

A photograph of a church interior, showing rows of wooden pews in the foreground and background. In the distance, there are two arched stained glass windows with colorful designs. The lighting is warm and soft, creating a serene atmosphere. The text is overlaid in white on the image.

TRANSFORMING
CONGREGATIONAL
SINGING
for the
21ST CENTURY

David W. Cloud

Transforming Congregational Singing for the 21st Century

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to the remnant of New Testament churches that are purposefully going against end-time apostasy, to the faithful members thereof who want to please God more than man, and to the courageous preachers who are leading them. I refer to churches that do not move with the times and do not fear bearing the reproach of the times, that are striving to be, truly, a spiritual house made of living stones, that are refusing to conform to the world in Christian music. I refer to those Philadelphia churches that have a little strength and have kept Christ's Word, and hast not denied His name and that are living in expectation of the Trumpet and the Shout whereby they will be "kept from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world" (Revelation 3:8-10).

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"I am convinced that studying and singing in a more serious way congregationally, in the old Baptist way, will help protect the churches today from going contemporary. It is Biblical. It pleases God. It glorifies Jesus Christ. It is deeply edifying. It is educational. It is interesting. It is good for the families. It is good for the children and youth. It promotes spiritual and doctrinal unity."

—David Cloud, 2024

Introduction

This is a Bible Course

Transforming Congregational Singing for the 21st Century is for reading, but it is also designed to be a Bible course for home and church education. It consists of the textbook, review questions, and tests. It is part of the Way of Life Bible College. - <https://www.wayoflife.org/bible-college/>

Main Objectives

- That churches will study the Scriptures to learn how to conduct congregational singing according to God's plan and that they will test everything by Scripture, understanding that they are responsible to follow God's Word and are at liberty to follow God's Word. The main part of this course is a detailed study of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 to see exactly what God's plan is.
- That churches will understand and be aware of the traditions that have influenced them unwittingly.
- That churches will plan every part of congregational singing on purpose in light of the Scripture's teaching and do nothing by mere tradition or habit.
- That churches will guard against allowing the church's music and singing to become worldly, guarding against the incremental entrance of the contemporary sound and philosophy.
- That churches will understand how to measure music to distinguish between sacred and non-sacred sounds.
- That churches will guard against allowing the music/singing to be an entertainment program.

Rippon's Baptist Hymnal: A Time Machine

“What we seem to have done is to trade a big treasure chest full of rubies, emeralds, sapphires, opals, and diamonds (to mention no more) for a much smaller treasure chest, having fewer varieties of precious jewels” (Jim Orrick, “A Baptist Preacher and a Methodist Hymnal,” chapter 14, *Amazing Love! How Can It Be: Studies on Hymns by Charles Wesley*).

This book is for churches that are committed to congregational singing in an age when it is disappearing into a fog of ignorance, vain tradition, lukewarmness, and contemporary praise.

In a nutshell, this book is about transforming congregational singing in Bible-believing churches by getting back to the Bible's teaching on the subject and by learning from the example of past revival eras.

We want to encourage churches to rediscover the powerful practice of truly biblical congregational singing, a practice that was largely lost to most Baptist churches a century and more ago.

The Goals of This Book

To Recover a Full-Blown Biblical Pattern of Congregational Singing

The goal, first of all, is to recover a full-blown biblical pattern of congregational singing as given by divine revelation at the dawn of the church age:

“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:18-19).

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16).

The foremost thing we want to do is study the Bible itself to see the what, why, and how of congregational singing. Baptists are people who profess that the Bible is the sole authority for faith and practice, and that is how we want to operate in every area of church life.

We are 2,000 years down the road from the era when the first churches were established and directly instructed by the apostles and prophets. Our first priority is not to look at churches in history, but to look at churches at the very beginning of our history. In every generation, we must “get back to the Bible” and reject any vain tradition that has crept in unawares. This is the essence of spiritual revival, and it can be experienced in any time and place.

So our first goal is to recover a full-blown biblical pattern of congregational singing.

This is what we intend to do with the chapter “A New Testament Manual on Congregational Singing.”

To Recapture the Wisdom and Power of the Revival Eras

Second, our goal is to recapture some of the wisdom and power of the revival eras when the greatest hymns were produced.

Judging in a Non-judgmental Age

“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Th. 5:21).

It is impossible for a Christian individual, home, or church to stand correctly for the Lord Jesus Christ and the truth of God’s Word without *the conviction that it is essential to judge all things by Scripture.*

“Prove all things” (1 Th. 5:21) means exactly what it says, and “all things” certainly includes music! In fact, music is one of the most powerful things in modern society.

To prove all things is essential not to be led along by one’s emotions.

It is essential to avoid following the crowd and capitulating to that which is “popular.”

It is common today to believe that Christian music is strictly a personal matter that is beyond judgment. It is a matter of “taste” and “preference.” Thus, “my music” shouldn’t be criticized.

If this were true, the Bible would not say so much about music, but actually it says a lot.

We live in the era of end-time apostasy that is plainly prophesied in Scripture. Apostate Christianity is a judge not, live by your own lusts Christianity. Notice the following description:

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Ti. 4:3-4).

A New Testament Manual on Congregational Singing

“I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also” (1 Corinthians 14:15).

“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:18-19).

“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Colossians 3:15-16).

“Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms” (James 5:13).

In Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3, we have the Holy Spirit's instructions for congregational singing. It is a description of congregational singing as God intends it. It is a beautiful, power thing. There is nothing else like New Testament congregational singing in all of human society.

Here we see a congregation of born again saints, a congregation of spiritual and biblical depth, building itself up through the singing of sacred music. We see congregational singing as an essential part of the ministry described in Ephesians 4, “From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every

part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:16).

This is not a church in which the congregational singing is a mere ritual that is hurried through. It is not a religious practice or just tradition. It is not a church that sings mindlessly, distractedly. It is not singing for singing’s sake. It is not singing for entertainment.

It is a church of born again people who are filled with God’s Word and who are singing from the heart to God and to one another, singing with understanding, singing wisely with clear biblical purpose.

Recently, after a congregation had sung “Beulah Land,” I got up to preach and asked how many knew the meaning of “beulah.” If I remember correctly, two people raised their hands, and the pastor was not one of them. I’ve done this type of thing from time to time in various churches, with similar results.

In the passages in Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3, we have a divinely-inspired educational course for congregational singing. This type of singing does not happen automatically. The entire church must be educated, and each generation must be educated. The passages are addressed to the assembly as a whole. The lessons must first be understood by the church leaders and music people, then the whole congregation must be instructed, from the youngest to the oldest. The education must be given to each generation. It is a never-ending task. Every church is potentially only one generation away from apostasy.

In these last days, the vast majority of churches have moved far away from the pattern set in Ephesians and Colossians. Spiritual revival is to repent of going astray and to return to God’s Word. This is necessary in every generation and in every area of church life.

Singing the Psalms

“Speaking to yourselves **IN PSALMS** and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19).

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another **IN PSALMS** and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16).

“How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a **PSALM**...” (1 Corinthians 14:26).

“Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing **PSALMS**” (James 5:13).

New Testament churches are instructed to sing the Psalms, referring, of course, to the Psalms in our Bibles. The book of Psalms is a divinely-inspired sacred songbook.

The title “Psalms” in the English Bible is from the Greek *psalmos*. It means “a poem to be sung to a stringed instrument.” It is the title that is used in the New Testament (Acts 1:20; Eph. 5:19). *Psalmos* is from *psallo*, which refers to touching or plucking the strings of a harp. The name of the book of Psalms in Hebrew is *tehillim* (songs of praises). The individual psalms are called *miz'mor*, meaning melody of praise.

The Psalms have been sung by God’s people from ancient times, beginning in the Davidic kingdom. (The oldest Psalm in the collection is by Moses, Psalm 90:1.)

Singing the Psalms was common in Baptist churches until the latter 19th century. By the 20th century, very few Baptist churches in America sang the Psalms. The American Baptists (northern) and Southern Baptists didn’t sing Psalms, except

Learning from the Past: The 15th to the 17th Centuries

In the chapters “Learning from the Past,” we give some of the highlights of the history of congregational singing. Sound history is very important. It helps us know where we came from and how we got to where we are today. It is educational and challenging when viewed through the perfect lens of Scripture.

When studying church history, we are to “prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Th. 5:21). The standard for proving is the Scripture rightly divided (2 Ti. 2:15; 3:16-17). Note that we are at liberty to “hold fast” to everything that is good.

Thirty-three times in the Psalms God’s people are commanded to “sing”!

Christ’s churches have always been singing churches.

Singing was practiced by Jesus and His little flock (Mt. 26:30).

Congregational singing was practiced in the first churches (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

Congregational singing died wherever apostasy reigned (a heretical priestcraft destroyed the priesthood of believers). The Spirit-filled singing of the people was replaced with the mournful chanting of monks. The Council of Laodicea (late 4th century) actually banned congregational singing.

“At the time of Martin Luther’s ordination (1507), song and chant in the Catholic Church were the preserve of the clergy and the choir; the congregation, in the body of the church, was silent ... even if the congregation had wanted to sing it would have found

Learning from the Past: The 18th Century

The 18th century has been called “the century of divine songs” and “the golden age of hymnody,” and this was the product of the First Great Awakening at the beginning of the century and the Second Great Awakening at the end.

The latter 19th century was also a great era for hymns. We cover this in the section on “The Revivalist/Fundamentalist Era.” in the chapter “Learning from the Past: The 19th Century.” In fact, this was the most prolific era. Wonderful hymns were written then. Yet for depth of theology and poetic genius and the strength of churches, the 18th was superior, in our perspective.

The hymns of Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley, and Anne Steele, in particular, are peerless, in our estimation. Nearly every stanza is magnificent in poetic beauty and theological truth. The poetry is powerful but retains a simplicity so that it is easy to sing and memorize. It is extremely difficult to know where to start when extolling the glory of these hymns.

Baptist hymnals since the turn of the 20th century have retained a few of these treasures, but most have disappeared. The vast majority of the jewels by Watts and Wesley are gone, and as for Anne Steele, as we will see, none of her hymns are found in the hymnals commonly used among Baptists in America, though she was the preeminent Baptist hymn writer of all time.

The First Great Awakening

To understand the hymns of the 18th century, we must understand the times in which they were written.

Learning from the Past: The 19th Century

The 19th century was a great hymn writing century, the greatest in terms of the number of hymns that were written, and it was a century of revivals. There was the Second Great Awakening in the first part of the century and the Revivalist/Fundamentalist movement in the second half. There were sprinklings of revival throughout the century, even during the American Civil War.

Hand-in-hand with spiritual revival was the growth of great end time evils, including theological liberalism, Darwinianism, Humanism, Marxism, and Freudianism.

The 19th century was a time of great change. It is called the Second Industrial Revolution. It witnessed the birth of the telegraph, telephone, trains, steamships, transcontinental cables, electricity, light bulbs, photography, motion pictures, the automobile, the elevator, the skyscraper, plastic, and dynamite. It was the Victorian era, named for Queen Victoria, who reigned from 1837-1901. Great Britain reached its zenith as an international power.

Second Great Awakening

After the American War of Independence and the founding of the American nation in 1770s and 1780s, there was spiritual decline, and God mercifully sent a Second Great Awakening, which is usually dated from about 1790 to 1840.

It is said that “the closing years of the eighteenth century show the lowest low-water mark of the lowest ebb-tide of spiritual life in the history of the American church.” (Of course, that was written before the apostasy of the 20th century.)

The terrible French Revolution was only the greatest of the many revolutions that shook nations. Napoleon wrought turmoil and devastation across Europe.

In 1798, the Presbyterian General Assembly described the condition of society as follows:

“Formidable innovations and convulsions in Europe threaten destruction to morals and religion. Scenes of devastation and bloodshed unexampled in the history of modern nations have convulsed the world, and our country is threatened with similar calamities. **We perceive with pain and fearful apprehension a general dereliction of religious principles and practice among our fellow-citizens, a visible and prevailing impiety and contempt for the laws and institutions of religion, and an abounding infidelity, which in many instances tends to atheism itself.** The profligacy and corruption of the public morals have advanced with a progress proportionate to our declension in religion. Profaneness, pride, luxury, injustice, intemperance, lewdness, and every species of debauchery and loose indulgence greatly abound” (Leonard Bacon, *The History of American Christianity*, chapter XIV, “The Second Awakening”).

In New England, apostasy and heresy leavened society and deadened the churches. Church historians called it the period of *Deterioration*. Timothy Dwight, grandson of Jonathan Edwards and president of Yale University, described the condition in New England after the Revolutionary War as follows:

“The profanation of the Sabbath ... profaneness of language, drunkenness, gambling, and lewdness, were exceedingly increased; and, what is less commonly remarked, but is not less mischievous, than any of them, a light, vain method of thinking, concerning

Weighing the Music

This is the text to the video presentation “The Language of Music” which is part of the series *The Satanic Attack on Sacred Music*. We highly recommend viewing the video rather than merely reading this chapter, because it is impossible to illustrate musical styles in a book. The video is packed with graphics, audio and video clips.

Book: <https://www.wayoflife.org/satanic-attack/>

Video: <https://www.wayoflife.org/satanic-attack-video/>

Many former fundamental Baptist churches are converting to evangelical rock & roll churches, and the adoption of Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) and contemporary Southern Gospel is at the very heart and soul of these transformations. God’s people must learn to recognize contemporary music and protect themselves against it or they will be swept along the broad river of end-times apostasy.

Music is a language, and the message of the music must match the message of the lyrics. This is a foundational principle.

In contrast, CCM holds the philosophy that music is “neutral.”

Christian Rucker’s Creed - “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all music was created equal, that no instrument or style of music is in itself evil—that the diversity of musical expression which flows forth from man is but one evidence of the boundless creativity of our heavenly Father.”

Rick Warren - “I reject the idea that music styles can be judged as either ‘good’ or ‘bad.’ Churches need to admit that no particular style of music is ‘sacred’” (*Purpose Driven Church*).

Harold Best - Music is “morally relative ... [It is] essentially neutral in its ability to express belief, creed, moral and ethic exactitudes, or even world view” (*Music Through the Eyes of Faith*).

Bill Gaither - “God speaks through all different kinds of musical styles.”

Because of the “music is neutral” philosophy, CCM encompasses every sort of secular music style: boogie woogie, blues, rock, jazz, urban, techno, metal, thrash, punk, and rap/hip hop.

The concept that music is neutral is fundamental to contemporary Christian music. As soon as this is accepted, the battle for sacred music is lost. It results in the erasure of all boundaries.

That music is neutral is denied by world famous conductors.

“Music has powers for evil as well as for good” (Howard Hanson).

That music is neutral is denied by the rock crowd.

“Don’t listen to the words, it’s the music that has its own message” (Timothy Leary, 1960s LSD guru).

That music is neutral is denied by prominent social critics.

“Rock can’t be made respectable. The music will simply subvert the words” (William Kilpatrick, *Why Johnny Can’t Tell Right from Wrong*).

“The transformative power of rock lies ... in the music itself--in the SOUND, and above all, in the BEAT” (Robert Palmer, *Illustrated History of Rock & Roll*).

That music is neutral is denied by the movie text painter. Text painting refers to manipulating the mood of an audience with different types of music styles.

Weighing the Lyrics

In his hymnals, John Roberts of Wales rejected “all that was tawdry [poor quality], meretricious [attractive but having no value] [and] superficial.” That is a good standard for church hymns.

1. Beware of false doctrine (second blessing, praying to the Spirit, etc.)
2. Beware of a continual diet of shallow songs.
3. A word about revivalist songs

Beware of False Doctrine

Colossians 3:16 emphasizes the necessity of the hymns being conformed to the Word of God. Every hymn and spiritual song must be tested by this standard. Our hymns must be theologically sound.

There is a considerable amount of false doctrine in the standard Baptist hymnals.

We don't want to be hyper-critical, but we want to be solidly biblical. We want the truth to prevail everywhere in our lives, homes, and churches. We want to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3). We want to prove all things (1 Th. 5:21). We want to protect ourselves in an age when error encroaches on every side.

Deeper life, second blessing theology

As a young Christian, I often wondered about the words of hymns, such as the following, that describe an experience I could not relate to: “perfect happiness, perfect peace, not a shade of care, perfect submission, perfect delight, walking

Studying the Hymns

“... their brethren that were instructed in the songs of the LORD” (1 Chronicles 25:7).

“For God *is* the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding” (Psalm 47:7).

“I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also” (1 Corinthians 14:15).

“... teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Colossians 3:16).

“Music is portable theology.”

To sing with understanding, it is necessary to study hymns.

The 288 Levites who were set apart by David for the temple worship under the leadership of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun studied this glorious business intently (1 Chronicles 15:16-28; 16:4-6; 23:1-5; 25:1-31). And what a most wonderful business it was to praise God with instrument and word in Solomon's temple at the height of its glory, when it was the center of attention of the kings of the earth (2 Ch. 9:23)! It was their high privilege and delight. To their commendation, they were *instructed*; they were *skillful*; they were *cunning*; they *excelled* (1 Ch. 25:7; 1 Ch. 15:21-22).

In Israel's temple, only a few had this privilege, but the New Testament church is a house of priests, and one of their chief ministries--all of them, every one of them--is teaching and admonishing one another with hymns according to Colossians 3:16. This requires *studying* psalms and hymns. It is priest business.

The congregation that learns to study hymns can sing with much more understanding and effectualness. The goal should be for every member and every family to be engaged in this

spiritual exercise. The greater the number of members who are involved in this, the better for the overall spiritual life of the assembly.

Hymnwriter John Roberts of Wales insisted that “good singing could come only from practice, and from services in which the entire congregation had made an accurate and intelligent reading of the hymns.”

This is a fruitful exercise for family devotions and family get togethers. This way the children can learn to study hymns from their earliest years.

I sang hymns in church from an early age, but I don't ever recall studying the hymn lyrics. In fact, I did not do that in any type of serious manner until I was in my late 60s.

As we saw in the chapter “Rippon's Baptist Hymnal: A Time Machine,” Baptist churches of old took psalm and hymn singing seriously. They studied hymns. Pastors used hymns to educate the people in doctrine. Many of them wrote hymns for this purpose, to accompany their preaching. They were singing with real understanding. The Moravians memorized their hymns so well that they could join the leader when he started the first line of any stanza in any hymn! The Hutterites educated their children in hymns from an early age. The children memorized hymns as they memorized Scripture.

Spurgeon loved the hymns. He collected hymnals. (I saw his collection in the Spurgeon Library at William Jewel College in the 1990s; it has since relocated to Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.) He wrote hymns. He studied hymns. He used hymns in his private devotions. He used hymns to instruct and edify his congregation. He taught them new hymns. He was on the lookout for rich hymns fitting for this purpose. He published his own hymnal with hundreds of hymns plus metrical arrangements of all 150 psalms. (See the

The Song Leader

Churches must have the right song leaders if they are to have effectual song services according to Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16.

We put a lot of effort into training qualified men to lead singing. This course on song leading was developed over many years from this training. We train multiple men so we can have a variety of leaders for the various services, including regular services, prayer meetings, gospel meetings, house fellowships, and special occasion meetings. And we train multiple men so as to have leaders for new church plants.

A song leader is a matter of practicality. We are commanded to sing congregationally (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). A handful of people can do this without a leader, but not a larger church. It would be confusion, and confusion does not please God (“For God is not the author of confusion,” 1 Co. 14:33). God is a God of order. “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Co. 14:40).

It is true that the New Testament does not spell out the position of song leader or music director, but the Old Testament sets forth this pattern and there is no need to restate it in the New. Again, it is a matter of practicality. The “chief musician” is mentioned 55 times (Ps. 4:1; 5:1; 6:1; 9:1; 11:1; 12:1; 13:1; 14:1). God tells us that the Old Testament is for our example. “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Ro. 15:4).

Beware of Contemporary Musicians

Recovering Hymn Singing

There is a movement among contemporary worship musicians to recover hymn singing, but we find this to be more dangerous than helpful.

Consider two of the dangers: First, they do not renounce the “music is neutral” heresy, so they have no musical boundaries. Second, they do not renounce ecumenism, so there are no doctrinal boundaries. Thus, they can be a bridge to many false and dangerous things.

The Gettys are a chief example of this. Keith and Kristyn Getty partner with Stuart Townend to operate Getty-Townend Music (GTM). They have a massive influence. “Up to 100 million people worldwide sing Keith Getty’s hymns in church services each year” (“Hitting the right notes,” *Belfast Telegraph*, Aug. 11, 2018).

Among all of the contemporary worship musicians, we consider the Gettys perhaps the most dangerous, because what they are offering is wrapped in a package that is attractive to “fundamentalists” -- their Irish brogue and physical attractiveness, their *fairly* conservative appearance, their great talent, their effervescent cheerfulness, their beautiful family, and the comparative spiritual depth of their lyrics. They aren’t writing the typical CCM 7-11 music (7 words sung 11 times).

But as appealing as the Gettys are, they are a bridge to very large spiritual danger.

The Getty’s spoken goal is to “bring everyone together musically” (www.keithgetty.com). They want to “bridge the gap between the traditional and contemporary” (<http://>

One Baptist Church and 350 Years of Biblical Singing

The Metropolitan Tabernacle of London, England, has represented the biblical, old Baptist style of congregational singing throughout its history. For more than 350 years, this church has practiced Ephesians 5:18-19 and Colossians 3:16.

The church began in the 1600s during the era of Anglican persecution of non-conformists.

“From some one of the many Baptist assemblies which met in the borough of Southwark our church took its rise. Crosby says: ‘This people had formerly belonged to one of the most ancient congregations of the Baptists in London, but separated from them in the year 1652, for some practices which they judged disorderly, and kept together from that time as a distinct body’” (Charles Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle: Its History and Work*).

The first pastor, in 1652, was **William Rider**. This was three years after the execution of King Charles I and a few months before Oliver Cromwell was appointed Lord Protector of the English Commonwealth (1653-1658).

Benjamin Keach

Benjamin Keach (1640-1704) pastored the church from 1668 until his death. This was during the reigns of Charles II (1660-1665), James II (1685-1688), and William III (1688-1702), Prince of Orange and leader of the Glorious Revolution which deposed James II and returned Protestant power to England. The Toleration Act of 1689 and Bill of Rights largely ended persecution against “non-conformists.”

Wesley's Magnificent Hymns of Christ's Incarnation

Charles Wesley's *Hymns for the Nativity of the Lord* (December 1745) proclaim, in peerless poetry, the glories of Christ's incarnation. The collection is not merely about a babe in the manger; it is about the magnificent mystery of God manifest in the flesh. This is the true message of Christmas. (The original collection consisted of 18 hymns. Three more were added to the 1810 edition.)

Hymns for the Nativity was very popular, going through about 25 printings in Wesley's lifetime.

<https://ia801903.us.archive.org/11/items/newyemn00wesl/newyemn00wesl.pdf>

https://divinity.duke.edu/sites/divinity.duke.edu/files/documents/cswt/31_Nativity_Hymns_%281745%29.pdf

https://ia902508.us.archive.org/1/items/bim_eighteenth-century_hymns-for-the-nativity-o_wesley-john_1750/bim_eighteenth-century_hymns-for-the-nativity-o_wesley-john_1750.pdf

The only well-known hymn that remains from this collection is "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus," which was hymn number X.

In this collection, every biblical aspect of the incarnation is considered:

- Its mystery and paradox (God made man)
- Its purpose (Christ's vicarious sacrifice, resurrection, the eternal redemption of sinners, and the new creation made one in Christ)

- Its revelation of God (infinite power, infinite love, infinite grace and mercy, infinite wisdom, infinite holiness)
- Its infinite benefits to man
- Its infinite instruction for men and angels
- Its endless delight as the subject of meditation
- The necessity of proclaiming it to all men
- The necessity and joy of worshipping the God of the incarnation

The delightful, challenging lyrics are bursting with instruction. Nearly every stanza is a perfect theological jewel. They “are sprinkled with vivid, arresting, and provocative phrases as well as soul-lifting and exhilarating thought. The spirit is that of adoration and wonder” (T. Crichton Mitchell, *Charles Wesley: Man with the Dancing Heart*, p. 196).

Consider Hymn VI, “Join, all ye joyful nations,” stanzas 5 to 10 -

5 Go, see the King of Glory,
Discern the heavenly Stranger,
So poor and mean, His court an inn,
His cradle is a manger.

6 Who from his Father's bosom
But now for us descended,
Who built the skies, on earth he lies,
With only beasts attended.

7 Whom all the angels worship,
Lies hid in human nature:
Incarnate see,--The Deity,
The infinite Creator!

8 See the stupendous Blessing,
Which God to us hath given:
A child of man, in length a span,
Who fills both earth and heaven.

Lessons on Congregational Singing from the Old Testament

David organized the music worship program for the Tabernacle. This began on the glorious occasion of relocating the ark of God from Gibeah to Jerusalem (1 Ch. 15:1-24). After the ark was set in a tent, David appointed a continual music worship program (1 Ch. 16:1-7, 37-42). It was all in preparation for the Temple. When David was old, in connection with the charge to Solomon about building the Temple, he further organized the Levitical music program, assigning 4,000 priests to this task (1 Ch. 23:1-5; 25:1-31). He did this by divine revelation (2 Ch. 28:11-13).

There had been no such thing from the time of Moses until David. The divine Tabernacle service is described in Exodus and Leviticus, and there is no music. There were no Levites appointed to music. There was no hymnal.

With David, a new era begins. We are moving further along toward the coming of Christ! David is promised an eternal throne and kingdom, ruled by his Son, who is Christ (2 Sa. 7:12-16).

In a foreview of that glorious kingdom, David begins to write the Messianic hymnal. The last five psalms of the hymnal explode with Messianic praise. "Praise" is mentioned here 50 times. These psalms are about "an everlasting kingdom" (Ps. 145:13; 146:13). The words "for ever" and "everlasting" and "all generations" appear nine times. These psalms prophesy of a time when the LORD will "build up Jerusalem" and strengthen the bars of her gates and "gather together the outcasts of Israel" and make peace within her borders and fill her with the finest of wheat (Ps. 147:2, 13, 14). Then, the entire universe will resound with praise to the LORD: the

angels, the sun and moon and stars, the heavens and the earth, the mountains and hills and trees, the beasts and flying fowl, the kings, the princes, the judges, the young men and maidens, old men and children (Ps. 148:1-13). Then the Lord's people will execute vengeance upon the heathen (Ps. 149:6-9). Then the LORD will be praised with the sound of the trumpet, the psaltery and harp, the timbrel and dance, the stringed instruments and organs, the loud cymbals and the high sounding cymbals (Ps. 150:3-5). Then everything that has breath will praise the LORD (Ps. 150:6)!

In 2 Ch. 5:12-13, we see the music ministry operating full blown in Solomon's Temple.

“Also the Levites *which were* the singers, all of them of Asaph, of Heman, of Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, *being arrayed* in white linen, having cymbals and psalteries and harps, stood at the east end of the altar, and with them an hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets;) It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers *were* as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD; and when they lifted up *their* voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the LORD, *saying*, For *he is* good; for his mercy *endureth* for ever: that *then* the house was filled with a cloud, *even* the house of the LORD.”

These passages contain instruction for the churches. “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning...” (Ro. 15:4).

This does not mean that we are to construct grand buildings and have magnificent professional choirs and orchestras. The New Testament church is a pilgrim church. We live in tents, so to speak, like Abraham. We are composed of the weak things of the world rather than the noble (1 Co. 1:26-29). Typically, we don't have the top rank singers and musicians.

A Treasure Chest of Little Known Hymns

The following lesser known hymns are intended to be a sampler for individuals, homes, and churches in the effort to expand their hymn repertoire. These are some of the hymns I have found during the research for *Transforming Congregational Singing for the 21st Century*.

We have included links to music scores, so that copies can be printed. As far as we know, all of these hymns are in the public domain.

A church can expand its repertoire of hymns by purchasing binders for each pew and adding the pages of newly discovered hymns.

“A Garden of Roses” (Charles Weigle)

[https://www.wayoflife.org/free_ebooks/
life_and_songs_of_charles_weigle.php](https://www.wayoflife.org/free_ebooks/life_and_songs_of_charles_weigle.php)

“A Hiding Place” (Charles Weigle)

[https://www.wayoflife.org/free_ebooks/
life_and_songs_of_charles_weigle.php](https://www.wayoflife.org/free_ebooks/life_and_songs_of_charles_weigle.php)

“A Little While” (James Deck)

<https://hymnary.org/page/fetch/CHoF1944/358/high>

“Above and Below” (trans. Frances Bevan)

[https://www.christmysong.com/767/
jtr767en4_in_the_bosom_of_the_Father.pdf](https://www.christmysong.com/767/jtr767en4_in_the_bosom_of_the_Father.pdf)

“All Hail the Power of Jesus Name” (Edward Perronet)

Six stanza version which includes addition by John
Rippon

<https://hymnary.org/page/fetch/CWH2021/489/high>

Resources on Sacred Music and Congregational Singing

Brethren Archive - Hymnology and Poetry

<https://www.brethrenarchive.org/hymnology/>

Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology (by subscription)

<https://hymnology.hymnsam.co.uk>

The Cyber Hymnal

Nearly 15,000 hymns and songs; lyrics, music, biographies, history, audio, photos, drawings
hymntime.com

Deck, James

Links to hymns by James Deck, a prominent Brethren hymn writer.

https://www.christmysong.com/james_george_deck/

Draw Near: Savoring and Singing the Presence of God

by Wendell Nisly and Lloyd Kauffman, Shenandoah Christian Music Camp.

Draw Near, a Mennonite publication, is a 10-lesson course for educating an individual, family, or church in music in preparation for hymn singing. It begins with the basics of song notation, like notes and scales, and ends with the minor mode and special musical symbols. There is a Draw Near Student Guide, a Draw Near Teacher's Guide, and a Draw Near Quizzes and Tests. There is also a set of Draw Near Video Lessons composed of 10 videos, one for each of the 10 lessons in the textbook. (As far as we can tell, they aren't using the term "presence of God" in the charismatic sense of a mystical, experiential encounter with God through music.) "It's very well done, and I know for sure it would be useful for