It used old

and new texts with old and new tunes, all in a distinct American idiom. The singing school increased musical awareness among common people, and produced what we can call folk hymns. For many years lyrics were still in the Psalter-or-Watts-or-Wesley tradition, but the music came to be very rough-hewn, with jagged lines, sad tunes that had to be wailed and joyful tunes that had to be shouted. These were often sung in harmony, but with a rough, unrefined harmony which is great fun to sing but sometimes hard to listen to. This is worth illustrating. 2 examples Second was the revivalism of the camp-meetings in the early 1800s, commonly called the Second Great Awakening. In the west, the camp-meeting song had the rough and powerful music and lyric of the folk hymn, with a great deal of passion, but also with something new: a great deal of repetition. In the east, under the influence of Lowell Mason (who is still with us, in a big way!), a more 'proper' and 'scientific' sort of music developed. It was more refined, but with the same emphases on simplicity and directness. In fact, it is so proper and scientific I think it errs on the side of predictability. In other words, it's boring.

Third was the Sunday school movement, (designed for non-Christian children, by the way, not for the church), which produced a lyric of even greater simplicity and repetition, and music which was light, and easy to learn, for the kids.

All three of these types of song influenced the music and the texts used by the great urban revivalists of the later 1800s, especially D.L. Moody and his musical sidekick Ira Sankey, who invented the term Gospel Hymn.' (Or, as I prefer to say, Gospel Song, since they aren't hymns in any useful sense.) Other revivalists followed their lead, and the Moody/Sankey-type gospel song became its own industry. (In this type of song, the words and the music are almost inseparable, and are thus considered together.)

This type of song was not intended for Christian Discipleship, in any sense. [refer to diagram] It was designed to warn sinners of their doom, or more likely, to woo them, to charm them, into returning to the faith of their childhood. In other words, it was for unbelievers. And not just any unbelievers, but ones who knew the truth of Christianity but had rejected it. And, because of their theology, these songwriters didn't simply proclaim the truth and leave the persuasion to the Holy Spirit, as previous generations would have. No, they used a number of emotional techniques to persuade unbelievers. For instance, Softly And Tenderly (TH 694) I can't believe they let this in. And the music was extremely simple, smooth, and sweet. Because, again, it was to be as attractive as possible to unbelievers. No demands. It reflected their theology: Just come to Jesus, and your life will be...easy. Right? And as time went on, it became even sweeter, as we'll see later. It would not be attractive to unbelievers today, but it certainly was back then.

In the 20th century, other types of song developed from it. In the 30s and 40s what was called southern gospel, or country gospel, or just plain gospel (all derived from the same genre, including styles that are known by their publishers, Rodeheaver, or Stampss-Baxter), continued to follow the popular music of the day. It eventually opened the door for the 1960s and 70s praise choruses (what I like to call campfire songs) which followed the same trends, and developed the same characteristics, but were unusual in including Psalms, which had entirely vanished in the previous hundred years. Actually, I should say they include snippets of Psalms, such as in "I will call upon the Lord." This same trend, still taking its cues from the popular music of the day, developed through the 80s and 90s into the Praise and Worship style we have today.

Now, we may disagree with this method of evangelizing. I certainly do. But that's not the point.

The point is that, none of it was designed for the church! This was and is pop and commercial movement. But starting in the late 1800s, churches in America began to adopt this style of song for their church music. It was only to be expected. The churches were being filled with people whose only Christianity was the Christianity of the urban revivalists, and its music became their music. It happened first, of course, with groups which agreed with the revivalist mentality, like Baptists and new-order Mennonites, but eventually every denomination was filled with the gospel song. Some denominations went over to it almost entirely, and retained only a nod to the hymn. (By the way, here we're ahead of the UK. The gospel song made inroads there also, and so has pop music since the 50s, but there are far more British churches that still sing hymns. Although even there I should mention, these churches are very, very small.)

This was a very dramatic shift, as I see it. It's as dramatic as the reformation shift from choir music to congregational music. Church music shifted from formal corporate discipleship to informal individualistic evangelism. The transformation was so complete that when 'contemporary Christian music' finally knocked at the church doors a hundred years later, the 'traditional' music it competed with was the gospel song! And since the two are essentially the

same (the same goal, the same method) there was no stopping it. So the “worship wars” that we hear about are really a tempest in a teapot, since they represent two spots along the same stream. It’s a little ironic: When you see a sign outside a church building that says, “Traditional 8am, Contemporary 10am,” do you know the difference? It’s the music. And do you know what the ‘traditional’ is? It’s the gospel song! Nobody wants to go back further than 1850.

I don’t want to overstate the case. Through all this there were, and still are, churches which continued their old practices. Many Roman Catholics still sing the Latin liturgy in choirs (which the congregation does not understand), -or at least, they did until Vatican II. Mormons, and Mennonites, and certain types of Baptist churches, the ‘independent Bible-believing’ type, still sing gospel songs with a smattering of hymns. There are still Presbyterian denominations, fewer every decade, which stay with the psalters, Scottish or even Genevan. Many Lutherans are still singing hymns, some of them quite old. And the Amish continue to sing the *Ausbund*, in German (which the congregation does not understand).

And new hymns are still being written. We call them 20th century hymns. In the last 25 years, more new hymns have been written than in any other period of church history. It’s called the Hymn Explosion. They look and sound different than the ones we know. They’re much more focused, and more relevant, because in the last hundred years, hymns couldn’t take their existence for granted, especially in the US. Collections of nice religious-sounding phrases will no longer work. A new hymn has to be very convincing at first sight, or it doesn’t stand a chance. examples- Carl Daw, Bryan Leech But in general, in these days, the formality and discipleship represented by the Hymn are no longer welcome. What everyone wants now is ‘worship,’ which often just means good feelings about religion, put to music.

So in summary, let me briefly list the options we have, in words, music and performance.

What were the **words** like from each era of Christian hymnody? Through history, themes have been added to our repertoire. Every era from the beginning of time has sung Praise to God. [write all on board] In the early Christian era, hymns of doctrine were added, which more pointedly focused on theology, though will in the context of praise. In the generations following the Reformation, hymns of personal testimony become popular, and these are still with us. In the late 1700s and very much in the 1800s, hymns of evangelism became popular. Then in the last 100 years or so, hymns of social duty have been added: hymns which are very relevant to the problems of the current day, like civil injustice, or the arrogance of science, or environmental concerns.

Church music uses, and has always used, words with a specifically religious flavor to them. But throughout history, that has included a tremendous variety of content. Briefly, here are 8 areas in which church music has varied over the years.

Subject Matter It’s always religious, like I say, but there are many different sorts of religious content. General praise to God is the most popular. Prayer for general needs is a close second. Exhortation of others to obey God’s commands, in general, and general confession of sin rank pretty high, also. But what’s with all this generality? Can’t we get specific? Yes, we can, and we’ll see how, through history, church music texts have been written on more and more specific subjects. General vs. Specific

Emotional Depth Some hymns are like doctrinal statements. Statements of fact. Not a lot of passion. If we took the book of church order and set it to music, it would have lots of meaning but not much emotional depth. In fact, if it had any, it would be accidental! These are static texts. But many church music texts are much more dynamic; they use more forceful language. Static vs. Dynamic

Emotional Mood Whether it’s shallow or deep, there is some emotion. What is that emotion? Poems can be ecstatic, calm, motivated, pensive, heartbroken, etc Coherence. Some hymns seem to be not much more than collections of religious-sounding ideas. On the other extreme, some have a clear sequence of ideas running through them. Random vs. Structured

Relevance As I mentioned under subject matter, some of the topics addressed are so general that only a very sensitive person would apply them personally. Others (mostly 20th century hymns) are clearly relevant to decisions we all make daily. The odd thing about this one is that when the hymn writer makes a text general enough to apply to a wide number of Christians, it’s usually so general that it doesn’t address any of them very strongly. It’s a trade-off.

Addressee Some are addressed to God, (or one member of the Trinity), some to other Christians, some to non-Christians.

Complexity Some are easy to grasp and obvious (usually more recent selections). Some are easy to grasp but have deeper aspects which are not immediately obvious. Some may not make sense at all until they are studied. In other words, there are two ways of judging complexity. There is the difference between simplicity and complexity. There is also the difference between shallow and profound. They aren't the same. Writing can be complex but shallow. It may be simple but profound.

Theology Every shade of religious belief has found its way into a song. Every heresy, every possible belief on important subjects, are somewhere in some hymn or church music text. In this century, these are all still with us in the hymns we sing. But hymns themselves have largely been discarded, replaced by Praise and Worship music which, of course, is just about praise.

The **music** has varied a great deal more. Almost every style of music ever made has found a place in the church. However, only a few are congregational. After all, congregations are nearly always untrained musically. Only simple melodies and simple harmonies will work. But even that gives us a good variety. Plainchant, unison and harmonized Genevans, Becker Psalms, German chorales in their original rhythm and the simplified rhythm, Scottish Psalm tunes, West gallery music, American folk hymns, Welsh hymn tunes, Oxford movement hymnody, Anglican chant, English carols. Not to mention gospel songs, praise choruses and PWM, which is all we have at the moment. But two modern forms are steadily gaining ground, what I call modern High hymnody (Paul Steven Jones, Timothy Dusenbury, et al) which are just like hymns of the past except the harmony is more daring, and Popular hymnody (Stuart Townend, Greg Wilbur, et al), which are more like serious, tamed-down versions of PWM.

The **performance** has varied about as much as anyone can imagine. At times it's all been fast and loud, at other times slow and mournful. Sometimes, as in today's hymn-singing churches, it's in the middle all the time. Sometimes there's a lot of variety, sometimes it gets in a rut.

We've had the congregation singing just the melody with no instruments, we've had the congregation singing harmony, a choir accompanying them in harmony, various instruments accompanying them. We've had just the choir singing, with no one expected to sing along. We have many churches where the people are expected to sing, but the instruments are so loud no one can hear them. Churches with a large organ fall into that trap, but so do churches with an amplified praise band.

If this were a full course in church music, we would talk about what sorts of things are being communicated by each element, in different pieces and different styles, and tell you how you can find out for yourself. But let me finish today by giving some illustrations of what I mean, so you'll know what I'm talking about. Imagine these four pieces of music during a Sunday morning church meeting.

*Gregorian chant.*

What are the words communicating? Absolutely nothing, unless you know Latin. Isn't that right?

No, I think subtly it would be communicating to you, over time, that the proper praise of God and His works is on a higher level than the common people can understand or participate in.

What is the music communicating? Well, what's your impression, just on a basic level? Would you say it's frivolous, or earnest? Yeah, that's a pretty easy one. But how about this: personal or distant?

Well, that might be different if you were singing it or if you were listening to it.

Now what about the performance? Yeah, that's a little tricky, isn't it? How does a performance communicate anything, you may wonder? Let me give you some hints.

·Would you say it's passionate or bored? Well, that's a little tougher! I assure you, in its time period, this music did not put anyone to sleep. It expressed passion the way that was appropriate in that time period. But what would it do today?

·Furthermore, who's singing? Choir or congregation? What's the significance of that? What if that's the only church music you ever heard?

·Are there any instruments? No. What's the significance of that? If you know the language, you could say it's to emphasize the words. They really want to make sure you understand the words. But since we don't know the language, what would this performance communicate if we were to hear this live on Sunday morning? Tricky, isn't it? What it communicates is that the human voice, esp. the male voice, is the most important and beautiful instrument for the praise of God. And in fact, that's what they believed.

Now what if you didn't think of that while you were listening? Does the performance still communicate that? Well, I'd say yes, for two reasons. 1. If you understood that time period, you'd know that that's what the composers and performers believed. 2. If this is all you ever heard in the way of church music, you'd know instinctively that that's what this performance communicates. You may not agree, you may not put it into words, but you'd know that's what was being said.

Do you see why understanding the history and formats of church music is important? We need to know the options, what they mean, and where they came from. Why? So we can tell what's being communicated. Why's that important? So we can glorify God with it.

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Let's move ahead 500 years to *GenPs 99*

What are the words comm.? Praise to God, in some detail, how He should be praised, why, who, etc.

What about the music? Some level of excitement, but dignity as well.

What about the performance? Well, let's pretend this is a whole congregation of men and women singing, in unison, without instruments. It's not, but let's pretend it is, because that's how the music was used for a hundred years. Does the unison tell us anything? Does the acappella tell us anything? Does the language? Does the tempo?

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Let's move ahead another 500 years to *Tenderly He Watches*, solo voice w/ piano

The words? The tenderness and gentleness of the Son of God. But more than that. Does it sound like a lullaby? Who is singing the lullaby to whom? We're singing it to each other, about God.

The music? Does the music sound like a lullaby? One of my students said it sounds like cotton candy. 'There's a Sweet, sweet spirit in this place' indeed.

The performance? It's written to be sung melody in unison, with piano or instrumental accompaniment. What does that tell you? It's not a group song. It's personal and intimate.

Now, how about the way I sang it? Did I do it well? Did I make mistakes? Does it sound like I was sincere? Did it sound like I had worked hard on it? No, in fact, I intended to communicate that I dislike the music, and the words, and I was deliberately making fun of them.

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Let's move ahead 60 years to *Hold Me Lord*. Remember, this is intended as church music.

What do the words say? Jesus is a good buddy.

What is the music communicating? Casual, unrestrained. Feeling-centered.

What about the performance? Skilled, but very passionate.

Thank you. Let's close with prayer.