

Lecture #11 – History of Sacred Music – Part III

I. Review and Introduction

So far, we have looked at the sacred music in ancient Israel and the first millennia of the church. We have observed the primary focus on the voice, words, and doctrine placed on music. We have seen great lengths taken to ensure that sacred music remained sacred and holy.

Today, we will begin to look at the music of the Reformation. We will see the tug-of-war between Scripture vs. tradition. We will see concerted efforts to make sacred music more accessible and relatable to the common congregant.

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

II. Music in the Churches of the Reformation

There is no possibility of underestimating the impact of the Reformation on the world. Spiritually, politically, and socially it was an upheaval that transitioned the Western world from the Dark Ages into the modern world.

While theology is usually the focus of studying the Reformation, it is important to note the role of music in it. There was a growing dissatisfaction not only with the doctrines of Catholicism but also its practices including music. We noted before the changes in music that isolated and excluded the common worshipper. Also of concern was secular music that had crept into sacred use. Erasmus (1469-1536) wrote:

“We have introduced an artificial and theatrical music into the church, a bawling and agitation of various voices, such as I believe had never been heard in the theatres of the Greeks and Romans. Horns, trumpets, pipes vie and sound along constantly with the voices. Amorous and lascivious melodies are heard such as elsewhere accompany only the dances of courtesans and clowns. The people run into the churches as if they were theatres, for the sake of the sensuous charm of the ear.”¹

The First Hymnals

From its earliest days there was a renewed emphasis on congregational singing. It is estimated that by the end of the 16th century that over 20,000 new German hymns had been composed.² The first printed hymnals began to appear. The first known to us is a Czech hymnal printed in 1501 (a full sixteen years before Luther’s *Ninety-Five Theses*) that was produced by followers of John Hus (1369?-1415). The first Lutheran hymnal was published in 1524 and is known as the *Achtliederbuch* (“book

¹ *Te Deum*, p. 163

² *Te Deum*, p. 101

with eight songs”). The first Anabaptist hymnal, the *Ausbund*, was published in 1564 and is still used by the Amish.

One characteristic of these early hymnals that prevailed into the 1800’s is the **separation of text and tune**. The afore mentioned *Achtliederbuch* contained eight songs but only four melodies to sing them to. This is accomplished by the texts being written in standard meters that could match any tune written to match those meters. Generally, the writers of the text and tune were not the same.

There were many other developments in church music during this period that still affect us today. The use of harmony developed using the *Kantional* style, which placed the melody in the highest voice with lower voices harmonizing. In the Lutheran tradition this arrangement became known as a *chorale*. Instrumental accompaniment was developed using the *basso continuo* style, usually written in notation as figured bass.

Psalmody

Another innovation of the Reformation is **metrical psalmody** which developed out of its great emphasis on the use of the Scriptures. The text of a psalm would be taken as a foundation, then reworded or rewritten so that it fit into a standard meter. For an example, here is Psalm 23 from *The Scottish Psalter of 1650*:

*The Lord’s my shepherd, I’ll not want.
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green: he leadeth me
the quiet waters by.*

*My soul be doth restore again;
and me to walk doth make
Within the paths of righteousness,
ev’n for his own name’s sake.*

*Yea, though I walk in death’s dark vale,
yet will I fear none ill:
For thou art with me; and thy rod
and staff me comfort still.*

*My table thou hast furnished
in presence of my foes;
My head thou dost with oil anoint,
and my cup overflows.*

*Goodness and mercy all my life
shall surely follow me:*

*And in God's house for evermore
my dwelling-place shall be.³*

Ongoing Debate

Still, there was much debate regarding the use of music in churches. **Martin Luther** (1483-1546) heavily promoted the use of music in many forms, such as in worship and education. He was a musician and singer himself and composed many hymns. In his book *Te Deum: The Church and Music*, author Paul Westermeyer highlights the following elements of Luther's thoughts on music: (1) "music is a gift of God's good creation", (2) "music bears the word", (3) music joins "praise to proclamation", and (4) "music is an important way the Christian community celebrates the victory Christ has won".⁴

While Luther promoted music, others sought to silence it. **Ulrich Zwingli** (1484-1531) was both a gifted singer and musician, yet he preached against the use of music in churches. In 1524, his followers went through the churches of Zurich, Switzerland, not only removing the relics and images used by Catholicism but also nailing the organs shut to silence music in those churches. His reasoning behind abandoning church music was that (1) God had nowhere commanded singing in worship, (2) music was of the physical or material realm and at odds with the spiritual, and (3) that music was related to play and not the Word of God.⁵ He wrote about Paul's command to sing: "Here Paul does not teach mumbling and murmuring in the churches, but shows us the true song that is pleasing to God, that we sing the praise and glory of God not with our voices, like the Jewish singers, but with our hearts."⁶

In between the positions of Luther and Zwingli was that of **John Calvin** (1509-1564). To Calvin singing was a form of public prayer⁷ and thus a fundamental element of church worship. As to what type of songs should be sung Calvin reasoned that the Psalms should be the songs used in churches. In his preface to the Genevan Psalter of 1565, Calvin wrote:

What is there now to do? It is to have songs not only honest, but also holy, which will be like spurs to incite us to pray to and praise God, and to meditate upon his works in order to love, fear, honor and glorify him. Moreover, that which St. Augustine has said is true, that no one is able to sing things worthy of God except that which he has received from him. Therefore, when we have looked thoroughly, and searched here and there, we shall not find better songs nor more fitting for the purpose, than the Psalms of David, which the Holy Spirit spoke and made through him. And moreover, when we sing them, we are certain that God puts in our mouths these, as if he himself were singing in us to exalt his glory. Wherefore Chrysostom exhorts, as well as the men, the women and the little children to accustom themselves to singing them, in order that this may be a sort of meditation to associate themselves with the company of the angels.⁸

³ <https://thewestminsterstandard.org/psalm-23/> - Accessed 12-16-21. It is written in Common Meter (8.6.8.6) with ABAB rhyme scheme.

⁴ *Te Deum*, p. 145-147

⁵ *Te Deum*, p. 151-152.

⁶ As quoted in *Changed From Glory to Glory* by Scott Aniol, p. 188-189.

⁷ "As for public prayers, there are two kinds. The ones with the word alone: the others with singing."

<https://psalterium.wordpress.com/2008/02/23/calvins-preface-to-the-genevan-psalter-of-1565/> - Accessed 12-16-21

⁸ <https://psalterium.wordpress.com/2008/02/23/calvins-preface-to-the-genevan-psalter-of-1565/> - Accessed 12-16-21

The impact of Calvin on church music is profound and it also greatly affected early English church music. Key principles he established include the use of metrical psalms, one note per syllable of text, printed music with only melody line, unison/octave singing, and unaccompanied/acapella singing. He promoted the singing of Psalms at home and often harmony was used in that setting.

Music and Anabaptists

The Anabaptists had similar debates on the use of music. Scott Aniol describes the theology and positions of the Anabaptists:

“These “Radical Reformers” spread the doctrine of believer’s baptism among dispirit groups like the Swiss Brethren, Hutterites, and Mennonites, followers of Menno Simons (1496-1561). Figures in these movements consistently demanded that all doctrine and practice should be based exclusively on clear biblical prescription and that there should be no compromise made with man-made innovations or traditions. Furthermore, rather than having a centralized ecclesial body formulate official statements of faith to which all must ascribe, which even Zwingli advocated, these groups insisted that each local congregation was free to establish its own faith and practice based upon the Word of God alone....

“These convictions, of course, affected how Anabaptist groups worshiped. For the most part, Anabaptists rejected liturgical books, insisting that each congregation had the right to worship as they believed most consistent with New Testament example and precept. This central principle renders generalization concerning Anabaptist worship impossible, yet since these groups attempted to derive their worship practice from Scripture, several common characteristics appear. They all, of course, reserved baptism for those who expressly professed faith, and also insisted that only believers who had been baptized could participate in Communion. They also stressed the necessity of purity for those taking Communion, emphasizing church discipline, what they referred to as ‘the ban’ (Matt. 18:15-18) – prohibiting those living in unrepentant sin from joining in the Lord’s Table.”⁹

Conrad Grebel (1498?-1526) and **Balthasar Hubmaier** (1482-1528) both were against the use of music in churches. Followers of **Menno Simons** (1496-1561) and **Jacob Amann** (1644-1730?) did use music in church worship. Of their followers today, all sing in their services but only some Mennonites use instruments.

III. Development of Sacred Music in English

English Psalmody

The use of **Metrical Psalms** dominated the church music of England during and after the Reformation. The first complete psalter was published by Robert Crowley in 1549. *The Whole Booke of Psalmes, Collected into English Meter*, better known as the **Sternhold and Hopkins** Psalter was published in 1562. This work proved the most influential and was the official psalter of the Anglican Church until the 1800’s. Perhaps its greatest legacy is the inclusion of **William Kethe’s** version of Psalm 100 and its use of an existing tune by Louis Bourgeois, OLD HUNDREDTH.

⁹ *Changed From Glory to Glory: The Liturgical Story of the Christian Faith* by Scott Aniol, p. 191.

*All people that on earth do dwell,
sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.
Serve him with joy, his praises tell,
come now before him and rejoice!*

*Know that the Lord is God indeed;
he formed us all without our aid.
We are the flock he comes to feed,
the sheep who by his hand were made.*

*O enter then his gates with joy,
within his courts his praise proclaim.
Let thankful songs your tongues employ.
O bless and magnify his name.*

*Trust that the Lord our God is good,
his mercy is forever sure.
His faithfulness at all times stood
and shall from age to age endure.¹⁰*

Still, the Sternhold and Hopkins Psalter did not enjoy universal acclaim. The Scots created their own psalter in 1562 which is considered to have better music with its use of more French tunes.¹¹ A *New Version of the Psalms of David* was published by Nahum Tate and Nicholas Brady, whose work was never as popular and used much looser paraphrasing of the Psalms. Isaac Watts produced in 1719 his own psalter, *Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament*.

English Hymnody

Eventually England saw a combining of the principles of Calvin's psalms and Luther's hymns as both began to be developed side-by-side. The earliest English hymnbook was likely **Miles Coverdale's *Goostly Psalmes and Spirituall Songs*** that was published in 1535.¹² It followed Luther's theories on harmony and hymns as well as Calvin's use of psalms. It was subsequently condemned and burned by Puritans. The next English hymnbook, *Hymnes and Songs of the Church*, was published in 1623 by George Wither.

Many well-known names appear as early hymn writers in England. The poet **John Milton** (1608-1674) wrote a few hymns that very loosely followed Psalms. **Richard Baxter** (1615-1691) was an early advocate for singing hymns and wrote a few. **John Bunyan** (1628-1688) wrote portions of *Pilgrim's Progress* in a metrical style that were later set to music. **Thomas Ken** (1637-1711) wrote one

¹⁰ https://hymnary.org/text/all_people_that_on_earth_do_dwell - Accessed 12-16-21

¹¹ *Sing with Understanding*, p. 120.

¹² I could only find a few fragments of the original available to view online. The text of the can be found beginning on p. 535 at https://www.google.com/books/edition/Remains_of_Myles_Coverdale_Bishop_of_Exe/go7zrx_vC9QC?hl=en&gbp v=1&printsec=frontcover

the words now commonly known as the Doxology (“Praise God from whom all blessings flow...” and so on) and sung to the tune OLD HUNDREDTH.

Ongoing Debates

Of course, there were debates on the use and character of music in churches. Early Congregationalist leader **Henry Barrowe** was concerned with the nature of music in churches. He wrote to a Mr. Gifford that he was not “against that most comfortable and heavenly harmony of singing psalms, but against the rhyming and paraphrasing the Psalms as in your Church; nor yet... so much against that, as against the apocrypha erroneous ballads in rhyme sung commonly in you Church instead of the Psalms and holy songs of the canonical Scriptures.”¹³ Early English Baptist **John Smyth** (1544?-1612) wrote against the use of paraphrased Psalms as it came from a book and not the heart. His concern (complete with old-timey spelling!): “Whither meter, Rithme, & tune, be not quenching the Spirit?”¹⁴

Many voices rose in support of Psalm singing. One famous example was *Singing of Psalmes a Gospel Ordinance* by **John Cotton** of Boston in 1647.¹⁵ He concludes that singing must be with the voice and not merely in the heart by stating (1) singing with the voice is meant in Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, and I Corinthians 14:15-16, (2) New Testament examples of singing in Matthew 26:30 and Acts 16:25, and (3) Old Testament prophecies such as Isaiah 52:8 or Psalm 100:1 foretell the New Testament duty to sing. He makes the assertion that the psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 are all referenced to the book of Psalms. He concludes that if it is lawful for us to translate the Bible into a new language it is therefore lawful to translate the Psalms into a metrical form for singing.

Of note is the position of the Baptist pastor **Benjamin Keach** (1640-1704). Unlike most other Baptists of his day including John Smyth, Keach grew to support singing and gradually introduced it into his church. Keach engaged in 1691 in a series of pamphlets in discourse with a man named Isaac Marlow on the use of singing in church worship. He quoted earlier authors like John Cotton in defending singing in church but went one step further: he endorsed the singing not only of Psalms but also of hymns.¹⁶ In the same he published a hymnbook titled *Spiritual Melody*.

The greatest hymnwriter of this time was **Isaac Watts** (1674-1748). In *A Short Essay Toward the Improvement of Psalmody* originally published in 1707, Watts gave five reasons for writing new songs: (1) to make songs “suited to the present Case and Experience of Christians”, (2) that “to express unto God what Sense and Apprehensions we have of his Essential Glories” was not possible if “confining ourselves to David’s Psalms, or the Words of any Songs in Scripture”, (3) that Ephesians 5:19-20 and Colossians 3:16-17 “are the two chief Commands of the New Testament for Singing; both bid us make Melody, and give Thanks to God the Father, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”, (4) “there is not a Set of Psalms already prepared that can answer all the Varieties of the Providence and the

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https://www.google.com/books/edition/Historical_Memorials_Relating_to_the_Ind/1HQrAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1 – p. 61, Accessed 12-16-21

¹⁴ *Te Deum*, p. 184.

¹⁵ This book can be found online at <https://archive.org/details/singingofpsalmes00cott> (Accessed 12-16-21) but here we are following the summary in *Te Deum* p. 186-188.

¹⁶ *Te Deum*, p. 188-190; *Sing with Understanding* p.130

Grace of God”, and (5) singing was part of the “several Parts of Divine Worship” along with prayer and preaching.¹⁷

The impact of Watts is immeasurable. Before Watts singing churches generally sang psalms, after Watts they generally sang hymns. From his pen came some 700 hymns and paraphrased Psalms, some are still well known today: “Joy to the World”¹⁸, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”, “Alas, and Did My Saviour Bleed”, and “I Sing the Mighty Power of God”¹⁹.

Another hymn writer that was quite popular in her time but largely forgotten today was **Anne Steele** (1716-1778). She was the daughter of a Baptist preacher in Hampshire, England, that wrote under the pseudonym “Theodosia”. 144 hymns, 34 metrical psalms, and 50 moral poems that were published as part of her complete works that was published posthumously.²⁰ Hymnary.org shows that her “Father, Whate’er of Earthly Bliss” is found in 832 hymnals²¹ and “Father of Mercies, In Thy Word” is in 740 hymnals.²² In another sign of her popularity, an 1808 Episcopal hymnal printed in Boston contained 152 hymns of which 59 were by her.²³

¹⁷ <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/30409/pg30409-images.html> - Accessed 12-16-21

¹⁸ Is actually a paraphrased psalm based on Psalm 98.

¹⁹ Originally written as a children’s song. Shows how far our children’s music has fallen!

²⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne_Steele - Accessed 12-16-21

²¹ https://hymnary.org/text/father_whateer_of_earthly_bliss - Accessed 12-16-21

²² https://hymnary.org/text/father_of_mercies_in_thy_word - Accessed 12-16-21

²³ <http://hymnbook.igracemusic.com/people/anne-steele> - Accessed 12-16-21