

## **Lecture #11 – History of Sacred Music – Part IV**

### **I. Review and Introduction**

We have begun to see the radical changes brought about by the Reformation and the general advances in music (harmony, hymnals, etc.). In this lesson we will see how the sacred music of England is set afire in the flames of revival. We will also look at the early sacred music in America.

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” – philosopher George Santayana

### **II. Music of English Revivalism**

As we saw the importance of music in the Reformation so we can see its importance in the history of revivals. Even a cursory overview of the history of the great revivals will show that music was both a product and catalyst of those mighty movements of God among men. We begin to see this especially in the as we look at the great revivals fanned by the Wesleys and Whitefield in the late 1700's.

#### **Wesley Brothers**

The **Wesley brothers, John** (1703-1791) and **Charles** (1708-1788), were ordained Anglican ministers whose lives were transformed by their personal piety, study of Scripture, evangelism, and interaction with groups like the Moravians. Their ministries led to the formation of the Methodist denomination. As they drifted away from the liturgical practices of the Anglican church, they reworked their services to include more prayer, preaching, and singing. Charles Wesley wrote around 6,500 hymns, some of which are still popular today, including “And Can It Be?” and “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”.

John is known more for his preaching and organization of the Methodist movement, but he did compose a few hymns and translated some German ones into English. He also advocated for church music to be of high quality. In the preface for the 1780 hymnal *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*, he wrote this about the quality of the language and poetry of its hymns:

*“May I be permitted to add a few words with regard to the poetry? Then I will speak to those who are judges thereof, with all freedom and unreserve. To these I may say, without offence, 1. In these hymns there is no doggerel; no botches; nothing put in to patch up the rhyme; no feeble expletives. 2. Here is nothing turgid or bombast, on the one hand, or low and creeping, on the other. 3. Here are no cant expressions; no words without meaning. Those who impute this to us know not what they say. We talk common sense, both in prose and verse, and use no word but in a fixed and determinate sense. 4. Here are, 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. Lastly, I desire men of taste to judge, (these are the only competent judges) whether there be not in some of the following hymns the true spirit of poetry, such as cannot be acquired by art and labour, but must be the gift of nature. By labour a man may become a tolerable imitator of Spencer, Shakespeare, or*

*Milton; and may heap together pretty compound epithets, as 'pale-eyed,' 'meek-eyed,' and the like; but unless he be born a poet, he will never attain the genuine spirit of poetry."*<sup>1</sup>

John Wesley heavily promoted congregational singing. His 1761 *Select Hymns with Tunes Annexed* contains twelve pages teaching how to read music and included these words of instruction as an appendix:

*"This this Part of Divine Worship may be the more acceptable to God, as well as the more profitable to yourself and others, be careful to observe the following Directions.*

*"I. Learn these Tunes before you learn any others; afterwards learn as many as you please.*

*"II. Sing them exactly as they are printed here, without altering or mending them at all; and if you have learned to sing them otherwise, unlearn it as soon as you can.*

*"III. Sing All. See that you join with the Congregation as frequently as you can. Let not a flight Degree of Weakness or Weariness hinder you. If it is a Cross to you, take it up and you will find a Blessing.*

*"IV. Sing lustily and with a good Courage. Beware of singing as if you were half Dead, or half a Sleep; but lift up your Voice with Strength. Be no more afraid of your Voice now, nor more ashamed of its being heard, than when you sung the Songs of Satan,*

*"V. Sing modestly. Do not haul, so as to be heard above, or distinct from the Rest of the Congregation, that you may not destroy the Harmony; but strive to unite your Voices together, so as to make one clear melodious Sound.*

*"VI. Sing in Time: whatever Time is Sung be sure to keep with it. Do not run before nor stay behind it; but attend close to the leading Voices, and move therewith as exactly as you can; and take care you sing not too slow, This drawing Way naturally steals on all who are lazy; and it is high Time to drive it out from among us, and sing all our Tunes just as quick as we did at first.*

*"VII. Above all sing spiritually. Have an Eye to God in every Word you sing. Aim at pleasing Him more than yourself, or any other Creature. In order to this, attend strictly to the Sense of what you sing, and see that your Heart is not carried away with the Sound, but offered to God continually; so shall your singing be such as the Lord will approve of here, and reward when he Cometh in the Clouds of Heaven."*<sup>2</sup>

John Wesley did much to elevate and standardize church music. He helped to standardize the **pairing of text and tune** as few had done before by suggesting or providing tunes for specific texts. He wrote two books on music instruction to help train his followers. He sought to produce affordable hymnbooks so that the common people would have access to them.

Another author of this time whose legacy is still strong is **John Newton** (1725-1807). His story of being former slave-trading sea captain that was wondrously saved is still told today. He collaborated with poet **William Cowper** (1731-1800) to produce a hymnal in 1779 for his parish in Olney, fittingly

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ccel.org/w/wesley/hymn/jw.html#preface> – Accessed 12-17-21

<sup>2</sup> <https://archive.org/details/selecthymnswitht00wesl/page/n265/mode/2up> - Accessed 10-2-22

titled *Olney Hymns*. That hymnal had the first appearance of Newton's "**Amazing Grace**" and early appearance of Cowper's "**There is a Fountain Filled with Blood**".

### Beyond England

England was not the only place experiencing revivals that affected the development of church music. Wales saw a great revival that was sparked in part by interaction with the Wesleys and Whitefield, and that mixture of revival with the music traditions of the land produced a great number of hymns. **William Williams** (1717-1781) wrote over 800 hymns in Welsh and 100 in English, the best-known today being "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah".

The Moravians also well-known for their evangelistic zeal but also left a lasting impression with their music. One of the chief leaders was Nicholas Ludwig, **Count von Zinzendorf** (1700-1760), wrote over 2,000 German hymns in his life. Some of these hymns were composed extemporaneously as he led singing. He would sing a newly thought up line, which the congregation would repeat, then sing the next newly thought up line, which the congregation would repeat, and so on.

### III. Development of Sacred Music in America

We now shift our attention to the New World and how church music took root and developed there. Of course, the earliest church music traditions were brought by the explorers and settlers from their old homes and customs. But there began to be a new and unique branch of church music developing in America that was built on many sources.

Reflecting the Calvinist and Puritan influences of many of the early American settlers, the first very first book printed in America is what is now known as the *Bay Psalm Book*, published in Massachusetts in 1640. The early editions contained only the texts but the ninth edition in 1698 provided thirteen tunes. It remained popular for over a century but is best known today for its historical significance in the history of American printing.

The singing of metrical psalms is the foundation for congregational singing in America, reflecting the same practice in England and in the Reformed churches of Europe. The practice of **lining out** became the standard, in which each line was first sung by a leader then repeated by the congregation. This system worked well with congregations that were illiterate or untrained musically. But it eventually broke down as "a congregation could take an hour to sing thirty stanzas of a psalm, two or three seconds per note".<sup>3</sup> As to the quality of singing, Thomas Walter would write in 1760: "...I have observed in many Places, one Man is upon this Note, while another is a Note before him, which produces something so hideous and disorderly, as is beyond Expression bad."<sup>4</sup>

In effort to improve church music, **singing schools** began to appear. Paul Westermeyer describes how these worked in *Te Deum*:

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<sup>3</sup> *Te Deum*, p. 248, footnote #12.

<sup>4</sup> <https://people.bethel.edu/~rhomar/Prefaces/WalterPrefaceIntro.htm> - Accessed 12-17-21

*“At first minister or lay persons found patrons, hired a teacher, and reserved a meeting room in a church, private house, or tavern. The teacher instructed the students in the rudiments of music so they could sing the psalms. Students paid a fee and were expected to bring a candle and instruction book with a board to hold them. Courses usually lasted for a period of twenty-four sessions or less. By the middle of the nineteenth century itinerant ‘singing school masters’ went from community to community, organizing students into schools for about fifty cents a lesson for some thirteen lessons.”*<sup>5</sup>

The singing schools also helped introduce instruments into worship. Even churches that prohibited the use of instruments in worship, pitch pipes began to be used to set the starting tone of each song. Using the bass viol for accompaniment was introduced into churches through the singing schools and was popular in New England for some time. These simple steps helped pave the way for organs to be integrated into church music. The first permanently installed organ was originally bequeathed by Thomas Brattle to the Brattle Street Church in Boston, who then refused to accept it, and it was instead installed in 1713 at King’s Chapel.<sup>6</sup>

**Folk hymns** developed in America that were accepted into use and print through the singing schools. The combination of these influences brought about the creation of **shape notes**, first seen in 1802 in *The Easy Instructor*. The use of shape notes helped bridge the gap between trained and untrained musicians and found ready acceptance in the American frontier. Influential shape note books of the time include William Walker’s *Southern Harmony* (1835) and *The Sacred Harp* (1844).<sup>7</sup>

Another uniquely American innovation in church music is the **Spiritual**. *Sing with Understanding* defines them as “a distinct type of American folk hymn characterized by text repetitions of phrases and usually a chorus”<sup>8</sup>. Today, spirituals are often associated with African American traditions though their use was far more widespread. Many old camp meeting songs can be classified as spirituals.

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<sup>5</sup> *Te Deum*, p. 149

<sup>6</sup> *Te Deum*, p. 257

<sup>7</sup> Many great resources on shape note singing can be found at <https://home.olemiss.edu/~mudws/resource/>

<sup>8</sup> *Sing with Understanding*, p. 45