Theology in Hymns through the Ages

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Preacher: Edward Norman

[0:00] Well, as usual, very gracious and undeserved introduction. Thank you, Jim. Hymnity is dear to me, but I must emphasize I'm not coming to you, I always have to say this, as an academic.

I'm not coming to you as a hymnologist. I am coming to you as someone speaking out of experience in the field, and convictions, perhaps, and some passions aroused because of that.

Also, though, I stand here because I do believe very strongly in music of integrity in worship, and the hymn, as against all other forms that sound like hymns, I think is critical in that.

The psalm, of course, but I mean by hymn, not chorus. I'm not touching on that today. Either the old 19th century chorus of the Sankey mode, or the contemporary chorus, at least not much.

I'll try and bridle my tongue. And I, because I think what we can see in the hymn, if we look at it through the decades, a kind of archaeological dig.

[1:09] And so if you could just treat me more as somebody saying, look what I found digging into the ground, armed with a shovel. And look at these things. And then we can discuss them later on, which has to be at least a quarter past, right?

At latest. Take what you need, but normally finish by nine. All right. Okay.

So it's been lovely being with you, and I... Are there any questions? Hymns have, from time to time, been the butt of nasty remarks, including by our hero C.S. Lewis, who described hymns as sixth-rate music in one place.

I think he was just flailing around a bit and generally addressing the torpor, which has descended, certainly had in my school days, and on Peter Hitchens' school days.

I'm just reading about it. In worship, just a slow, sluggish kind of hymnody, which had its roots mostly in the 19th century.

[2:17] But, of course, the hymn goes back much further than that. What is a hymn? Well, that's also a little debatable, but technically a hymn is a poem on a religious subject.

It doesn't... It's not the prerogative of Christianity, but it, of course, has become associated with that. A hymn is a song of... In praise of God, according to Augustine.

Either way, it's a religious poem, which is being adopted by the Christian Church. Hymns, of course, appear in Scripture, but I'm not going there either, just because, in the words of hymnologist Ruth Messinger, she died in 1964, but she warns that that field is controversial.

She says we have very little to go on as to whether or not or how these words were treated, and, in fact, singing is not always implied. In any case, some of these wonderful poetic moments are already encapsulated under the title of canticle in the Book of Common Prayer, for our use.

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So, we have, most famously, the Te Deum, which is a very early Christian hymn. We have the Benedictus, we have the Magnificat, and the Nunc Dimittis, Mary's song, and Simeon's song, excuse me, as examples of these biblical hymns, if you will.

[3:47] But, of course, the hymn as we know it is a somewhat different thing. A freely composed verse and song. I'm not going to deal much with the music.

There isn't time. The very first breakthrough in terms of words that we have, music is indicated, but we can't interpret it very well, though it's been tried.

It goes, is from the Oxyrhynchus hymn, which is in Oxford, in a library there, from the third century. Let it be silent.

It's fragments, so it starts halfway through, I think. Let it be silent. Let the luminous stars not shine. Let the winds and all the noisy rivers die down.

And as we hymn the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, let all the powers add, Amen, Amen. Empire, praise always, and glory to God, the soul giver of good things.

[4:48] Amen, Amen. Amen. So that's from the third century, our earliest example of a hymn that has something in common with what we understand by hymn. What I hope to show is that by starting around here, moving very shamefully rapidly through the centuries, because we don't have time, especially if I have to finish by nine.

Well, no. What we have is, in this archaeological dig, we're going to see some shifts, which I hope will be of interest, and I hope also will arouse some concern about our condition today in the Church.

The self-denying, let all mortal flesh keep silence kind of theme is frequent in early Church hymnody. It reminds us of the holiness, the majesty, and the omnipotence of our Lord God, his Son, and the Holy Spirit, and our smallness in comparison.

It comes through time and time again. In fact, the hymn we still sing as let all mortal flesh, they've all gone through translation and some alteration. Still, from the ancient liturgy of St. James, reads, you remember, let all mortal flesh keep silence and with fear and trembling stand.

Now, the Romantics are fond of trembling, but in a different kind of way. This is trembling because of this majesty and holiness. Ponder nothing earthly-minded, for with blessing in his hand Christ our God to earth descendeth, our full homage to demand.

[6:27] An Advent theme. The final verse, this again is not uncommon. At his feet, the six-winged seraphs, cherubim with sleepless eye, veil their faces to the presence as with ceaseless voice they cry, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Lord Most High.

With that kind of intensity, earthly-minded things are indeed going to be put aside. As we'll see later, this kind of imagery appealed immensely, as I just said, to the 19th century poets and clergy, eagerly translating such texts as these, but also they influenced their own efforts, though with somewhat different results.

The 4th century Bishop Ambrose of Milan composed this hymn, urging as he did so with all his hymns, congregational participation. He's often accredited with that.

I don't quite know how it would have worked, whether people would have been expected to memorize, as people so readily could, and were trained to do in those days, the words.

I can't think how that was handled. But at any rate, he did urge congregational participation. And one of his examples is, We praise thee, we worship thee, O God, thy sovereign power we sound abroad.

[7:49] Very broad, powerful phrases. All nations bow before thy throne, and thee, the great Jehovah, own. Loud hallelujahs to thy name. Angels and seraphim proclaim, by all the powers and thrones in heaven, eternal praise to thee is given.

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And of course, the long Christian tradition of a doxological ending is seen time and time again. A Trinitarian closing to the, a Trinitarian verse of praise closing the hymn.

In the 6th century, Gregory the Great, who of course helped formulate Gregorian chant, wrote this, which introduces a theme frequent around this time.

Thankfulness for a new day, and getting through the night safely. Something with our street lighting, and police forces doesn't occur to us so readily. It may in some places, but, Father, we praise you, now the night is over.

Active and watchful, stand we all before you. Singing, we offer prayer and meditation, thus we adore you. Monarch of all things, fit us for your mansions, banish our weakness, health and wholeness sending.

[9:09] Bring us to heaven, where your saints united, joy without ending. Very strong sense of, we don't have it all under control here. We are weak, we are vulnerable, and we carry the consequences of a fall, and we fix our eyes on heaven, and praise God for that goal.

Not dismissing this life, not at all, but not sugarcoating it either, something which tends to happen later on. So our utter dependence on God's grace and protection.

And life was like that, uncertain and brutal, for a very long time. Francis of Assisi's famous hymn continues this tradition of glorious hymnody.

Praise, emanating from a humble heart and poetic skill, I would argue, all creatures of our God and King, lift up your hearts and with us sing. Alleluia, Alleluia, thou burning sun with golden beam, thou silver moon with softer gleam, O praise him, O praise him, Alleluia, Alleluia.

The theme of praise is striking. The absence of self-indulgence, to me, is remarkable. So creation's invoked here, but it's not sentimental, or romantic, if you like, there aren't accretions which vie with the focus of the worship.

[10:43] the awareness of a holy and, in the words of most teenagers, awesome God is ever present. It's interesting to compare this with what I've just read, with All Things Bright and Beautiful, for instance.

That's a contrast we're going to see increasingly, I think. Nothing, I'm not criticizing All Things Bright and Beautiful, but it's different. Skimming along, if we may, and must, to the 14th century, we have this powerful hymn by Thomas A. Kempis.

He was 14th and 15th century, mostly 15th century, died in 1471. O love, we sing this, it was in the book, with one voice, hymnal, O love, how deep, how broad, how high, it fills the heart with ecstasy, that God, the Son of God, should take our mortal form for mortal's sake.

He sent no angel to our race, of higher or of lower place, but wore the robe of human frame himself, and to this lost world came. Christ's life on earth through four more verses is described, and then once again, there's a doxological to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost final verse.

There's a dignity that flows from this kind of writing. There's a dignity from this kind of poetry, which seems to me, this is subjective perhaps, so appropriate, and perhaps the least we can offer to our Lord.

[12:17] The backbone of these hymns is that they are theologically anchored and doctrinally direct, as a word I would use.

There's no embellishment or sentimental imagery. It gets right down to business, and it keeps it up throughout the whole hymn. Okay, I need to jump.

Oh, I have to jump, so great big leaps. Let's assume that that kind of hymnody now prevails. I think we can assume this. It prevails up until around the time of the Reformation.

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These things never cut off and start in clean breaks. Of course not. There's always leakage and overflow into the different centuries and periods, but just as a trend.

Of course, by 1483, a gentleman called Martin Luther was born, and he brings his talents when he is a monk who's had his kind of road to Damascus experience, brings his passionate love of his Lord and his passionate love of music together for the Reformation.

[13:38] His Reformation, the Lutheran Reformation, was particularly marked by a love of music. It meant so much to him, and he insisted on it being part of the education in the Lutheran schools.

It was he who set up a formula for music in the Lutheran congregations, just setting aside cathedrals for a moment, whereby there's room for performed music, hence the cantatas that the choir would sing, though nearly always, with a chorale or hymn tune at the end for the congregation to join in, and the body of chorales, which is really the Lutheran hymn, or the German hymn, the chorale becomes a major feature of actually Western music from here on.

Up to that point, it had been plain chant. So if you, and to this day, if you, as an organist, if you play the music of the French composers, whether early, François Couperin, or present day, or recent, like Maurice de Ruffele, or Dupre, nearly all the thematic material, variations on, a prelude on, are plain chant.

They're plain chant themes, Gregorian themes. If you turn your attention to the Germanic or Protestant composers, the central material is the chorale. So it's a prelude on, and then you get all the Lutheran hymn tunes, Bach, for instance, wrote hundreds of them.

The cantatas are based around a chorale, and the first line of that chorale, Wackertau, Sleep is Awake, for instance, is the title for that work. So there are these two levels, congregational participation, which is essential, and the performed music, which he made room for.

[15:32] The Calvinist teaching on music was not as severe as we're led to believe, but it was different, and influenced much more the English approach to music in worship, in public worship.

So whereas, under Lutheranism, music went on to blossom in a particular way, I would say culminating at its best in the music of J.S. Bach, that was not so in Britain, which was influenced more by a very restrained and very disciplined, austere approach to music.

In fact, for Anglicans, the legislated form of music praise was the metrical psalm. Not in the cathedrals, but in the parish churches.

So, Calvin encouraged music at a certain level, as did the Puritans generally, but it was in the home. Tafel music, you must know that name perhaps in a group in Toronto that has adopted it as its name, an early music group, where you would sit around the table with part books, everybody with their different line to play, either on the recorder, or perhaps stringed instruments or a mixture of instruments, or sing.

It was interchangeable. But in England, it was too bad that there was very rich music in the cathedrals and in the royal chapels coming out of the Elizabethan period, period.

[17:06] But, what was I going to say, but in the parish churches, there was a dearth of inspiration, and music didn't have the richness that our Lutheran brothers and sisters enjoyed.

Luther composed many hymns, but he also translated a lot of the early hymns into German, of course. Savory of the Nations, come, Virgin, Son, make here your home.

Marvel now, O heaven and earth, that the Lord chose such a birth. From heaven to earth I come, which is a chorale, an Advent chorale by Luther, which Bach uses several times, turning them into preludes for the organ.

I mean, Bach comes much later than Luther, and other composers did this before him, but I pick on Bach because he perfects the treatment of these hymns.

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At the same time, there's something else that creeps in, and we can see it in the music of Bach, which is a pietistic strain. How about this?

[18:20] So by the time of Bach, he is battling, you can see it in some of the cantatas and the arias in some of his cantatas and the arias in the passion music. They've got scripture in the recitatives and then a tenor will stand up and sing an aria, and it's very sentimental sometimes.

Is that wrong? I'm not saying it's wrong. It's just sentimental and very fanciful sometimes. Here's an example. Ah, dearest Jesus, holy child, prepare a bed, soft, undefiled, a quiet chamber set apart.

And then it goes on to say, now make my heart a chamber for you to dwell in. This pietistic influence is really here to stay now, and it goes on into our time.

I don't have time, and others here know far more about it than I, but just to fill you in, my understanding is that Philippe Jacob Spaner, who was an 18th century influence, really started or perhaps formulated pietism.

That is an emphasis, well, this is what Gordon Craig says in his book The Germans. The heart of pietism was the moral renovation of the individual, achieved by passing through the anguish of contrition into the overwhelming assurance of God's grace.

[19:52] This experience was the result of introspection and prayer and was completely personal and unique to the believer. He had no need of theologians to point the way.

That's Gordon Craig's understanding. It's an interesting book, The Germans. It's old now, but very, very, very fascinating. And so begins a new trend in hymnody whereby it isn't just either metrical psalms, which is scripture, altered to fit into metrical form, nor is it just focusing as the early hymns did on almost circumscribed material to like God, who he is, and his glory, and so on.

Now there's the personal input. Luther also set what we know as canticles in hymn forms, such as In Peace and Joy I Now Depart, which is the Mount Demetrius, and he also set the Lord's Prayer, turning that in to a nine-verse hymn.

The Ten Commandments turned into a twelve-verse hymn. These people had time on their hands to sing. In fact, the modern Lutheran hymnal still has those twelve verses, those nine verses, and some cases thirteen-verse chorales in it.

A lot of his hymns focus on the Eucharist, and he wrote much for Advent and Christmas. But also, of course, the political pressures of the day, the upheavals and the horrors sometimes of the Reformation battles and struggles reflect in hymns like this.

[21:42] Grant, we pray, in mercy, Lord, for there is none on earth but you, none other to defend us. You only, Lord, can fight for us. Another one says, in the very midst of life's snares and, sorry, in the very midst of life, snares and death surround us.

Who shall help us in the strife lest the foe confound us? Only thou, Lord, thou only. We mourn that we have greatly sinned, holy and righteous God, holy and mighty God, holy and merciful Saviour, eternal Lord God.

Save us from the terror of the bitter pangs of death. Have mercy, O Lord. Later on, he speaks of the fiery pit of hell, but when it comes to references to Satan and darkness and evil, I think many commentators see there also the battle between Catholicism and Protestantism that was at the centre of Luther's reforming work.

Luther's most famous hymn, of course, has come down to us as a mighty fortress is our God. And here we begin to see real shaping through political pressures.

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There are five theories at least as to its origin by various people of the time or just shortly afterwards. It was sung by Luther and others as they entered Worms in 1521 for the great date of that year, or it was a tribute to a friend of Luther's, Leonhard Kaiser, who was executed in 1527, or it was sung at the presentation of the Augsburg presentation in 1530, or composed in connection with the date of Speyer in 1529, when the German Lutheran princes lodged a protest to the Holy Roman Emperor over his enforcing of the 1521, Diet of Worms, composed as a martial song to inspire soldiers against the Ottoman forces in Europe.

[23:46] These are some of the interpretations seen woven into an oft-changing text to this hymn. It didn't change in terms of a mighty stronghold or a mighty castle, but the stuff in between the sandwich outer bits did change according to political pressures.

For Luther, the devil and sin were vivid and had to be confronted in the power of an active, present God. But, as I say, this seems to also, the battle slides across into an identity with struggles with the Roman Church and the papacy.

David Music, a musicologist, says, when the Reformation finally took root in England, it was not the hymnody of the Lutherans, but Genevan psalmody that served as a model for the congregational songs, as I just mentioned.

So the Metrical Psalm emerges. And this is what you will see in the parish church with the clerk sitting in his desk in front of the pulpit. You will see those pictures of a stacked pulpit in trying to think of the artist of the time.

Can't for the moment think of the 18th century. Slip my mind. Anyway, there's a print in David Short's office of Wesley preaching, and he's sitting in this stacked pulpit.

[25:18] We had one in the church in Charleston where Susan and I were until recently. An 18th century pulpit. And it's high up and at the bottom there's a desk for the clerk whose job it would be to line out these psalms in some cases if they went for that form.

So he would say, And so on.

If he had a good voice, that would be good. But experience suggests it might not have been. Salters, of course, for this purpose inevitably appeared.

The dominant one being Sternhold and Hopkins of 1562, which went through many revisions but actually existed on into the 19th century. Tate and Brady is another one that kind of went into competition with it.

All this up until the, I don't know technically how one should, we speak of the high church movement, that's too vague, the tractarians, the early 19th century high church movement or Anglo-Catholic movement came in.

[26:36] Until then, metrical psalms would be pretty well what you would expect in your visiting a parish church in England. Now, some of the hymns that have come out of non-conformism would have leaked in, but officially that was your diet.

So, in these metrical psalms, the Old Testament songs of praise and repentance, the 150 psalms, were squeezed into poetic forms and poetic meters.

The results were sometimes very beautiful. Here's the early American Bay psalm book of 1549, with Psalm 23, which you may remember, maybe we still do, I can't, I'm not sure, sing at St.

John's, My shepherd is a living Lord, nothing, therefore I need. In pastures fair, near pleasant streams, you settle me to feed. You bring my wandering spirit back when I forsake your ways, and lead me for your mercy's sake in paths of truth and grace.

Goes on to speak of when I walk through the shades of death, your presence is my stay. Wonderful words. The last verse is very moving.

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[27:59] My wife Susan loves this verse. The sure provisions of my God attend me all my days. O may your house be mine abode, and all my work be praise.

There would I find a settled rest while others come and go, no more a stranger or a guest, but like a child at home. It's a lovely use of language.

Peter Hitchens, of all people, not Christopher Hitchens, his brother who's a Christian, speaks of the dark purity of the English language around this time.

It's a lovely phrase. Now, there were some that were not quite so successful.

How about this? Metrical version of Psalm 62 from the 1665 Scottish Psalter. Although my soul hath sharply been assaulted, yet towards God in silence have I walk it, in whom alone all health and hope I see.

[29:03] He is mine health and my salvation sure, my strong defence which shall forever endure, therefore afraid I need not much to be. And this treat from Psalm 115, a mouth they have speechless, nor moving tongue nor lips, and eyes they have but see no wit, no more than do dead chips.

Ears they have and hear not, as do the ears of man, a nose also, but to no use, for smell nothing they can. That's a little unfortunate.

A famous one is William Keat, Psalm 100, all people that on earth do dwell, we know this well, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice, persistent theme, at this time, with cheerful voice.

I love this, about this period we're in. It isn't self-pitying, breastfeeding, cheer, often in the face of great adversity, and certainly, as you know, in the early parts, well, also the early parts of the Reformation in England are dangerous, and there was much suffering.

The Puritans certainly felt it. Hymns serve with mirth, ha, his praise forth tell. Come ye before him and rejoice. There were some other horrors which are just interesting, more in the area of hymns.

[30:35] Hymns, freely composed, music, words, allow more license. Dr. Benjamin Keech, a Baptist minister in Southwark, wrote, well, he was actually the first to introduce hymns into regular worship in an English congregation.

It was good news except for the quality of some of his work. Some of his work, let's be fair. Here meets them now that worm that gnaws and plucks her vitals out.

The pit too on them shut her jaws, this dreadful is no doubt. Here meets them now the worm that gnaws and plucks her doesn't or repentance like a bucket is to pump the water out.

Leaky is our ship alas which makes us look about. Scottish hymnody contributed this in verses concerning Jonah, not Scottish hymnody, that's a mistake, sorry, another hymn of this type.

Ah me, this is an awesome place without air coal or candle, says Jonah. Nothing but fish's stripes to eat and fish's stripes to handle. So, we need more of that today.

[31:52] So, these, I said, introducing hymns to English congregations, but not note, Anglican ones. The first person credited with an attempt at an English hymnal was George Wither in 1623, but against some opposition because the defenders of the metrical sounds were vociferous.

They believed firmly in Calvin's directions and preferences and stuck by them. One of Wither's hymns is The Lord of Heaven Confess, which is in with one voice hymnal that we use.

Many more I could mention of people who started to write hymns and did so, but, well, John Dunn was, of course, Anglican. He was dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, but the cathedral's always a little different from the trend that we're tracing here.

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He wrote Let Us With a Gladsome Mind. We still sing. Oh, no, that's Milton. Milton wrote Let Us With a Gladsome Mind. Bunyan, of course, wrote He Who Would Valiant Be. Again, red-blooded texts.

Richard Baxter gave us Ye holy angels bright who wait at God's right hand, or through the realms of light fly at your Lord's command. Assist our song, or else the theme too high will seem for mortal tongue.

[33:11] And it goes on, you'll remember, My soul, bear thou the part, triumph in God above, and with a well-tuned heart, sing out the songs of love, and all my days let no distress nor fear suppress his joyful praise.

And, of course, another greatly loved hymn from this period is George Herbert's Let All the World in Every Corner Sing, My God and King. So, in all these very, very fast skimmed examples, we get, I think, or pick up a consensual belief in central biblical truths, confidently stated, endorsed, and reinforced, and an eager embracing of these truths in poetry.

Some of the terms would not go down well today in our politically correct climate, fear him, you saints, and you will then have nothing else to fear. Fear? I thought God was a God of love.

Then there's Isaac Watts, the father of English hymnody. 1647 to 1748, he knew well about the cost of discipleship as a nonconformist and had been imprisoned several times for it.

He wrote nearly 800 hymns, as well as many in the officially sanctioned metrical psalm form, but also even those freshly written with a kind of New Testament emphasis.

[34:43] His hymn texts, for the most, spare the singer self-indulgence, self-pity, and sentimentality, though there are some exceptions. There's a constant awareness, just as with his contemporaries and predecessors, with an awareness of God's blinding glory.

Jesus is securing an eternal life for us, and a practical and courageous attitude to this short and troublesome life. In other words, a healthy, balanced spiritual outlook.

Begin my tongue, some heavenly theme, and speak some boundless thing, the mighty works or mightier name of our eternal King. The final verse. How would my leaping heart rejoice and think my heaven secure?

I trust the all creating voice and faith desires no more. There's the much loved when I survey the wondrous cross. With great humility of approach, I hardly need to read it to you because you know it so well.

My richest gain I count but loss. And then we can't just ponder over that because at the end he says love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all, it's me but it's you as well as we sing it together.

[36:01] And its strength of course to rise from scripture itself. Galatians 14 I think. That can't be right, Galatians. God is a name my soul adores.

Who can behold the blazing light? Who can approach the consuming flame? None but thy wisdom knows thy might. None but thy word can speak its name.

Other hymns of similar bend are from all who dwell beneath the skies. Some of these will be familiar. Joy to the world, we give immortal praise, I sing the almighty power of God, I'll praise my maker while I breath, or some have it, or praise the maker, God is the refuge of his saints.

It goes on and on. Similarly, God is a name my soul adores. So, I mentioned that one, sorry. As we move on into the depths of the 18th century, we find other names.

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Philip Doddridge, who gave us, O God of Bethel, great God, we see that mighty hand. William Cooper, these are dates of these people tend to run from into the 1700s and up to the 1800s.

[37:14] William Cooper was died in 1800. Sometimes a light surprises, God moves in a mysterious way, though, interestingly, looking, I think, ahead more than he thought, he gave us there is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins, which I find very difficult imagery, but has many imitators and hits a tone which we're going to see more of.

John Newton, 1725 to 1807, Amazing Grace, of course, not the only one, but the most famous one, and James Montgomery could go on. But rising supreme above them all, of course, is Charles Wesley.

Now, he died in 1788, his brother John Wesley a little later, in 91. John produced hymns in smaller numbers, but his chief contribution was translating some of those German pietistic hymns into English and creating hymn books.

He created a collection of psalms and hymns in Charleston in 1737, a collection of psalms and hymns in London, printed in 1738, a collection of hymns for the use of the people called Methodists in 1780, and a pocket hymn book for the use of Christians of all denominations 1785.

John and Charles Wesley worked together on both sides of the Atlantic. They both, along with George Whitefield, ended up where Susan and I have just moved from, in the Savannah-Charleston corridor.

[38:57] And it's amazing to go to the downtown Savannah, and there outside City Hall is a big historic plaque to George Whitefield. George Whitefield preached here. I wonder if that would be allowed in Canada.

And at the church where I served and we attended, it's pretty certain that Wesley visited. He certainly went to the church around the corner, St. Phillips, and it wasn't a very successful period for John Wesley.

Nevertheless, that's what they did. And in that commuting across the Atlantic, they encountered Moravian missionaries and heard them singing their beautiful chorale-like songs, much, I think, influenced by Luther's heritage and modeling.

And particularly during big storms, they just sang. When in those days, a big storm in the Atlantic could mean the end of your life. There they were, singing songs, greatly impressed them.

They both underwent, and again, I'm sure you know more about it than I, separate conversions, but very, very strong moments in their lives. Of course they were.

[40:12] They both carried a deep conviction about the importance of hymns in the Christian life and valued their ability to encourage and build up and edify. And they also held themselves to the very highest standards poetically and theologically.

But this really shows up most vividly in Charles' work. Hundreds of hymns produced by Charles, including his own hymnals, so that only a fraction of his output really now remains in popular use, but plenty.

Jesus, the name high over all, just to look at a few highlights, ye servants of God, hark the herald angels sing, to us a child of royal birth. We have time only to sample, but let earth and heaven combine, angels and me agree, to praise in songs divine the incarnate deity.

Our God, is a wonderful line, our God contracted to a span incomprehensively made man. Ah! Made perfect by his love and sanctified by his grace, we shall from earth remove, and see his glorious face.

Then shall his love be fully showed, and man shall then be lost in God. The theological integrity of these kind of hymns is very striking, and the assurance that lies behind them.

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[41:36] You can sing them, confident that there isn't some gremlin around the corner, either a squirm-making image of soft beds and glassy seas and withering flowers, or some heresy.

You turn the page and come to verse eight. The author's assumptions give all their work a foundation of sound theology and doctrine, and a personal vision of the glory that awaits the saints.

What should we say of Christ the Lord is risen today, love divine, all love's excelling. With the words, finish then thy new creation, pure and spotless may we be, let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee, changed from glory into glory, sanctification again, till in heaven we take our place, till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love and praise.

All these images can be checked back into scripture, nothing fanciful there. I could go on, but time doesn't permit. Let me just read what John Wesley said about his standards in compiling and editing hymns both of his brothers and his own.

He says, may I be permitted to add a few words with regard to the poetry. I will speak to those who are judges thereof with all freedom and unreserve. To these, I may say without offence, because he was coming under attack and criticism for these hymns, in these hymns there is no doggerel, no botches, nothing put in to patch up the rhyme, no feeble expletives.

[43:19] Here is nothing turgid or bombast on the one hand, or low and creeping on the other. Here are no cant expressions, no words without meaning. Those who impute this know not what they say.

We talk common sense, whether they understand it or not, both in verse and prose, and use no word but in a fixed and determinate sense. Here, Ara, allow me to say, both the purity, the strength and the elegance of the English language, and at the same time, the utmost simplicity and plainness suited to every capacity.

So, that, in a few words, I think, speaks beautifully of the quality of his little self, well, he's defending himself against slander, but in that self-affirming paragraph, he does indeed sum up the quality of the hymns of Charles Wesley, and the translation of the hymns that he himself handled.

I need to jump a century because nine o'clock is coming up. I want to be quite clear, no era is dead loss.

Have I said enough? The 19th century and romanticism in the arts generally made a valuable contribution to civilization and to the arts and to a lesser extent the church.

[44:58] I personally feel that a lot of our problems in late 20th century church worship and certainly into today stem from this. But, you know, on the positive side, who can complain about Cecil F.

Alexander's There is a Green Hill far away? She lived 1818 to 1895. Or Henry Light's 1834 text, Praise My Soul, the King of Heaven, which I'm going to take a look at again in a couple of minutes.

Or William Washington House for All the Saints. Holy, Holy by Bishop Haber, dated 1827. Now, you start to see some little quaintisms creeping in.

There's a glassy sea, of course, and then there's which word and art and ever shall be. It seems a little awkward and creates a few rolled eyes today in congregations amongst the young.

Even in Praise My Soul, the King of Heaven, we're beginning to see references to feeble frames and being frail as summer flowers and we perish. It's all right, but you just think that's a bit it's the kind of thing you would think to put off your average 14-year-old male who's been denied a hockey practice that morning and he is singing about frail flowers that perish.

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[46:19] Once in Royal David City, once again by Cecil Francis Alexander, has some wonderful things about it, but has those sappy verses in the middle. A new awareness of children as children, all good children, all children, all Christian children should be mild obedient as he.

Again, your 14-year-old in genes is going to have something to say about that. But they were, children begin to see as children, not as little adults, which I think has some drawbacks in that you start to get a church which breaks down its outreach and teaching into age groups.

things. You have the influence of people like John Henry Newman, who of course went across from Anglicanism into Catholicism to become Cardinal Newman, causing a huge scandal.

In 1866, well, his hymn, Lead Kindly Light, apparently refers to that transition. He was being led. When you catch some of his Anglo-Catholic sympathies in lines, in other words, fine hymn, praise to the holiest in, I'm not saying this isn't fine, but in a hymn known we know well as praise to the holiest in the height, that curious verse, and that a higher gift than grace, a higher gift than grace, should flesh and blood refine, God's presence in his very self and essence all divine.

Imagery now starts to change and reflect the wider use of poetry in 19th century cultural life. At the same time, there's this strange holding on to a pseudo-Elizabethan language, or perhaps a book of common prayer language, which is fine, but that seems to be a requirement of this style.

[48:10] And I understand that. About Elizabethan language, there is this ability to convey majesty and these attributes that we've just been considering more readily, partly because it was the Bible, as was Luther's Bible in Germany, a shaper of the language of the people at the time.

So it's not surprising. But it's a kind of throwback language seemed to be important at this time for the Victorians, let's say, to convey serious and religious thoughts.

hymn. In many of these hymns, there's a trinitarian and doxological statement, praise God, usually at the outer edges of the hymn, so you can see it a bit like a sandwich.

Once in Royal David's City being one example, praise my soul, the king of heaven being another. And good. But in between, there's a tendency for poetic license to run rampant.

So the robust invitatory language of the 18th century hymn writers is now often replaced by gentle admonishment or even in children's hymns, a little rap over the knuckles, as in Christian children almost be mild, would be good as he.

[49:30] It seems to me, this is just my thought, that at this time we're seeing a culture deeply impacted by the romantic view in the arts at the expense of biblical truth, not to eliminate it, but at the expense of.

There's a nod to biblical truth, but this how I like to see and think of Jesus, how I understand God, creeps in as a frequent, as a feature.

Nothing illustrates it better, and it's being harnessed to the music. of the romantic era, then the piece I went to Kingston to play two weeks ago on Good Friday, Stainer's Crucifixion.

John Stainer was organist at St. Paul's Cathedral in the mid-19th century. I think he was a devout man, interesting character, and with the help of the Reverend J.

Sparrow Simpson cobbled together this collection of both biblical passion accounts and reflective hymns and recited, in some cases, little solos or arias, if you like.

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[50:42] I was reminded of how music, this is a little off topic, but how music can completely change the impact. When Christ says, you must forgive, I can't remember the precise text right now that he uses, but it ends up with two men singing in kind of 19th century parlour song style.

Thou must forgive, forgive, forgive. You feel you've missed the only bit that's missing.

That was the kind of mindset or expectation then that seemed to run through this period. And that's not in the evangelical wing.

We're talking very much middle class and upper class, I suppose, Anglican churchmanship. One of J. Sparrow Simpson's verses says, By thy look so sweet and lowly, while they smote thee on the face, by thy patience calm and holy, in the midst of keen disgrace, crucified I turn to thee, son of Mary, plead for me.

Sweet becomes a very important word at this time. It was used in Wesley's time, but it had a slightly different cachet. At this point, it's kind of very much to my mind, to my ear, sugar on the, what do you put sugar on?

[52:13] Something. Cake. Yes, sweet is now a staple in hymns of this era. Other children, in fact, a child-likeness, a nursery-likeness, seems to creep into many hymns, even for adult consumption.

Once again, the Christmas carol, once from Royal Davis City, he was little, weak and helpless, tears and smiles like us, he knew like us. I mean, I'm sure there's some truth in it, but it's turned into something more than truth.

What about this, by Edwin Paxton Hood? I love to think, though I am young, I like to think, I like to think, that my Saviour was a child, that Jesus walked this earth along with feet all undefiled.

Why feet? They, I don't know her first Dorothy, I think it's Helen Stone, says, I can picture Jesus toiling, carpenter of Nazareth town, in his face a great glove shining, working till the sun goes down.

Who says? By his children still he stands, blessing labour of the hands. There are obvious isms and some other isms going on.

[53:26] Jesus' hands, Margaret Cropper tells us, were apparently kind hands, doing good to all, healing pain and sickness, blessing children. Well, I'm sure they weren't unkind, but are hands kind?

I don't know. Washing tired feet and saving those who fall, Jesus' hands were kind hands, doing good to all. To which I can only say yuck.

Jesus, good above all other. The tameness of the language compared to the 18th century, dark purity. Adults were only given a slightly different medicine by Frank Fletcher.

Feet again. Your feet were strong to climb the path of duty. A bit of public school, British public schoolism creeping in here. Your lips divine taught us the words of truth. Your kind eyes marked the lilies in their beauty.

Your heart was kindled at the zeal of youth. A bit of heroic schoolboy imagery creeping in there, I think. In his immortal love forever full, forever flowing through, Mr.

[54:29] Greenleaf Whittier, he's an American Quaker, died in 1892, describes our Lord's presence thus, so warm, sweet, tender, even yet a present help is he, and faith still has its all of it and love its Galilee.

Well, you get the picture. I believe the effect of these things is it robs Christian statement, public proclamation, praise and collective worship.

It undermines its gravitas. Perhaps it takes away its dignity. The dignity of holy writ. And that hinders clear-minded Christian thinking.

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Breast-beating, or as Ang Douglas, a very interesting person who has written a book on the feminization of American culture, very much with the aid of the church. Forgive me, I don't mean that in a politically incorrect way, but that she speaks of breast-beating and enforced confessions instead of genuine repentance.

Of the, it is I, Lord, I alone who nailed thee to the tree type. That was very much, of course, in the pietistic tradition. Even Isaac Watts sort of foresaw this.

[55:43] T'was I that shed the sacred blood. I nailed him to the tree. I crucified the Christ of God. I joined the mockery. Yes and no, I would say. And then, of course, there are these hopelessly ambitious dedications.

Oh, I will follow the star of my soul through deep shades of life to the goal. That should keep the 14-year-old happy because he can probably think of his hockey practice. Yet let thy cross be born each day by me.

Mind not how heavy if with thee. It's too good to be true. And it begs that Peter-like, it begs that kind of Peter-like riposte that he received.

Yeah, so to speak. If you can imagine Jesus saying it this way. Yes, yes, okay. But I tell you, before the cock crows thrice, you will betray me. We can't trust ourselves this much.

I think that's what troubles me. Clumsy imagery detracts from the true awe and adoration. I've got to skip, but just to quote an Austin Phelps in the 19th century, working in a theological seminary at Andover.

[57:04] Hymns, in his opinion, express the heart of the church. They should not have, quote, an excess of the analytic element. They should be well-written, tasteful, beautiful. Their purpose is to inspire, uplift, and cheer.

Well, I would agree with that. They are to act as a kind of tonic to the worshiper. Unquote. Hymns were not, in other words, to be intellectual.

Phelps was using hymns to further and define that split between the theology of the intellect and the theology of the feelings. things. So, I need to skip.

Yes. Okay. Excuse me. Well, I do try and arrange this skip because I'm running out of time. The Romantic movement, or the Victorian movement, to be better to say, in the arts, and especially in poetry, flowed into the Edwardian era.

Musicians call this period post-romanticism. Much more satisfactory musically, to be honest. The fruits of it can be seen best in the English hymnal, a book which we considered getting when I was here at St. John's, with Ralph Vaughan Williams at the editorial helm.

[58:26] 1906. And it lifted English hymnody out of the worst stylistic excesses, both poetically and musically, as typified by the ubiquitous 1861 hymns, Ancient and Modern.

That's still published, but of course, greatly revised. Nevertheless, the 19th century impact was so great, it is with us today. The fascinating hymnal is the Songs of Praise, 1925, used by, perhaps some of you remember it, schools, left, right, and center.

Two examples from it will perhaps give you a hint of what it could be like. There was some good stuff in it, but, These things shall be. These things shall be a loftier race than e'er the world hath known shall rise with flame of freedom in their souls, and light of science in their eyes.

They shall be gentle, brave, and strong, to spill no drop of blood. This is 1906. But dare all that may plant man's lordship firm on earth and fire and sea and air.

Quite a list. They shall be simple in their homes, and splendid in their public ways. On and on. And then, I'll skip that.

[59:43] You've got things like Arthur Shaulnessy's, With wonderful deathless ditties we build up the world's great cities, and out of a fabulous story we fashioned an empire's glory.

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These hymns make no mention of God or Jesus Christ. Well, some of them may. I want to be careful with that. At least many of them. I vow to thee my country, by Sir Cecil Spring Rice.

Yes, that's right. That doesn't mention God or Jesus. Good music, Gustav Holst. Other gems, men of England, who inherit rights that cost your sires their blood, by Thomas Campbell.

O beautiful my country, by F.L. Homer. Be thine a nobler care. What heroes thou hast bred, O England, my country, by G.K. Menzies.

And, more famously, because it's still used, especially on Remembrance Day, O Valiant Hearts, by D.S. Arkwright. Written, I think, after the First World War.

[60:44] God and Jesus do get a look in, but only to interweave the Passion and Easter accounts and Christ's sacrifice with that of the brave soldier. O Valiant Hearts, who to your glory came through dust of conflict and through battle flame, tranquil you lie, your knightly virtue proved, your memory hallowed in the land you loved.

And, of course, the singing of things like I Did Those Feet in Ancient Times, words by Blake, which I never understood fully, sung at anything from soccer finals to the last night of the proms.

Very few, I think, can have a clue what the words are about. It doesn't matter. It makes you feel good. Then, in 1971, what about a skip?

The arrival of The Hymn Book. I like the title. The Hymn Book. Our Red Hymn Book in Canada. There's a confidence, a self-confidence there, which I find is very, very interesting.

And we get this... I've got to stop. I know I have, but let me just quickly... Oh, yes. We meet you, O Christ.

[61:58] This is Frederick Herman Kahn, not of all of whose hymns are in the least bit to be deprecated, but this one is interesting. We meet you, O Christ, in many a guise.

Your image we see in simple and wise. You live in a palace, exist in a shack. We see you, the gardener, a tree on your back. Praise the Lord with joyful cry.

Let the mood of praise run high. Praise him who with mighty deeds human greatness far exceeds. Oh, that's nice. Praise him with a sound that swings, with percussion, brass and strings. Let the world at every chance praise him with a song and dance.

There's a clumsiness here, a loss of some subtlety of language at least, but also other threads creeping in. Sing we a song of high revolt. In 1971, that would please the hippie community.

Make great the Lord his name exalt. Sing we the song that Mary sang of God at war with human wrong. Not all, you know, of bad intent, but it just, to my ear, ain't working very well.

[63:10] Let's have a look at some others before I try to stop soon. What that hymn book did to Jesus Loves Me, this I know, is very interesting.

And it's just cute that they lumber at number one, two, three. For the Bible tells me so is changed to and the Bible tells me so. Traditional verses dealing with the washing away of sin, firm promise of eternal life, heaven's gate, hope and wide, and several original references to being with him after death are studiously removed.

There's nothing much left in it. Multi-faith themes appear. Sidney Carter with his Lord of the Dance, but more to the point, with Every Star Shall Sing a Carol, number 428, the words of which are praise him by whatever name you know.

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Then, so, oh, the prize winner is, sorry, I must just show you this one, is God of Concrete, God of Steel, which I don't think is typical, but it is interesting just in its self-confidence and scientism.

God of Concrete, God of Steel, God of Piston and of Wheel, God of Pylon, God of Steam, God of Gerda and of Beam, God of Atom, God of Mine, all the world of power is thine.

[64:50] Desperate struggle for rhyming here. Goes on, Lord of Cable, Lord of Rail. Lord of Science, Lord of Art, ah, Lord of Map and Graph and Chart, Lord of Physics and Research, Word of Bible, Faith of Church.

And then there's this doxological final verse, Tradition still carrying through God, whose glory fills the earth, gave the universe its birth, and so on. That's by Richard Granville Jones.

And then, just last of all, Common Praise, the Anglican Hymn, 1998. Praise my soul, the King of Heaven.

In its version, there's a removal of all regal or royal imagery. All imperialist imagery is removed, such as tributes and gloriousness.

And in that case, there's an alternate set of words in italics underneath that you can sing if such things offend you. Fathers are out where possible, it isn't always, but they try.

[65:53] Subtle changes in wording. Angels teach us. Adoration instead of adore him. Bow down before him, change the sun and moon, or creation bowing down before him.

And just putting a distance between God and us. You've probably heard enough. And some of the hymns are, I won't, because we're running late, I'll just refer to a hymn, know him by many names, bring many names, mother God, father God, old man God, youthful God.

It's there. CPP, common praise 554, you can see it for yourself. 390 is womb of life and source of being.

There's a lot of, I say this with respect, feminist influences and a liberal treatment of the revealed person of Christ. that's not to say there's no good.

Our cities cry to you, oh God, by Margaret Clarkson, is a very fine new hymn, and really speaks of the redemption of this world. And there are many good contemporary writers, Timothy Rees, Stuart Townend, Paul Jones at 10th Presbyterian in Philadelphia, Peter Halleck in Seattle, who just died last week, Tim, did I mention Timothy Rees?

[67:19] We have some of his hymns in With One Voice. But you can see, I think, through this archaeological dig, a shift in theological priorities and doctrinal beliefs.

And I should stop right there. I hope it hasn't been too tedious a dig. And I should understand that the language became ■■■■■■■ confident employment and he gall ray should pass in moved with being discouraged through and disconnected through the unl Keller saw Facebook anecdote thatís I thought que re was

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