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A HOMILETICAL HERMENEUTIC FOR THE RE-WRITING OF HYMN TEXTS

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned that with the growing practice of hymn-text revision, a lack of consistency and quality is evident in some alterations which do not have the benefit of clear criteria and guidelines for such revision. This is of particular interest to preachers and pastors because of the significant relationship between preaching and hymn singing which have complemented and supported each other in the proclamation of the gospel. Sixteen issues or concerns about language usage and imagery are identified. Each of these issues is explained and examples are given to illustrate why individuals and faith groups today may have questions or difficulties with the wording in particular hymns. Homiletic theory and practice is used as the basis of a proposed hermeneutic for hymn-text revision. The five steps of this hermeneutic provide guidance to those who revise hymns, and offer a process which will lead toward consistency and quality in hymn-text revision.. The revisions of two well-known hymns are critiqued to demonstrate the process.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Dedicated to my father, Rev. Dr. Theo T. Gibson,
whose knowledge and love of hymns
have enriched my life.

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INTRODUCTION

For as long as the Word of the Lord has been proclaimed, the preacher has wrestled with both the richness of language and its limitations. Each successive proclamation requires the retranslation and reinterpretation of the sacred texts so that the words, idioms, images and message are conveyed authentically to the hearer. Each new generation of preachers is trained and encouraged to reinterpret the gospel message faithfully in contemporary language. Each sermon is, in fact, a new interpretation of the gospel.

To reinterpret the gospel, a preacher uses words to create a sermon. But there is much more at work here than the mere preparation of an address. Something else is going on which homileticians describe as an event. A sermon *happens*; it becomes a moment in time.

Sermons are spoken: This is essential to their nature, not incidental. The church has always insisted that the sermon is a spoken word. The Word is not silent. Although most of our theological libraries have large collections of sermons, these documents gained that name by having first been preached. We might even say that a written document becomes a sermon only through its having been spoken. Sermons are events in time, God's Word addressed to particular congregations in particular circumstances.¹

Martin Luther put it emphatically, that the gospel "should not be written, but shouted" and that "the church is not a pen-house but a mouth-house."² David Buttrick brings in the additional concept of community, saying, "God's Word, spoken, constitutes community, for

¹Paul Scott Wilson, The Practice Of Preaching, (Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 1995), 47.

²Martin Luther, Dr. Martin Luther Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, (Weimar, 1883-), 12:259; 37:207, and 10: 1, 2, 48; cited with discussion in Fred W. Meuser and Stanley D. Schneider, eds., Interpreting Luther's Legacy, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969), 19, 30.

God's Word always takes flesh. What is primary is neither gospel nor church but Jesus Christ who has created both a word-community and a community word."³ So the sermon, while constructed with words, becomes God at work in human existence. "Christian preaching not only reveals, it continues the work of Christ by calling, liberating, and forming a new humanity."⁴

What then is the nature of the sermon which is spoken (Wilson) or shouted (Luther) or incarnated (Buttrick)? All make reference to voice. While Buttrick cautions us against the arrogance of thinking that we can equate our own voices with that of God: "we are only human and we speak with human voices,"⁵ Wilson makes what appears to be an extravagant claim:

Preaching is no ordinary speech. However, preaching is no ordinary poetry either. It is the sound of God speaking, and as such, it is the intelligible sound of our salvation taking place. It is oral speech of a unique sort, rooted in Scripture and the oral traditions which gave it birth. It remains part of oral traditions we can no longer hear and for which historical records of sermon manuscripts are poor substitutes.⁶

There is another voice heard in the community of faith, and that is the voice of song. Whereas the voice of the preacher is usually solitary, the voice of song has within it the invitation for all to join in. Whereas the message of the preacher has new words for each sermon, the message of the song becomes a refrain, repeated over and over until it becomes part of the collective faith expression of the community. Yet there is a unity of message coming from and through the Word spoken and the Word sung. From Old Testament times,

³David Buttrick, Homiletic Moves and Structures, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 449.

⁴Ibid., 451.

⁵Ibid., 456.

⁶Wilson, 19.

psalms and singing have been a vital part of the proclamation of the Word of the Lord, and the Christian Church has continued to develop and use a great heritage of hymnody based on sacred texts and the experience of faith. The Hebrew Psalter was the first source of the early Church's hymnody. Alexander MacMillan points out,

That this beloved Book of Praises was firmly established in the primitive Church is confirmed from a number of sources. One of these is that ancient document, The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, where it is written:

Sing the psalms of David, and pursue diligently the Gospel . . .
If thou desirest something to sing, thou hast the Psalms . . .
Assemble yourselves together every day, morning and evening,
singing psalms and praying in the Lord's house.⁷

The next additions to early Church hymnody were songs derived from other Old Testament texts. The victory paean of Moses, found in Exodus 15:2, lent itself to song:

The LORD is my strength and song,
And he is become my salvation:
he is my God. (KJV)⁸

The Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures was the source of other songs, which were used from their time right up to and beyond the Reformation. The *Benedicite Omnia Opera*, a song found between Daniel 3:23 and 3:24 in the Septuagint, was used by the Western Church, and eventually ended up translated into English in the Book of Common Prayer.

When the Gospels appeared, they became a new resource for songs and hymns. Very quickly the song of Mary, "My soul doth magnify the Lord" (Luke 1:46 KJV) and the song of Simeon "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace" (Luke 2:29 KJV) were

⁷Alexander MacMillan, Hymns of the Church, (Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 1935), 2.

⁸The King James Version is quoted here in several instances because these texts have become so familiar to Church composers and musicians, and to believers in general, through hymnals and prayer books, that the same text in any of the modern English translations would not be as identifiable. This illustrates the tension between the need for updating hymn texts and the wish to hold on to that which is familiar and loved.

chosen for musical treatment. The song of Mary became the *Magnificat*, the song of Simeon became the *Nunc Dimittis*, and with other hymns drawn directly from the Gospels the heritage of hymnody grew. Not all hymns had their roots in Scripture, however, for the early Christians (like those of every age, including our own) created their own hymns and songs as expressions of their faith and experience.

Thus the body of Christian song began to take shape from the Scriptures and from the extemporized vocal expression of the early Christians. The practice of Christian song is well documented in the Scriptures. It is not known what songs or Scriptures were sung, but, for example, the account of the imprisonment of Paul and Silas relates: "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them." (Acts 16:25)

About the manner of performance, Paul writes, "I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also." (I Corinthians 14:15)⁹

Still more hymns and songs were lifted from the Epistles which were gaining popularity and status in the rather fluid "canon" of the early Church. Paul's first letter to Timothy had the wording of a hymn waiting to be sung:

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible,
the only wise God,
be honour and glory for ever and ever. (1 Timothy 1:17 KJV)

The early church sang this text with words and music familiar to them. Much later, Walter Chalmers Smith (1824-1908) rewrote the text into what was modern English at the time:

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, Thy great Name we praise.

While the sermon is new for each occasion, the hymns and songs of the faith tend to remain unchanged for longer terms between periodic revisions. Even a repeated sermon is

⁹William J. Reynolds and Milburn Price, *A Survey of Christian Hymnody*, (Carol Stream, Illinois: Hope Publishing Company, 1987), 4.

different each time it is preached because of the oral delivery and the response of the hearers. But because of the repetition of the hymn occasion after occasion, the natural consequence is that the hymn becomes, word for word, part of the individual and collective memory of the faith community. The Scriptures have been retranslated many times in the last fifty years; yet a few beloved texts such as Psalm 23 and the Lord's Prayer are still used in worship from the older version because of the familiarity of memorized text. A survey of the hymnals and hymn-books listed in the Bibliography at the end of this thesis shows that during the period from 1850 to 1970, very little revision was done to the text of the hymns shared by the various denominations of the Christian Church. They had been published and republished as fixed texts; that is, they were relatively unchanged, while great numbers of new hymns were introduced, reflecting a period in which the American gospel hymn became more and more popular.

It is only recently, since around 1970, that significant amounts of change or rewriting have been undertaken of the older hymns of the faith. As will be shown in Chapter 2, much of the reason for this interest in hymn-revision came about when issues concerning modern linguistic usage were raised, such as gender inclusiveness. Even more recently, with the advent of desk-top publishing and photocopying systems within the reach of even the smallest church, hymn texts are being changed by pastors, church musicians, youth leaders, and anyone else who wants to do so. When there is a need to change the wording of a hymn in order to clarify it for a new age, or correct a mistaken notion, or remove a single word which has picked up an inappropriate connotation, there is no clear set of guidelines for the re-writing of the hymn text. It usually falls to the pastor/preacher to be the judge of what change will be made in a particular hymn for a particular occasion in a particular church.

Most accredited theological education includes homiletic training, with its particular concentration on proclamation. Within this discipline are to be found principles and skills which pastors and preachers can use very profitably when they approach the task of rewriting hymn texts.

Since the essence of all proclamation is to convey the truth in language understood and embraced by the hearer, this thesis will demonstrate that there is similarity of purpose and complementary nature in preaching and hymn-singing (the Word spoken and the Word sung). In any given situation, whether arranging a worship service or editing a denominational hymn-book, the proclamation of the Word of the Lord spoken by the preacher and that shared in song by the worshippers should be unequivocally supportive of each other. Both proclamations are authentically rooted in the same sacred texts and Christian experiences. Chapter 1 will provide evidence of this unity between sermons and hymns.

This thesis will further demonstrate that just as in sermons, language and meaning are crucial in hymns; and many hymns now need to be revised or amended if their proclamation is to be clearly understood and embraced in a new age. Chapter 2 will identify many issues and concerns about linguistic problems and language usage in hymn texts.

It will be shown in Chapter 3 that many of the necessary tools for such revision are to be found within a current homiletic hermeneutic. A specific step-by-step hermeneutic for hymn revision will be proposed and offered for the use of those who have the task of editing and revising hymns. In Chapter 4 this proposed hermeneutic will be applied to two familiar hymns and their current revisions, as a demonstration of the validity of the homiletic approach to hymn-revision.

Finally, as hymns are sung to musical tunes, and are often identified with particular tunes, a short study of music's power to affect mood, emotion and behaviour will be explained in the context of its use and abuse in worship. Martin Luther considered music second in importance only to theology.⁹ This study of the power of music will be presented as Appendix A. Since this thesis stresses the inter-relatedness of preaching and hymn-singing, and demonstrates the value of homiletic hermeneutic to hymn-revision, it holds that this sharing can work in the other direction as well. Hymns and hymn-writers have much to offer the preacher. Appendix B will relate several things which preachers may learn from hymn-writers.

⁹MacMillan, 38.

CHAPTER 1

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SERMONS AND HYMNS

One's philosophy and theology of preaching are directly related to the particular heritage of worship and practice which influenced and guided that person's own Christian growth and discipleship. Those things which were meaningful and helpful tend to be incorporated into a fairly permanent personal pattern of worship, while things not experienced in a positive manner are easily discarded or set aside as secondary. The result is that each new generation of believers reflects both the acceptance and the rejection of the particular heritage which either surrounded that person in formative years, or was instrumental in bringing that person into faith at a later date. Some are strongly influenced by liturgy and symbols, others by evangelical fervor. The place and prominence of preaching also varies with the heritage and tradition, and may be regarded as central to some like Baptists, or secondary to the Mass as in traditional Roman Catholic practice, or left to spontaneous utterance as among the Society of Friends (Quakers).

Preaching the gospel is of great importance, both in worship (for believers) and evangelism (for those being sought by the Good Shepherd). Preaching is more than simply an exchange of information; it involves movement and direction. For the believers, it is an opportunity to be encouraged and stimulated into a deeper, more meaningful and productive relationship with the Saviour. For those who are wrestling with faith, it is the challenge to risk a relationship with God, to test for oneself the promises of Scripture, and to put the

Saviour to the test. In short, preaching always aims to start where the hearer is, and then attempt to move the hearer closer to God. This means that preaching is more than teaching and instruction in the faith. Preaching becomes the front line, where life-changing decisions are made, where new courses of action are set, and where the Gospel becomes incarnate over and over again. The heritage of the Baptists includes street preachers, both men and women¹⁰ who took the message to where the people actually were. In the 1600's these often untutored street preachers felt compelled to step outside the boundaries of the official church and challenge their hearers to consider what the preachers believed to be God's pre-eminent claim. Notable in this tradition was John Bunyan, known for his book Pilgrim's Progress, written in 1678 while he was incarcerated in an English prison for preaching without a license. From this book comes *The Shepherd Boy's Song*, written to be a faith-song of one of the characters in the allegory.

Who would true valour see,
 Let him come hither;
 One here will constant be,
 Come wind, come weather.
 There's no discouragement
 Shall make him once relent
 His first avowed intent
 To be a pilgrim.

Whoso beset him round
 With dismal stories,
 Do but themselves confound;
 His strength the more is.

¹⁰Thomas Edwards, an English Churchman, described them disdainfully as 'she preachers' in 1646." Shirley F. Bentall, "Baptists and "Freedom of Expression Without Distinction as to Sex", Faith, Life and Witness, ed. William H. Brackney (Birmingham, Alabama: Samford University Press, 1990), 279. (It would take another three hundred years for the issue of gender inclusiveness and equality to be reflected in the language of hymns.)

No lion can him fright,
 He'll with a giant fight,
 But he will have a right
 To be a pilgrim.

It is significant that at this very time, the Baptists of England were embroiled in a debate about whether any congregational singing was appropriate for worship. Benjamin Keach, who in 1673 was pastor of the Southwark (London) Particular Baptist Church, introduced the singing of a hymn at the close of the Lord's Supper, following the example of Jesus and his disciples in Mark 14:26, "When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." Slowly, congregational singing was accepted in this and other Baptist churches, "and about 1691, hymn singing became a weekly practice"¹¹ using hymns written mainly by Keach. Meanwhile, Bunyan, who was in prison for twelve years, wrote his manuscripts, and had them smuggled out and published.¹² His *The Shepherd Boy's Song* was later lifted from Pilgrim's Progress and embraced as a Baptist (Dissenter) hymn. Much later, it was included in the hymnary of the same state church which had had him imprisoned.

Among many others in a rich heritage of preaching, the Baptists also claim Charles Spurgeon, who preached repentance to thousands in his London tabernacle, Robert McCracken, the Canadian Baptist who preached the gospel and social conscience to the wealthy and prominent of New York's Riverside Church, and Martin Luther King, Jr., whose preaching still echoes through a society in the midst of change. A unifying theme in all of these was their belief that the spiritual gift of preaching was a divinely appointed opportunity

¹¹Reynolds and Price, 44.

¹² Although not active in the debate over congregational singing, Bunyan wrote hymns and was an accomplished musician. The Bunyan Museum in Bedford, England displays sheets of hymns and music written in his own handwriting while in jail, along with the flute which he made out of one leg of the three-legged stool in his cell. If the guards heard the music (not allowed), the flute was quickly put back as a leg on the stool.

to bring about change in the lives of the hearers. Faithful preaching must *move* the hearer and prompt a response, always. Faithful preaching has an implicit *therefore*.

Religious music has been closely associated with preaching. The earliest form was probably choral recitation as in this example from Deuteronomy 27:14-18 (NIV).

The Levites shall recite to all the people of Israel in a loud voice:

"Cursed is the man who carves an image or casts an idol..."

Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"

"Cursed is the man who dishonors his father or his mother."

Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"

"Cursed is the man who moves his neighbor's boundary stone."

Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"

"Cursed is the man who leads the blind astray on the road."

Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"

(etc.)

The great themes, whether preached, recited or sung, demanded a response. God's people joined their voices. It is not necessary to trace in detail the use of music and song in the history of God's people; this is well recorded in Scripture. However, there is a very pertinent theme from the New Testament which makes clear the close relationship between the spoken word and religious music:

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord," (Ephesians 5:19 NIV) [and] *...sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."* (Colossians 3:16 NIV) (my emphasis)

The writer of Ephesians and Colossians (Paul?) appears to treat as interchangeable the witness of preaching and singing. Whether spoken or sung, the truth about God, the joy of relationship with him, and the wonder of the gospel are proclaimed for all to hear; and in addition to the affirmation of the preacher or singer, the hearer is invited to respond in kind. These verses warrant some definition of the terms used to describe religious music. A hymnbook will usually contain examples of all three.

Psalm. The revised BDB Thayers Greek/Hebrew Lexicon presents a definition from the Greek *psalmos*, being a song sung to the harp, with twanging of the fingers. This would obviously include the Old Testament book of Psalms. It could also incorporate any quotation or paraphrase of Scripture, since at the time Ephesians and Colossians were written, the canon had not been set, and references to the Scriptures could mean any of the writings which are included (in part or in whole) in what is now the Old Testament. Calvin “insisted that only God’s word is worthy to be sung in God’s praise,”¹³ and refused to allow hymns and spiritual songs to be used in worship. Most other parts of the church rejected Calvin’s restrictions.

Hymn. The Greek word *hymnos* is a song in honour or praise of God (or the gods); usually, though not exclusively addressed to God, or having God as the object of praise; his worth-ship. The Hymn Society of America has adopted the following definition which it uses to describe this important part of Christian worship and expression:

A Christian hymn is a lyric poem, reverently and devotionally conceived, which is designed to be sung and which expresses the worshipper’s attitude toward God, or God’s purposes in human life. It should be simple and metrical in form, genuinely emotional, poetic, and literary in style, spiritual in quality, and in its ideas so direct and so immediately apparent as to unify a congregation while singing it.¹⁴

Spiritual Songs. These may be any songs (other than psalms or hymns) which have a religious thought, message about faith or experience, or are from the soul. These are devotional in nature or content, are usually simple (both words and music), and are emotionally pleasing. Hustad refers to “*odae pneumaticae* — pneumatic odes, possibly

¹³John Calvin, as cited in Donald P. Hustad, Jubilate II Church Music In Worship and Renewal, (Carol Stream, Illinois: Hope Publishing Company, 1993), 28.

¹⁴Armin Heaussler, The Story of Our Hymns, (Saint Louis, Missouri: Eden Publishing, 1952), 1.

odes upon the breath”¹⁵ which he explains might refer to wordless songs, or single-word songs, or soloistic songs, or perhaps even singing in tongues.

The order of listing may itself be important. Presuming that Calvin may have been at least partially correct in his assertion that psalms (that is, direct quotations or paraphrases of Scripture) were always worthy of use in worship, then the psalm, or Scripture quotation and paraphrase would have the prime place in the listing, which it does. Then would come hymns, which though not always quoting Scripture, have a special place of honour because they are addressed to God, or have God as the object of praise. Last in this order, and perhaps lowest in the level of importance and biblical acknowledgment, come the spiritual songs which, as Hustad points out, may be related closely with the lesser New Testament gifts of speaking in tongues and ecstatic utterance, these being clearly regarded in Scripture as not being as useful for corporate worship though perhaps quite meaningful and edifying in private (1 Corinthians 14:12-14).

Following are six clear similarities of purpose shared by preaching and sermons (the spoken word) and religious music or hymns (the sung word). For simplicity, the term *hymn* is used to include all the forms of religious music referred to above: psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

1. Sermons And Hymns Convey The Gospel.

As contrasted with the simple direct quotation of Scripture, the gospel is the message revealed by God, incarnated in the life of our Lord, and experienced by the believer. It is the good news received and passed on. The gospel predates even the earliest Scriptures, for the

¹⁵Hustad, 148.

good news of God's involvement with the world was shared in pre-Christian times, and even before writing had been invented. The language used was always one common to both the speaker and the hearer, otherwise the gospel could not be understood and embraced. This tradition of proclamation (usually called the *kerygma*) was practised by the early church before the Gospels were written, and the message of the Gospels themselves was drawn from the proclamation of the gospel as told by the disciples and early believers. This tradition continued, and hymns as well as sermons were used to proclaim and share the faith. Among the early church hymn-writers was Clement of Alexandria (c. 170-220), who wrote:

Sunset to sunrise changes now,
 For God doth make his world anew;
 On the Redeemer's thorn-crowned brow
 The wonders of that dawn we view.

(paraphrased by Howard C. Robins, 1939)

The gospel is proclaimed, using images common to the witness of the early believers who passed on the stories of Jesus' death and resurrection, and the Gospels and other writings addressed to the churches which were now circulating freely among the churches.

During the early middle ages, the use of hymns became more and more associated with monastic orders who compiled large manuscript collections which would serve as foundations for the continuing development of hymnody in later centuries. John of Damascus (c. 750) wrote the following, as translated by John Mason Neale, (1818-1866):

The Day of Resurrection,
 Earth, tell it out abroad;
 The Passover of gladness,
 The Passover of God!
 From death to life eternal,
 From earth unto the sky,
 Our Christ hath brought us over
 With hymns of victory.

Here we have more than a quotation or rephrasing of Scripture. This is a theological statement. It doesn't just proclaim the account of the resurrection, it explains what resurrection means as history and doctrine, from God's point of view and ours. Ancient symbolism and current experience are interwoven in a poetic/musical tapestry.

By the tenth century, the Roman liturgy had been developed to the point that it was standardized throughout the western church. Hymn singing by the body of believers was not a part of the liturgy at that time, "Mass was sung by the choirs, congregational participation having been gradually abandoned."¹⁶ The language of the Mass and church music was no longer the language of the people, but was almost exclusively Latin.

The Medieval hymn-writers continued to produce hymns which had limited use during their own times, but were often used in later centuries, translated or paraphrased. This example by Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153) is still used today:

Jesus, Thou Joy of loving hearts,
Thou Fount of life, Thou Light of men,
From the best bliss that earth imparts,
We turn unfilled to Thee again.

(translated by Ray Palmer, 1858)

The Reformation saw a great increase in hymn-writing, with the emphasis being on the gospel and the use of the vernacular so that all people could once again understand and embrace the gospel. Martin Luther (1485-1546) wrote, in "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,"

Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right man on our side,
The man of God's own choosing;

¹⁶Reynolds and Price, 8.

Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is He!

(translated by Frederick H. Hedge, 1805-1890)

“The same conviction that motivated Luther’s translation of the Bible into the vernacular of the people also produced the desire for congregational song in the language of the people, so that all people might join in singing praises to God.”¹⁷ In addition to his own writing, Luther’s work also brought about the translation into German of dozens of hymns from Latin and other pre-Reformation sources.

Similar movements later in England led to the rise of the English hymn, which is the focus of this thesis. A brief history of the English hymn will be presented at the beginning of Chapter 2, before we explore the many issues of changing English language usage which have brought about the need to revise hymn texts.

2. Sermons And Hymns Proclaim the Message of the Scripture.

While no one would claim that every sermon and every hymn has always been (or should always be) quoted from Scripture, many early Christian hymns were statements of faith and doctrine, based on Scripture and quoting familiar Scripture texts. Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, (348-413), wrote

Of the Father’s love begotten,
Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the source, the ending He,
Of the things that are and have been,
And that future years shall see,
Evermore and evermore.

¹⁷Ibid., 17.

This is He whom seers in old time,
 Chanted of with one accord,
 Whom the voices of the prophets
 Promised in their faithful word;
 Now He shines, the long-expected;
 Let creation praise its Lord,
 Evermore and evermore.

(translated by John Mason Neale, 1818-1866)

Here, the message as recorded in Scripture was restated in poetry, using the rich terminology and imagery of Scripture, and given new life in music. All God's people could then share in the proclamation which would be both a reinforcement of personal faith and a witness to others; just as the reading of Scripture both enriches the reader(s) and reaches out to the non-believer(s). There are numerous examples of direct quotation of Scripture, such as the *Magnificat*, or Song of Mary found in Luke 1:46, being used as canticles or hymns presented as direct quotations, or translations, or paraphrases set to music, or chanted.

3. Hymns Support The Sermon.

In the Protestant tradition of worship and liturgy there is considerable emphasis on the place of music in corporate worship. Themes which engage the worshippers in a cohesive and meaningful direction rely to a great extent on the hymns which reinforce the movement of worship from beginning to end. In particular, hymns are used to emphasize the hearing of the Word and to restate emphatically the faithful message of the sermon. Most hymnals have indices listed by topic, theme and content, to allow their profitable use for every occasion, especially enhancing the effect of preaching. A good example is the hymn by William Walsham How (1823-1897), which restates what has been the theme for unnumbered sermons on Christian stewardship:

We give Thee but Thine own,
 Whate'er the gift may be;
 All that we have is Thine alone,
 A trust, O Lord, from Thee.

And we believe Thy word,
 Tho' dim our faith may be,
 Whate'er for Thine we do, O Lord,
 We do it unto Thee.

Many hymns could be considered sermons in themselves; and some hymns were written specifically to teach. The anonymous seventeenth-century Christmas Carol, "The First Nowell," tells much of the Christmas story, combining information from several Gospel writers. Then, in the last verse comes an invitation to make the story part of one's own faith journey.

The first Nowell the angel did say
 Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
 In fields, where they lay a-keeping their sheep
 On a cold winter's night that was so deep.

They looked up and saw a star,
 Shining in the east, beyond them far,
 And to the earth it gave great light,
 And so it continued both day and night.

And by the light of that same star
 Three wise men came from country far;
 To seek for a king was their intent,
 And to follow the star wherever it went.

Then entered in those wise men three,
 Full reverently upon their knee,
 And offered there in his presence
 Their gold and myrrh and frankincense.

Then *let us all* [emphasis mine] with one accord
 Sing praises to our heavenly Lord,
 That hath made heaven and earth of naught
 And with His blood mankind hath bought.

4. Hymns Are A Vital Part Of The Faith Memory Bank.

Just as many people have found great solace in the words of Scripture which they have committed to memory, many more find the words, themes, and even the tunes of hymns a great source of solace and comfort. The difference is that while most Scripture which is memorized is done so intentionally, most hymns are memorized through common usage. The result is that for many people, the most lasting resource for faith and trust carried into old age is in the hymns they learned as children. In seminars for church musicians on how the music of the church can best be used to enhance the ministry of the church, Dr. Frederick Swann, the Director of Music at the Crystal Cathedral, refers to this as the *faith memory bank*.¹⁸ While the sermon may serve as a powerful means of presenting the gospel and invitation to faith, it is often the accompanying hymns which become part of the emotional response. Memories, especially musical memories, have a great emotional meaning for they transport the person back to the earlier event. This is one of many qualities of music which will be explored at the end of this thesis, in an appendix on the power of music.

A musical performance does not express a *present* emotion, but rather, a recall of a previous emotional experience. In other words, the singer of a happy (or a sad) song is not necessarily happy (or sad) at the moment of singing, nor is the listener. Rather, one projects and the other receives a *recall* of a previous experience of happiness or sadness.¹⁹(emphasis in original)

The faith memory bank motif is echoed succinctly by Mark A. Noll as the title of an article written in 1999, "We Are What We Sing."²⁰ Many of the elderly and infirm who spend long hours and days in nursing homes and hospitals would agree, as they softly hum or

¹⁸Frederick Swann, as recorded March 11, 1994, McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, On.

¹⁹Ibid., 13.

²⁰Mark A. Noll, "We Are What We Sing," *Christianity Today*, (12 July 1999,) 37.

sing the hymns learned in childhood. The feelings of faith, hope, comfort and all the other rich emotions felt and first experienced with the learning of a hymn come flooding back with the words, and even the tune alone. This makes it all the more essential that great emphasis be put on the use of worthy hymns for all ages, and that every attempt be made to ensure the validity of the theology, doctrine and Scriptural truth expressed in those hymns.

Someone asked Karl Barth to sum up the message of his books on Christian Theology. He unhesitatingly replied, using the familiar words of a children's hymn, by Anna Bartlett Warner (1820-1915),²¹ who wrote:

Jesus loves me, this I know,
for the Bible tells me so.

This hymn was not even from his own language, German, but was instantly recognized as one of the most loved and best remembered hymns of another language.²² This illustrates even more the power and influence hymns may have, even beyond their language of origin.

5. Community Is Found Both in Preaching and in Singing Hymns.

As quoted earlier from David Buttrick, "God's Word, spoken, constitutes community."²³ The singing of hymns is an expression of that community, in word and action. The very act of singing the same words at the same time to the same melody (hopefully!) is in itself a unifying device, practised from Old Testament times. As seen at many international

²¹In his book *Amazing Grace*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1990), page 73, Kenneth W. Osbeck reports that this hymn was part of a story, *Say and Seal*, written by sisters Anna and Susan Warner. Osbeck notes that the story and its plot are long forgotten, but the simple poem spoken by one of the characters remains one of the favourite hymns of all time.

²²This story has been verified by Dr. R. Kerstan, Professor of Preaching and Homiletics at McMaster Divinity College, who shared classes with students of Dr. Barth at Basel when the incident took place.

²³Buttrick., 449.

events such as the Olympics, each nation represented has a national anthem, which serves as a unifying force for that community, stirring up feelings of patriotism and valour.

Common faith, common experience, common hope and much more are celebrated by singing in concert. The words of many hymns are designed to unify the faithful. In this hymn by Isaac Watts (1674-1748) all of the words reflecting community and oneness are highlighted:

1. Come, *we* that love the Lord,
And let *our* joys be known;
Join in a song with sweet *accord*,
And thus *surround* the throne.
2. Let those refuse to sing
That never knew *our* God;
But *children* of the heavenly King
May speak *their* joys abroad.
5. Then let *our* songs abound,
And every tear be dry;
*We're marching** through Immanuel's ground
To fairer worlds on high.

[*in step with each other]

It is of note that one of the characteristics of contemporary Christian music is that it is seldom written to be sung in four-part harmony, as most traditional hymns are. More often, contemporary hymns and choruses are written with melody (solo) voice, and a more elaborate accompaniment score, suitable for band or even orchestra. While the result can be a very pleasing sound, achieved with minimal musical skill on the part of the congregation, the experience of singing in four-part harmony is lost. This is more than a musical concern, for a strong element of cooperative community is lost. Four-part harmony requires learning complementary parts; it also demands the cooperative work of listening to each other, and

relying on each other to make the sound complete. It could also be argued that singing in unison requires cooperation and fosters unity, but the unity of unison singing is the unity of sameness, while the unity of harmony is the unity of complementary differences coming together to create a whole which is larger than all its individual components. This is primarily an aesthetic argument, but has theological overtones.

The old Scottish Presbyterians who forbade the use of musical instruments in their churches desired just the purity of the community of voices providing harmony in music (and faith). The old order Mennonites who still reject musical instruments in church have made hymn-singing a fine art, which provides not only harmonized spiritual enrichment, but greatly treasured socialization for the whole community.

6. Sermons And Hymns Elicit A Response.

*“Preaching evokes response. The response to preaching is a response to Christ, and is, properly, faith and repentance (emphasis in original).”*²⁴ To claim that hymns also evoke a response is not merely to point out that the words may be evangelistic or invitational, as in “Come to the Saviour now” by John M. Wigner (1844-1911). The force of a hymn to evoke a response is much more fundamental. When one hears a preacher, one is being preached *to*; when one sings a hymn, there is the potential of one preaching to himself or herself, which is a powerful psychological event. It is, of course, possible to sing a hymn without paying any attention to the words, but on those occasions when the words are sung with sincerity, they take flesh, just as Buttrick says about the spoken word of the sermon. This is intensified by the emotional response triggered by the music, and the combined effect can be dramatic.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 453.

Evangelists have made good use (and sometimes abuse) of this evocative power in hymns. Billy Graham has for decades used the familiar hymn/prayer by Charlotte Elliott (1789-1871):

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Those who sing the hymn, and mean it, have experienced an incarnation in their lives, with the Word of God, sung and spoken, drawing each one into the community of faith.

Conclusion.

While not identical, the similarities in purpose and effect of sermons and hymns, their being preached and sung, leads to an obvious question. While one of the characteristics of effective preaching is that each sermon is new (no preacher would last long if the same sermon were preached word-for-word at every service all year), one of the characteristics of hymns is their comfortable familiarity which is found in words that remain the same over a lifetime. While an old sermon can easily be reworked for a new occasion, hymns tend to remain word-for-word the same in people's minds.

But language, symbols, and meanings are changing constantly, and more quickly than ever in the present technological age. The preacher has the opportunity to update language and relevance continuously and as required, using the various tools of homiletic training. At what point can (and should) the hymns of the faith be updated to make them speak more clearly and effectively to the new age? How does one balance the need for renewed clarity in

the hymn/sermon with the desire among the faithful for the old hymns to remain unchanged?

In the next chapter we will examine sixteen reasons or circumstances under which the revision of a hymn may be advantageous or necessary. We will identify examples where this must be done. We will also identify situations where poetic and other concerns or familiarity of phrase make alterations nearly impossible. We will see clearly the need for a hermeneutic to guide as such revisions and alterations are made.

CHAPTER 2

THE NEED FOR RE-WRITING SOME HYMN TEXTS

A Brief History of the English Hymn

Since the focus of this thesis is the need for revision of hymn texts in the English language, and the proposal of a hermeneutic to assist with such revision, a short history of the English hymn is appropriate at this point. As noted in the previous chapter, the earlier development of hymns and congregational singing of hymns went through many stages which reflected the time periods of church history. For the early church, singing was done in the language of the believers themselves or was quoted from whatever parts of the Scriptures were available to them, such as the Psalms. Then, for many hundred years, the language of church music was restricted to the official language of the church. During the Reformation, Luther and others returned the Scriptures, liturgy, and church music to the people in their own language.

This influence was felt in England and Scotland, “and psalm singing became a vibrant part of the movement.”²⁵ Protestant leaders in England during the sixteenth century adopted the limited concept of worship and praise advocated by Calvin, and very few hymns were written. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603), a great quantity of religious lyric

²⁵Reynolds and Price, 41.

poetry was written. John Donne, Thomas Campion, George Wither, Robert Herrick and George Herbert were some of the most prolific among the many writers of devotional verse. “While these verses were often called hymns, they were intended neither to be sung nor to be used in the church service.”²⁶ George Wither published one small book, The Hymnes and Songs of the Church, in 1623, but it wasn’t until the latter part of that century that the usage of psalmody waned. With its decline, a renewed interest was shown in hymn-writing, this time with congregational singing as the goal. This transition from psalmody to hymnody was characterized by a movement away from strict adherence to Scripture text or paraphrase toward giving “hymnic form to devotional poetry,... freely composed and yet more or less based on Scripture.”²⁷ These hymns, as well as reworked versions of previously published poetry, were readily accepted in the Church of England, but among the Dissenters and Puritans the whole issue of music in worship was being debated. As noted in the previous chapter, the introduction of congregational singing was slow in these groups, who regarded such things as inappropriate embellishments to worship, usually associated with the state church. By the last quarter of the seventeenth century, however, most groups had accepted hymns as a valid expression of praise and worship.

With the eighteenth century, came Isaac Watts (1674-1748) who is often referred to as “the Father of English Hymnody.”²⁸ During his lifetime Watts wrote over 600²⁹ hymns, with two distinct concentrations of effort. Having rejected the often ponderous wording of

²⁶Ibid., 42.

²⁷Louis F. Bensen, The English Hymn, (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1915), 73.

²⁸MacMillan, 111.

²⁹Kenneth W. Osbeck, Amazing Grace, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1990), 12.

the Psalter, Watts was challenged by his father to write something better. In 1719 he published The Psalms of David imitated in the language of the New Testament and apply'd to the Christian state and worship. In the preface Watts stated his method and purpose, explaining that he intended to *Christianize* the Psalms so that they would be interpreted in the life, death, resurrection and teachings of Jesus. The resulting hymns are clearly based on the Psalms but are modified to reflect New Testament faith. One of the best known is his rendering of the 72nd Psalm, printed in most hymnals in five verses. Some references from Psalm 72 are listed at the right, with phrases quoted in the King James Version of Scripture.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does his successive journeys run;
His Kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more. | vs. 17 His name shall be continued as
long as the sun
vs. 8 from sea to sea
vs. 5 as long as the sun and moon
endure |
| 2. For Him shall endless prayer be made,
And praises throng to crown His head;
His name like sweet perfume shall rise
With every morning sacrifice. | vs. 15 prayer also shall be made for
him continually
vs. 15 daily shall he be praised |
| 3. People and realms of every tongue
Dwell on His love with sweetest song;
And infant voices shall proclaim
Their early blessings on His Name. | vs. 17 all nations shall call him blessed
vs. 4 He shall save the children of the
needy |
| 4. Blessings abound where'er He reigns:
The prisoner leaps to loose his chains;
The weary find eternal rest,
And all the sons of want are blest. | vs. 4 He shall judge the poor of the
people
and shall break in pieces the
oppressor |
| 5. Let every creature rise and bring
Peculiar honours to our King;
Angels descend with songs again,
And earth repeat the long Amen. | vs. 18 Blessed be the Lord God
vs. 19 Let the whole earth be filled
with his glory
Amen, and Amen |

The other concentration of hymn-writing for which Watts was known was his original verse, based on Scriptures other than the Psalms, and reflecting Christian life, faith and

experience. His hymns described all aspects of the life, death and ministry of Jesus, and their meaning for the Christian. Among his many hymns associated with the suffering and death of Jesus is this contemplative view of the Cross, which is considered by many to be the finest English hymn ever written.³⁰

When I survey the wondrous Cross
 On which the Prince of glory died,
 My richest gain I count but loss,
 And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
 Save in the death of Christ my God;
 All the vain things that charm me most
 I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,
 Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
 Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
 Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
 That were a present far too small;
 Love so amazing, so divine,
 Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Of particular significance in Watts' writing is his stance as a Dissenter, distancing him from the liturgical tradition of the Church of England.

The emphasis of his hymns was related to the sermon of the day rather than the season of the year. This aspect of appropriateness led him to write hymns that would illustrate, reinforce, and climax the sermon from the pulpit. Perhaps one of the reasons for the enduring quality of so many of these hymns is the fact that they were written during the week in the quiet of his study as the sermon for the coming Lord's Day was taking shape in his mind. Sermon and hymn emerged together, but the hymn remains long after the sermon has been forgotten.³¹

³⁰MacMillan, 112, says "Is not this sublime verse a high-water mark of English Hymnody?"

³¹Reynolds and Price, 48.

The next major contributors to English hymnody were the Wesley brothers, John and Charles. During his lifetime Charles wrote over 6500 hymns, and John wrote an additional 233. Their hymns added a new evangelistic emphasis, as the Wesleys spent so much of their lifetime as itinerant evangelists. In a day when the Calvinistic belief in limited atonement was prevalent, the Wesleys' sermons and hymns stressed the free availability of God's love for *all*. Also stressed was the theme of Christian experience and life-style. Hymns were written which attempted to personalize the challenge and joy of the Christian life. In "O For A Thousand Tongues To Sing," Charles Wesley writes of his own experience of salvation and the joy which came from his conversion,

He breaks the pow'r of cancelled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean;
His blood availed for me.

Strongly influenced by the Moravians in both theological and musical matters, the Wesleys were also concerned about the manner in which hymns were to be sung. In the preface to their book Sacred Melody (1761), they encouraged strong and lively singing, with a strong emphasis on harmony and beauty of sound. Slow, subdued formality was openly scorned, and the faithful were encouraged to sing "spiritually," endeavoring to please God with every word sung. They were told to sing "lustily," exceeding the effort put into singing for Satan.

The Evangelical Revival in England in the mid-eighteenth century continued to be reflected in the output of new hymns, and many writers added their contributions. This began to have a noticeable effect on the music of the state church. "Throughout the eighteenth century, hymn singing was unauthorized in the Church of England. While this was the

official rule, there were many exceptions.”³² The hymns of Watts and the Wesleys had become a part of the popular Christian culture, and were brought into the Church of England informally at unofficial prayer and devotional services. As the growing power of the evangelicals was felt within the established church, it was only a matter of a few years before the policy changed and even the hymns of the Dissenters were used in many unofficial hymnals published by the Church of England. While it had strict control over every word in The Book of Common Prayer, the Church of England has never affirmed an official hymn book, even the popular Hymns Ancient and Modern which has sold over 150 million copies.

Another aspect of the continuing development of the English hymn was in the translation of hymns into English from other languages. Early Greek and Latin hymns, along with numerous hymns of the Lutheran chorale and other European traditions, were introduced and readily accepted in the mix of English hymnody. The fact that the original versions of many of these hymns were in other languages does not seem to have dissuaded the English-speaking churches from claiming the new translations as if they were native to English! Many of the most-loved English hymns such as “Jesus, The Very Thought Of Thee”³³ and “Now Thank We All Our God,”³⁴ have their origins in other languages.

Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, and into the twentieth century, hymns of many varieties were written which reflected a new liturgical emphasis and interests in devotional piety and humanitarian concerns, and in recent years the movement toward contemporary church music has led to the creation of a whole new genre of English hymns.

³²Ibid., 56.

³³From the Latin, Mediaeval, translated by Edward Caswall (1814-1878).

³⁴From the German, by Martin Rinkart (1586-1649), translated by Catherine Winkworth (1829-1878).

Paralleling the development of the English hymn in England was the growth of American hymnody. Controversies about the appropriateness of congregational singing raged in the Presbyterian and Baptist churches just as they had in England. Many of the same influences were felt through the visits of the Wesleys and the growing popularity of the English revivalist hymns. The American revival, called the Great Awakening, resulted in the reprinting of the hymns of Watts and the Wesleys.

During the nineteenth century the new term *gospel song* was used to describe hymns which had their roots on American folk-hymnody. The name was first used in 1874 by P. P. Bliss whose small collection, Gospel Songs, was published by the John Church Company of Cincinnati. That title quickly became a generic label for all similar music used by the evangelists and camp-meetings of the period. Ira Sankey, who worked as a soloist and song-leader for Dwight L. Moody, eventually published in 1907 his Sacred Songs and Solos, a collection of 1200 hymns from many sources, but mostly composed of *gospel songs*. This book was enormously successful, selling eighty million copies in fifty years, and remained the standard reference for gospel hymns. The single most prolific writer of new gospel songs was Fanny Crosby, whose more than 8,000 hymns include “To God Be The Glory” and “All The Way My Saviour Leads Me.” Most American gospel songs and hymns are characterized by noticeable emotional feelings, which are supported by simple, popular tunes and usually returning to a refrain. These mutually supportive features led to hymns which were simple to learn and easily remembered, and this placed them quickly and permanently into the religious consciousness of the people. Recent trends in contemporary American hymnody in many ways reflect the same desire for emotionally pleasing words with music which is marked with the simplicity and repetition of the gospel hymn.

Linguistic Issues and Concerns Which Lead to Hymn-text Revision

The English language is constantly changing and redefining itself. Poetry and hymnody which were written using the words and meanings of one age are often found to be unclear and even misleading in later years. Different people, with their own attitudes and concerns, will view language in different ways and expect change for the sake of clarity or emphasis. There are many reasons for the changes being made to hymn-texts, ranging from words which have simply become unclear with age, to issues of how we accept and treat each other, to theological principles about the nature and personhood of God. Sometimes, a single word, such as the use of *for* or *and* in “Jesus Loves Me” will bring about heated debate concerning the original intent of the writer, or what the new (or old) text really means. These words are from the 1930 Hymnal for the United Church of Canada:

“Jesus loves me, this I know
for the Bible tells me so.”

In 1971, The Hymn Book published jointly by the Anglican Church of Canada and the United Church of Canada has an altered version of the words of that hymn, so that it reads:

“Jesus loves me, this I know
and the Bible tells me so.”(emphasis mine)

The most recent Hymn and Worship Book of the United Church of Canada, Voices United, 1996, has reverted to the original words.

Research for this thesis has identified sixteen issues or areas of concern which have resulted either in changes being made to the text of hymns, or serious questions being raised concerning the continuing use of existing texts. It is not the purpose of this thesis to judge the merit of every change which has been made to particular hymns. It is obvious that from time

to time there will be valid reasons for changing or re-writing hymn texts. This thesis contends that on those occasions there should be guidelines for such re-writing, and will offer a homiletic hermeneutic for this purpose in a later chapter.

It is worthy of note that one change often brings about another change, whether intended or not. For instance, a change of wording to correct a bias such as *dominance* could make subtle changes in the theological or doctrinal stance of the hymn. This may or may not have been the intention of the editor or reviser; indeed, the reviser may not even be aware of the ripple effect of change. The following sixteen categories of concerns are perceived by some to necessitate the re-writing of hymn texts. In each case, a short explanation is given, and a hymn is quoted on the left side of the page to illustrate the perceived problem. In some cases, a revision is quoted on the right side of the page to illustrate alterations which have been made, and the changes are emphasized.

1. Archaic Language

Language is not static; it grows and develops and ages and matures. Over centuries of usage, some words become endowed with the reputation of being out-of-date, or old-fashioned, or overly formal, or archaic. *Thee, thy, thine, hadst, doth*, and similar words are commonly regarded as such, and common language usage substitutes the more familiar *You, your, yours, had, and does*. These words, which have been classified by many as Shakespearian, form the speech patterns of the King James Version of the Scriptures, so it follows that many of the hymns written during the time when the King James Version was the most readily available English translation would use the same patterns of speech. As noted earlier in this chapter, Isaac Watts and others deliberately chose to use these words and

speech patterns. While the King James Version remained largely unchanged for over 300 years, the common language of the English-speaking people changed greatly both in words and grammar. Because of the close association of hymn-writing with the language of this particular version of the Scriptures, hymn language became more and more removed from the common usage of the people. With the advent of new translations of the Scriptures during the twentieth century, the divergence between the language of the new Bibles and the old hymns became more and more pronounced. While it is now common for the pew Bible in most churches to be a relatively new version, many of the hymns in the hymnals sound decidedly Shakespearian. Without dismissing the obvious artistry and poetic flow of the old language, it is becoming more and more difficult for modern children (and adults) to understand the archaic words, and few churches make the explanation. The result is that many old hymns are being re-written specifically to replace the archaic language. Sometimes it simply involves replacing old words with new, without major changes to the flow of the poetic text and without shifts in meaning. Occasionally, the new words do not fit the rhyme or rhythm pattern, which necessitates the adjustment of a whole line to accommodate a new word which can complete the rhyme pattern.

JOYFUL, JOYFUL, WE ADORE THEE
Henry van Dyke (1852-1933)

Revision in Voices United, 1996, United
Church Of Canada

2 All *Thy* works with joy surround *Thee*,
Earth and heav'n reflect *Thy* rays,
Stars and angels sing around *Thee*,
Centre of unbroken praise;
Field and forest, vale and mountain,
Blooming meadow, flashing sea,
Chanting bird and flowing fountain,
Call us to rejoice in Thee.

2 All *your* works with joy surround *you*,
Earth and heav'n reflect *your* rays,
Stars and angels sing around *you*,
Centre of unbroken praise;
Field and forest, vale and mountain,
Flowery meadow, flashing sea,
Chanting bird and flowing fountain,
Sound their praise eternally.

It is of interest that experts in the English language point out that the words *thee* and *thy*, which are regarded as too formal, were in fact words expressing familiarity in the time of Shakespeare. The words *you* and *your* were originally very formal and saved for the most official of occasions and personages. Over the last 300 years, the usage of these words has changed to become the exact opposite of the earlier form. To address God as *thee* in the time of King James was to assume a warm familiarity, while to modern minds *thee* is hopelessly formal. This illustrates clearly how language changes, not just in choice and usage of words, but in the changing meanings of words. There are pockets of old usage in England, where the archaic forms and words are still used in common communication. It is not unusual in rural Yorkshire to hear an old farmer address his cow as *thee!*

2. Gender Issues As Related To Persons

In recent decades, words which are gender-specific such as *he*, *him*, and *his* have been perceived by many to be needlessly exclusive when used in gender-neutral situations, and are replaced wherever possible in an attempt to include all people. Collective gender specific words, such as, *father*, *man*, *mankind*, and *brother*, when used to describe people, are replaced with words like *parent*, *humankind*, and *people*. Unfortunately, English is very heavily gender-biased language, and many of the collective gender-neutral words are awkward in ordinary speech, and cumbersome in poetry.

RISE UP, O MEN OF GOD
William Pierson Merrill (1867-1954)

1. Rise up, O *men* of God!
Have done with lesser things;
Give heart and soul and mind and strength
To serve the King of kings.

The Celebration Hymnal (Word Music,
1997), with notation 'altered'

1. Rise up, O *Church* of God!
Have done with lesser things;
Give heart and soul and mind and strength
To serve the King of kings.

2. Rise up, O *men* of God!
 His Kingdom tarries long;
 Bring in the day of brotherhood,
 And end the night of wrong.

2. Rise up, O *Church* of God!
 His Kingdom tarries long;
 Bring in the day of brotherhood,
 And end the night of wrong.

The word *men* in this hymn is obviously gender-specific, and for that reason this hymn is often quoted as an example of unacceptable gender bias which must be removed. However, anecdotes about this hymn and its author suggest that shortly after having introduced it Rev. Mr. Merrill was taken to task for the blatant gender bias, which even by the enlightened early 1900s standards was seen to exclude fully half the population. In response, Mr. Merrill stated firmly that his choice of words was not unthinking, but deliberate. He said,

The story of the writing of this hymn is simple and uninteresting. The editor of *The Continent* in Chicago asked me to write a hymn appropriate to the “Brotherhood” movement in the Presbyterian Church (1910 and 1911). I read a stirring article by Gerald Stanley Lee on “the Church Of The Strong Men,” and was deeply impressed by it. So I wrote this hymn.³⁵

“The words are a trumpet call to men”³⁶ of the church, who for far too long had left the work and witness of the church (i.e. missions, Sunday School, etc.) to the women. The women were not addressed in the hymn because their faithfulness did not need to be questioned! The reference to brotherhood was an intentional use of the name of the men’s group, The Brotherhood. Merrill would sanction or allow no changes to his words. In a later chapter, we will address the issue of the original intent of the author and consider whether of not those intentions are absolutely binding for all time.

The language of Scripture also has gender bias which is regularly faced in preaching.

³⁵quoted by Armin Haeussler, *The Story Of Our Hymns*, (Saint Louis, Missouri: Eden Publishing House, 1952), 406.

³⁶Albert Edward Bailey, *The Gospel in Hymns*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1950), 572.

In John 11:25-26, Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. *He* who believes in me will live, even though *he* dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."(NIV) (my emphasis) This is often read, "I am the resurrection and the life. *They* who believe in me will live, even though *they* die; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." At the funeral of a woman, it might be read, "I am the resurrection and the life. *She* who believes in me will live, even though *she* dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." The truth is the same in all three readings, and it certainly was (and is) the intent of the Lord to make his salvation available to all who believe in him. Buttrick explains the issue.

The problem, though not peculiar to English, is probably more evident in English. In languages such as French or Spanish or German there are definite and indefinite articles that express gender, for example, "*le*" and "*la*." As a result, if we live, let us say, in the French language, our whole world will be gendered. Things around us will be masculine, or feminine, or neuter. Unfortunately, the English language seems to have been losing gender. Years ago, when a powerful locomotive rolled into a station, people would say "Here *she* comes!" whereas today we say "Here *it* comes." Thus a sense of the mystery of gender in all things has been rubbed out of everyday English.³⁷(emphasis in original)

Another means of removing the imbalance of gender bias is to enlarge the hymn, and provide balance. This is done by Joseph R. Alfred, who adds another verse to a familiar hymn, making the whole hymn become inclusive without changing the first verse.

FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

Frederick W. Faber (1849)

Voices United, United Church Of Canada,

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. Faith of our <i>fathers</i>, living still
 In spite of dungeon, fire, and sword;
 O how our hearts beat high with joy
 Whene'er we hear that glorious word;
 Faith of our <i>fathers</i>, holy faith,
 We will be true to <i>thee</i> till death.</p> | <p>2. Faith of our <i>mothers</i>, daring faith,
 Your work for Christ is love revealed,
 Spreading God's word from pole to pole,
 Making love known and freedom real:
 Faith of our <i>mothers</i>, holy faith,
 We will be true to <i>you</i> till death.</p> |
|---|---|

³⁷Buttrick, 197.

3. Gender Issues As Related To God

How we address God has become a point of issue among Christians, especially in recent years. For some, references to God which use gender specific words such as *he, him, himself, his, father, and son* are unacceptable and need to be replaced with non gender specific words such as *parent, the loving one*, or simply the repetition of the word *God* as in the following example, which has all gender references replaced.

THE DOXOLOGY

Thomas Ken (1637-1710)

Revision in Voices United,
1996, United Church Of Canada

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise *Him*, all creatures here below;
Praise *Him* above, ye * heavenly host;
Praise *Father, Son*, and Holy Ghost.

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise *God*, all creatures high and low
Give thanks to *God* in love made known
Creator, Word and Spirit, One.

[*altered in 1712 from 'y'angelick host]

The *gender of God* issue is very controversial, and is felt in all aspects of worship, especially in preaching and church music. Buttrick continues,

The more serious problem for preaching has to do with sexist God-talk, thus with images: God the King, God the Warrior, and, yes, God the Father. Some of the obvious God-talk problems can be resolved neatly by simply using a different syntax. We do not need to use the construction "When God spoke, *he* created the world," when we can say, "God spoke, and the world was created."³⁸ (emphasis in original)

God's gender is not revealed in Scripture, for there is no biological or physical attribute to describe. God is Spirit. The English language again fails, as all language must, in adequately describing the indescribable. However, we still must refer to God in preaching and singing. Current use of language tries to be sensitive to this issue.

³⁸Ibid., 198.

4. Dominance Issues

Words associated with dominance such as *Lord, King, Kingdom, and Prince*, whether male-biased or not, are often targeted for replacement with softer imagery. These are felt to presume hierarchy and power – offensive and inappropriate in today’s world. It is felt that the Christian faith should reflect better qualities than those of the world around us. In the Christian community, sharing would replace competition, relating would replace power struggles, equality would replace all class structure, and none would seek authority over another.

JOYFUL, JOYFUL, WE ADORE THEE

Henry van Dyke (1852-1933)

Unattributed revision in Voices United,
1996, United Church Of Canada

1 Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee,
God of glory, *Lord of love*.
Hearts unfold like flowers before Thee,
Praising Thee, their sun above.

1 Joyful, joyful, we adore you,
God of glory, *life and love*.
hearts unfold like flowers before you,
opening to the sun above.

5. Racial and Ethnic Concerns

Racial or ethnic bias, shown in words such as *heathen, savage, dark*, or any condescending reference to an *inferior* nationality is always inappropriate. When found in hymns, these words should be removed. It is very difficult to remove racial and social bias from our patterns of speech. “Language, we have noticed, embodies cultural convictions, values and perspectives some of which may be quite alien to the gospel. Language may also express social attitudes that, in the light of the gospel, are unlovely....we must seek to alter language in view of the gospel.”³⁹

³⁹Ibid., 196.

WHEN MOTHERS OF SALEM
William Medlin Hutchings (1827-1876)

1. When mothers of Salem
Their children brought to Jesus,
The stern disciples drove them back,
And bade them depart;
But Jesus saw them ere they fled,
And sweetly smiled, and kindly said,
'Suffer little children
To come unto me.'

4. O soon may the *heathen*
Of every tribe and nation
Fulfill Thy blessed word, and cast
Their idols all away;
O shine upon them from above
And show Thyself a God of love;
Teach the little children
To come unto Thee.

(No revised version available. This hymn has been dropped completely from the hymnals of the United Church of Canada, the Presbyterian Church of Canada, the Anglican Church of Canada, and the new interdenominational hymnals.

It appears that too much was in need of revision, in addition to the obvious word *heathen*. To modern children the phrase *drove them back* could mean a trip in the car. And the unfortunate shift in word meaning makes it appear that when children come to Jesus, *they will suffer!*)

6. Local Images Trapped In Time and Space

Images which are rich in meaning in some cultures and societies have little or no meaning in another culture or locale. For instance, the Inuit have no word for sheep but they do herd caribou. Translators of Scripture are very aware of the differing experiences and outlook of the hundreds of ethnic groups who live in various parts of the world. They try to substitute local concepts and images so that the truth of Scripture is revealed. Many hymns do not translate well into other cultures. Fr. Jean de Brébeuf (1593-1649) was a missionary priest among the Huron Indians of Canada. As the seasons led toward Christmas, he wished to enhance the message of the Nativity through music. It is very likely that Brébeuf was familiar with the Latin nativity carol which was very well known in Europe at the time he had been receiving his priestly training.

UNTO US A BOY IS BORN

Latin Carol 15th Century; Translated by Percy Dearmer (1867-1936)

1. Unto us a boy is born!
The King of all creation,
Came He to a world forlorn,
The Lord of every nation.
2. *Cradled* in a *stall* was He
With sleepy *cows* and *asses*;
But the very *beasts* could see
That he all men surpasses.
4. Now may Mary's son, who came
So long ago to love us,
Lead us all with hearts aflame
Unto the joys above us.

Presuming that Brébeuf wished to prepare a nativity carol, he might have wished to translate this or some other existing Latin or French carol into the Huron language. But images are not always understood when they cross cultural and language boundaries. The Huron would not have known what a cradle was for they did not cradle their children. Cows, whether sleepy or not, were unknown to them, as were asses, donkeys, mules, and horses until they were imported into North America by the Europeans. Beasts might have been imagined as fierce animals in the woods, while the carol was referring to domesticated, penned animals. So Fr.

Brébeuf wrote a new Nativity Carol:

'T WAS IN THE MOON OF WINTERTIME

Jean de Brébeuf (1593-1649)

translated from the Huron by Jesse E. Middleton (1872-1960)

1. 'Twas in the *moon of wintertime*, when all the birds had fled,
That mighty *Gitchi Manitou* sent angel choirs instead;
Before their light the stars grew dim, and wond'ring *hunters* heard the hymn:
Jesus your King is born, Jesus is born, in excelsis gloria.
2. Within a *lodge of broken bark*, the tender babe was found,
A *ragged robe of rabbit skin* enwrapped his beauty round;

But as the hunter *braves* drew nigh, the angel song rang loud and high:
Jesus your King is born, Jesus is born, in excelsis gloria.

3. O *children of the forest free*, O sons of *Manitou*,
The holy Child of earth and heav'n is born today for you.
Come kneel before the radiant Boy, who brings you beauty, peace, and joy:
Jesus your King is born, Jesus is born, in excelsis gloria.

Just as cultures differ, time periods within the same culture provide many changing images, and occasions when images become obsolete or lose their meaning. Some hymns are forced into disuse because they contain images, metaphors, or illustrations which are no longer comprehended by many adults, and almost no children.

MAKE ME A CAPTIVE, LORD

George Matheson (1842-1906)

Revision by T. T. Gibson (1915-)

1. Make me a captive, Lord,
And then I shall be free;
Force me to render up my sword,
And I shall conqueror be.
I sink in life's alarms
When by myself I stand;
Imprison me within thine arms,
And strong shall be my hand.

1. Make me a captive, Lord,
And then I shall be free;
Force me to render up my sword,
And I shall conqueror be.
I sink in life's alarms
When by myself I stand;
Imprison me within thine arms,
And strong shall be my hand.

2. My heart is weak and poor
'Til it a master find;
*It has no spring of action sure -
It varies with the wind.*
It cannot freely move
'Til Thou hast wrought its chain;
Enslave it with Thy matchless love,
And deathless it shall reign.

2. My heart is weak and poor
'Til it a master find;
*It falls for every crafty lure -
It has no constant mind.*
It cannot freely move
'Til Thou hast wrought its chain;
Enslave it with Thy matchless love,
And deathless it shall reign.

The whole hymn is based on the literary device paradox, the contrast of opposites being used to create a repeating theme of finding fulfillment in God only as we surrender our free will. Even more meaningful is that in this hymn each of the paradoxical opposites is itself true! The line whose image is seriously out of date is "*It has no spring of action sure -*

It varies with the wind.” The proof that it is in difficulty is that most people, when singing it, sing the word *wind* as if it means that we are buffeted by strong winds blowing us off course. But a look at the rhyme pattern shows that the word must rhyme with *find*, and must therefore have the meaning of winding around or tightening. In fact the image used by the author was that of the latest advancement in clocks – for his day. Previously, all clocks had to have a long pendulum, swinging at a constant speed to measure the seconds of time which the clock would relate to minutes and hours with its hands and face. The motion was kept active by heavy weights on chains which exerted a constant pull on the movement. Pocket watches and wrist watches were impossible because you couldn’t keep a long pendulum swinging in your pocket; nor could you have heavy weights dangling from your wrist! Some inventors tried using tension springs, but failed because when first wound up, they made the clock run very fast. Then, as the spring tension lessened, the clock would slow down more and more until it stopped. The result was the first few *hours* raced by, while the final few *minutes* of the day took hours to go by. The solution came when an inventor created an action spring called a balance wheel. It rocked back and forth and regulated the counting of the seconds at a speed similar to a pendulum, but it was tiny enough to fit in the smallest of clocks. The image in the hymn says, “My heart needs regulation: sometimes it’s all wound up and racing out of control; and other times it’s almost dead.” But who in today’s world of digital electronic timepieces knows the inner workings of a pocket watch, and why an action spring is so critical?

7. Historical Inaccuracy Or Adjustment

Some references to historical events are now known to be inaccurate, or to have an

interpretation which is no longer supported by fact. When these are found in hymns the result may be confusion or misunderstanding. Here, a revision is made to reflect an obvious change in the state of nations in today's world.

JUDGE ETERNAL, THRONED IN SPLENDOUR

Henry Scott Holland (1847-1918)

since the Commonwealth of Nations
replaced the British Empire:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>3. Crown, O God, Thine own endeavor;
Cleave our darkness with Thy sword;
Feed the faint and hungry heathen
With the richness of Thy word;
Cleanse the body of this <i>Empire</i>
Through the glory of the Lord.</p> | <p>3. Crown, O God, Thine own endeavor,
Cleave our darkness with Thy sword;
Feed the faint and hungry heathen
With the richness of Thy word;
Cleanse the body of this <i>Land</i> (or <i>Nation</i>)
Through the glory of the Lord.</p> |
|--|---|

8. Doctrinal Difference Between Denominations

The same hymn often appears with different words in the hymnals of different denominations, reflecting the point of view of that particular group. This hymn, written by J. Byrom in 1773, has had revisions of its second line which seem to indicate some disagreement on the theme of limited or general atonement.

CHRISTIANS, AWAKE!

The Hymnal: Revised and Enlarged, The Protestant Episcopal Church in America, 1894.

1. Christians, awake! Salute the happy morn,
Whereon the Saviour of *mankind* was born.

The Hymnary: for use in Baptist Churches, The Baptist Hymnary Committee of Canada, 1935 (Printing Plates purchased from the United Church of Canada)

1. Christians, awake! Salute the happy morn,
Whereon the Saviour of *the world* was born.

As recorded by the Huddersfield Choral Society, England, 1990, source unknown.

1. Christians, awake! Salute the happy morn,
Whereon the Saviour of *the tribe* was born.

9. Interpretation Of Scripture

While similar to 8. above, what is in question here is the view of Scripture itself.

JESUS LOVES ME

Anna Bartlett Warner (1820-1915)
Hymnal for the United Church of
Canada, 1930.

Jesus loves me, this I know
for the Bible tells me so.

The Hymn Book, published jointly by the
Anglican Church of Canada and the United
Church Of Canada, 1971

Jesus loves me, this I know
and the Bible tells me so.

The word *for* signifies that the Bible is the primary source, while the word *and* suggests that the Bible simply agrees with other sources of information about Jesus' love.

10. Questionable Theology

On occasion, a hymn will reflect a point of theology which is not shared by others. This may be a significant and contentious point between Christians, or it may be a personal feeling which has slipped into the hymn almost unnoticed, as in the following example.

IN THE GARDEN

C. Austin Miles (1868-1945)

1. I come to the garden alone,
While the dew is still is on the roses,
And the voice I hear, falling on my ear,
The Son of God discloses,

(Chorus)

And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own,
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.

This hymn celebrates the personal, intimate relationship between the believer and God, and the writer suggests that his own experience of and with God has never been matched by the experience of any other believer.

11. Simple Inaccuracy

The best intentioned of authors is capable of a simple error. Very popular hymns are almost impossible to correct, as common usage will outweigh any effort to amend the text.

THE BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC

Julia Ward Howe (written 1861)

1. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He has loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword;
His truth is marching on.

Glory, glory, Hallelujah! Glory, glory, Hallelujah!
Glory, glory, Hallelujah! Our God is marching on.

2. I have seen Him in the watchfires of a hundred circling camps,
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps; (etc.)
4. *In the beauty of the lilies, Christ was born across the sea,*
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me;
As He died to make men holy, let us live to make men free,

The allusion to lilies is misplaced historically when associated with the birth of Jesus. As poetic imagery it would fit better with his death and resurrection. The present wording is slightly misleading.

12. Militaristic Imagery

“The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” quoted above is reviled by some because of its militaristic imagery. Words which describe battle, or imagery which includes *war, armour, or fight*, are offensive to some, and would be removed whenever possible. There are many hymns which are not nationalistic, but use biblical imagery which is quite militaristic. To some believers, there is no militaristic imagery which is acceptable, even if it quotes Scripture and describes the spiritual confrontation with evil.

ONWARD! CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS
Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924)

1. Onward! Christian *soldiers*,
Marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus
Going on before;
Christ, the royal Master
Leads against the foe:
Forward into battle,
See! His banners go.

Onward! Christian *soldiers*,
Marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus
Going on before.

3. Like a *mighty army*
Moves the church of God, (etc.)

13. Melding Of Nationalism And Theology

Some hymns are a blend of nationalism and spirituality. Few people are now willing to make a pledge which precludes the opportunity to question the actions of one's country or its leaders. For some whose background is oriented to the heritage of the state church such a pledge is quite acceptable. For others, spirituality should never be confused with temporal loyalty, and for them revisions would be made to reduce or eliminate the problem of torn loyalties between the two verses.

I VOW TO THEE MY COUNTRY
Sir Cecil Spring Rice (1859-1918)

1. *I vow to thee, my country*, all earthly things above,
Entire, and whole, and perfect, the service of my love;
The love that asks no question, the love that stands the test,
That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best;
The love that never falters, the love that pays the price,
The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.

- 2 And there's another country, I've heard of long ago,
 Most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know;
 We may not count her armies, we may not see her King;
 Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering;
 And soul by soul and silently her shining bounds increase,
 And her ways are ways of gentleness and all her paths are peace.

14. Changing Connotations

Words which were clearly understood in one age may have picked up current usages which differ greatly from the original meaning. Language is constantly changing. For instance, in the hymn below the word *lay* is used. When written, *lay* was a reference to a *song of praise*. However, the word is now a slang expression for sexual intercourse.

O WORSHIP THE KING

Robert H. Grant (1779-1838)

Unattributed version in *Let's Praise*
 Baptist World Alliance, 1988

6. O measureless Might,
 ineffable Love,
 While angels delight
 to hymn Thee above,
 The humbler creation,
 though feeble their *lays*,
 With true adoration
 shall lisp to Thy praise.

6. O measureless Might,
 unchangeable Love,
 whom angels delight
 to worship above:
 Your ransomed creation,
 with *glory ablaze*,
 in true adoration
 shall sing to your praise!

Other common examples are words used to describe handicaps or disabilities. A major institution in Brantford was, until recently, named the Ross MacDonald School For The Blind. It is now named the Ross MacDonald School For The Visually Impaired. Hymns are full of terms like *blind*, *deaf*, *dumb*, and *lame*. It is no simple matter to replace these words with those currently acceptable, as in the example of *blind* and *visually impaired*. In these situations, a simple definitive word such as *blind* is replaced with a descriptive phrase, which is not easily inserted into the poetic flow of a hymn.

O FOR A THOUSAND TONGUES TO SING
Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Unattributed version in Voices United,
1996, United Church of Canada

6. Hear Him, ye deaf,
His praise, *ye dumb*,
Your loosened tongues employ;
Ye blind, behold
Your Saviour come,
And leap, ye lame for joy!

4. Hear him, you deaf,
you voiceless ones
your tongues again employ;
you blind, behold
your Saviour comes,
and leap, ye lame, for joy!

It is interesting to note that when Voices United was published in 1996, the word *dumb* was already not acceptable as a word used to describe a disability. Since then, *blind* has fallen into disuse and *lame* is questionable. This points out how quickly language usage is changing, and how difficult it is for a printed text to remain up-to-date and acceptable. The preacher can change the words used in a sermon on a moment's notice. Buttrick points out, "We live in a rapidly changing language. Since 1955, to select an arbitrary date, more than 100,000 new words may have found their way into our dictionary. Since the start of our century, we have watched a huge vocabulary slide away into social forgetfulness."⁴⁰ He goes on, "We must search the language of human conversation and, once more, find images and metaphors to proclaim the gospel. What we cannot do is fall back on stock theological terminology to any great degree. Instead, in our age, we must speak in a language of common image and metaphor, but do so with theological wisdom."⁴¹

15. Unpleasant Words

Sometimes hymns contain words that are well understood, and still have the same

⁴⁰Buttrick, 194.

⁴¹Ibid.

meaning as intended by the author, but are regarded by some as offensive because they bring unpleasant or sad feelings to mind. In addition to unpleasant words, references which include self-deprecation and related images are offensive to some.

AMAZING GRACE

John Newton (1725-1807)

Alternate unattributed version in Voices United, 1996, United Church Of Canada

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
that <i>saved a wretch like me</i>;
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.</p> | <p>1. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
that <i>saved and strengthened me</i>;
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.</p> |
|--|---|

16. Removal Of Negative Words And Phrases

Similar to number 15 above, some consider the use of any negative word or image to be contrary to their philosophy of ministry, so hymns are adjusted to reflect the preferred mood. At the Crystal Cathedral, Garden Grove, California, hymns are regularly amended to reflect positive thinking, as this quotation in a letter from the Director of Music states:

Mrs. Schuller is the real power and thought behind our efforts, which consist almost exclusively of

- a. eliminating archaic English words - 'thee, thou, hast, dost, blessED [emphasis in original] and other such words
- b. occasional changing of pronouns - although we still refer to God as "He"
- c. *removal of negative words and phrases*⁴² [emphasis in original]

Summary

While not all persons will agree about the importance of each issue or concern listed above, sufficient numbers do feel strongly enough about each issue to warrant their being

⁴²Quoted in a personal letter from Dr. Frederick Swann, Director of Music and Organist, The Crystal Cathedral, and signed "with all best wishes for a '*blessed*' Easter!" [emphasis in original; obviously a commentary on 'a.' in the quotation above] Dr Swann also reported that there was considerable objection by some of the church leadership at the time of the construction of the Crystal Cathedral because the architect's drawings showed a cross on the tower, and the cross was considered to be too negative a symbol.

taken seriously. Those who are concerned about these issues will continue to request or demand changes; and many will attempt those changes themselves. A study of some appropriate homiletic theories and principles will now be presented, and a hermeneutic specifically designed for the revision of hymn texts will be proposed.

CHAPTER 3

SOME HOMILETIC PRINCIPLES AND A PROPOSED HERMENEUTIC FOR HYMN-TEXT REVISION

The world in consciousness is ever-changing, mysteries of being human are variously understood....images of salvation may be different, even the ways in which we grasp images of revelation may alter from age to age.⁴³

It has been demonstrated that there is a clear mutually-supportive relationship between preaching and the singing of hymns, the Word spoken and the Word sung. It has also been shown that there is a rich treasury of Christian hymnody which has been used to reinforce the faith of believers, and for education and evangelism. This heritage of church music has been a growing, changing entity. Each generation and age has made its own contribution in style and language, and as new hymns were added, others were quietly discarded through disuse. Some hymns, however, retained their places of usefulness and honour within the body of hymnody. They have been retranslated from one language to another. They have also been retranslated within the same language so that they can continue to speak to new generations through words and images which are contemporary and therefore meaningful.

It has also been shown that the revision of hymns has been necessary in the past and

⁴³Buttrick, 269.

continues to be needed. Our present task is to discover and recommend consistent principles, through which the necessary revisions can be made with maximum gains in a variety of competing objectives. Hymns that have been judged beautiful and worthy for hundreds of years deserve the best treatment possible so that they will continue to serve the church for years to come. Otherwise, a great hymn, because of poor revision, will fall into disuse and be lost forever.

This chapter will present three clearly identified concerns which must be addressed before any revision be attempted. Then, a hermeneutic for hymn revision will be proposed.

Three Questions and Considerations

1. Is it true? In any translation, retranslation, interpretation or revision, we come back to this basic question asked by Buttrick.³⁵ While Buttrick was referring specifically to the interpretation of a text, the principle applies equally well to hymn revision. He says of the preacher,

“Truth” and “efficacy” are two different kinds of judgments. In speaking of God, the question we must ask of interpretation is “Is it true? and not “Is it helpful?” Though grace may triumph efficaciously through all kinds of error (thank God!), we should not presume upon grace. So, responsible preachers worry about being true to a text.⁴⁴

Sometimes change is both true and helpful. But first it must be true. To change truth into untruth simply to make it more palatable or pleasing to the hearer is never acceptable; but to reinterpret it so that its larger truth is heard is to be commended. In the case of Jesus’ statement about resurrection (John 11:25-26), the preacher rightly tells the whole truth, that when Jesus spoke these words he was referring to *one man (Lazarus)*; but through that one

⁴⁴Ibid., 270.

man, Jesus proclaimed his good news to *all people*. If this is true of gospel and Scripture and sermons, it may also be applied to the issues of rewriting hymn texts since they are dedicated to the same message. The primary concern will always be, “is it true to the gospel?”

For many Christians, the Scriptures are given the place of authority in matters of faith and practice, against which experience, tradition and personal revelation are tested. Believers ask, “is it true to the Scriptures?” This is a very difficult issue on which to satisfy the many differing stances. Buttrick, in his discussion of the nature of Scripture, believes that those who assert the inerrant literalism of the Bible take a unyielding stance, which he describes as “an extravagant position, seldom ventured by the church ‘fathers’ or by the framers of Reformation faith.”⁴⁵ On the other extreme are those who regard Scripture as a human invention, helpful in parts, but unreliable and prone to error. Some follow the Zwinglian tradition that if something cannot be specifically found or endorsed in the Bible, it is not acceptable, while others hold to the Lutheran tradition that anything is acceptable if not expressly forbidden in the Bible.

So the question, “is something true to the Scriptures?” will bring responses which differ significantly according to the doctrine of Scripture held by each individual or faith community. An important consideration is that words of a Scripture text and the message of Scripture may not always seem to be the same. Martin Luther points out emphatically that Scripture is often idiomatic language, and to translate idiomatic language literally is to lose much of the meaning. He advocates translating the text into equally idiomatic language, so that the full truth of the message (and the gospel) is clearly spoken for all to hear:

⁴⁵Ibid., 264.

Here, in Romans 3 [28], I knew very well that the word *solum* is not in the Greek or Latin text; the papists did not have to teach me that. It is a fact that these four letters *s o l a* are not there. And these blockheads stare at them like cows at a new gate. At the same time they do not see that it conveys the sense of the text; it belongs there if the translation is to be clear and vigorous. I wanted to speak German, not Latin or Greek, since it was German I had undertaken to speak in the translation. But it is in the nature of our German language that in speaking of two things, one of which is affirmed and the other denied, we use the word *solum* (*allein*), along with the word *nicht* [not] or *kein* [no]. For example, we say, ‘The farmer brings *allein* grain and *kein* money’; ‘I have *allein* eaten and *nicht* yet drunk’; ‘Did you *allein* write it, and *nicht* read it over?’ There are innumerable cases of this kind in daily use.

In all these phrases, this is the German usage, even though it is not the Latin or Greek usage. It is the nature of the German language to add the word *allein* in order that the word *nicht* or *kein* may be clearer and more complete.

We do not have to enquire of the literal Latin, how we are to speak German, as these asses do. Rather we must enquire about this of the mother in the home, the children on the street, the common man in the marketplace. We must be guided by their language, the way they speak, and do our translating accordingly.⁴⁶

All proclamation must be true to the gospel and to the fullest interpretation of Scripture. This will affect the manner in which preachers prepare their sermons, the way hymn texts are evaluated, and the attitude of those who would revise. The end product is to be true, and all other considerations become secondary. It does not matter if the sermon or the revised hymn is aesthetically pleasing, or grammatically perfect, unless it is first clearly shown to be true. God is a God of truth, and nothing less than truth is acceptable in Christian preaching and singing.

2. By what authority do we proceed? The whole question of authority is always before us in the interpretation of Scripture and the preparation of text to be preached to the faith community or sung by them. Buttrick asks. “For the preacher, where is authority – in text, in

⁴⁶*On Translating: An Open Letter, Luther's Works*, Vol.35, Word and Sacrament, E. Theodore Bachman, Ed. (Philadelphia: Muhlenburg Press, 1960), 188-189.

interpretation, in imagination, in the congregation – where?”⁴⁷ As affirmed earlier, the authority of every preacher and the authority of every believer is to be found in relationship to Christ. We do not presume in our own right to have authority, but we respond to the call of God (the call of Jesus in the Gospels) which is confirmed in the community of faith. The authority of the preacher is assigned rather than assumed. Like the women at the tomb, who were the first to see the risen Christ and were the first commanded by him to “Go and tell...” (Matthew 28:10), every preacher is constrained to continue the telling or proclamation of the gospel first assigned to the women. We tell openly and honestly all that has been revealed to us, and we claim it to be true, for we believe it to be true. Wilson adds that

the authority to preach is an office given by the entire church, in accordance with Scripture, usually through laying on of hands at ordination, only after the candidate has been thoroughly tested with regard to call, character, theological knowledge, and ability to interpret the Scripture correctly.⁴⁸

While there is no guarantee of perfection in the work or wisdom of any human preacher, the combination of Divine call and ecclesiastical confirmation is the best source of authority possible. So the claim to know the mind of God is both preposterous and proper – preposterous because we can not possibly know God as well as we are known; proper because we are granted the knowledge and experience of much of God’s will for us and the world. We feel ourselves to be personally present in the narratives of our Lord’s ministry and his death and resurrection, and there is authority in our feeling and experience of Christ. Beyond this revelation, we can relate our own joy at having received forgiveness, and our experience of the Spirit. The preacher dares to walk on holy ground, and speak for God. We

⁴⁷Ibid., 243.

⁴⁸Wilson, 29.

are thus commissioned to preach the gospel – to tell the truth as it has been revealed to us. This means that we must constantly wrestle with the limits of authority.

For the hymn-reviser, this sense of authority is no less important. While it may be easy to justify a change of wording which simply updates an out-of-date term, there are more serious questions to be raised about the author's original intent. Is the proposed change faithful to the original intent of the author? There are three distinct levels of answers to this question.

First, what did the author *mean* to say? It is impossible for any person fully to know the mind of another. When we say that we know what someone meant, we *presume* that we know. If we are able to discuss in detail with the author the intent and the meaning, we can still only presume that we understand. Even the author, looking back, may not be sure what was meant at the time of writing. People's feelings and opinions change, and with these changes come different interpretations of their own actions and speech. "[The poet] Klopstock was questioned regarding the meaning of a passage in his poem. He replied, 'God and I both knew what it meant once; now God alone knows.'"⁴⁹

Second, what did the author *actually* say? There is no certainty that the words used by an author relate perfectly the intent of the author, even if that intent is certain. Words are used to convey ideas and messages, but words are limited in that by themselves they can never fully describe the idea or become the message. Marshall McLuhan's 1964 proposition *that the medium is the message*, when applied to linguistics, would affirm that the choice of

⁴⁹ Cesare Lombroso, *The Man of Genius* [1891], pt. I, ch. 2 as quoted in *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, (Computer Version), licensed from Little, Brown and Company, Inc. Copyright 1980 by Little, Brown and Company, Inc.

words used to deliver a message cannot help but modify the message. The author's choice of words will always affect the way the message is received by the hearer, and this may or may not be in keeping with the author's intent. Words are best studied in context, that is, in relationship to the rest of the text. Just as Scripture texts are understood and interpreted in the context of the larger passage and larger message, the words of hymn texts need to be studied as part of the entire hymn. For example, a metaphor, removed from its surrounding text, may proclaim a much different message than if allowed to speak from within its original setting. Looking for the actual meaning of the words is further complicated by the fact that any given text or writing may have more than one meaning, which may be evident in the original, or in the modern understanding, or in both.

Anyone who has ever penned a poem and then listened as friends (or those not so friendly) interpret the words knows that meaning may well be wider than an author may suppose. Words are obviously not lexically narrow in definition, they tend to connote; thus we speak of polyvalent meaning. Someone reading a poem you have written may come up with surprising meanings that you, as poet, did not anticipate. In some cases, you may object, perhaps on the basis of intent, saying "No way!", but at other times you may turn inward and admit that, yes, the words you wrote may well reach beyond your own awareness, that unwittingly your poem has evoked more meaning than you knew. So, when we write, we may pen a system of words that, detached from our consciousness, claims a wider range of meaning than we once intended.⁵⁰

Third, what is (or was) the author's *attitude* about the use of the hymn? This is a major consideration, because it raises the whole issue of ownership from an emotional and spiritual perspective. (This is also a separate legal issue, to be discussed hereafter.) Who *owns* a hymn which has been written for the glory of God, or the work of evangelism, or the edification of the church, or the strengthening of a believer's devotional life? Some will insist

⁵⁰Buttrick, 270.

that this is purely a legal issue of intellectual property rights. Others will say that a hymn dedicated to God is now God's alone, and the Spirit will guide believers toward its best and most fitting use. Yet others will say that hymns designed for worship in church become the property of the Church universal and every believer who feels drawn to sing them.

The evidence of the lives and ministrics of many of the hymn-writers is that they were not concerned about legal issues of ownership – copyright was a later innovation, and has been practised with much more fervour in America than England. The accepted practice in the early days of the English hymn was that new hymns were meant to be shared. As a new hymn was introduced, a visitor would remember it – perhaps even copy it down – and take it back to his or her own church, where it would be added to the small but growing collection of hymns. This is much the same way the original copies of the Gospels and other New Testament writings were passed on, shared, and copied by many early churches, so that all could benefit equally. The early hymn-writers were pleased and honoured that their hymns were deemed worthy of wider distribution, and many actually encouraged the practice. Some, like the Wesleys, however, discouraged their copiers from making any revisions. In the preface to their Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists of 1780, John wrote:

Many gentlemen have done my brother and me (though without naming us) the honour to reprint many of our hymns. Now they are perfectly welcome so to do, provided they print them just as they are. But I desire that they would not attempt to mend them: for really they are not able. None of them is able to mend either the sense or the verse. Therefore, I must beg of them one of these two favours: either to let them stand just as they are, to take them for better for worse: or to add the true reading [the original text] in the margin, or at the bottom of the page; that we may be no longer accountable either for the nonsense or for the doggerel of other men.

For the Wesleys, there were two issues. They regarded their hymns as a vital part of

the great evangelistic effort to which they and others were whole-heartedly committed; and the more their hymns were used, the more souls would be won for the Kingdom. But they were concerned that some persons were changing the lyrics of the hymns, so that the message was altered or weakened. This would reduce the usefulness of the hymns for evangelism and Christian life-style, and was therefore vigorously opposed. Their desire to limit “mending,” as they called it, was for the sake of the larger ministry of the hymns. From this we can find reason to appreciate and commend those who have dedicated their works to the Saviour and the Church, and who desire to see them bear fruit as widely as possible, and for a long time to come. We must also appreciate their concern that that the gift they have freely given not be abused by thoughtless or unworthy change.

Other hymn-writers, such as William Merrill (“Rise Up, O Men of God!”), were less interested in the broader ministry of their hymns, preferring to keep them as written, and bound to their original purpose, even after it was pointed out that the change of a few words could enlarge the scope and potential usefulness of the hymn dramatically. This raises the question of whether the need of the larger group outweighs the author’s preference. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 4, most hymnal editorial boards have decided that if the revision of a few words can expand the usefulness and the life of a hymn, then it is proper to proceed for the sake of the wider proclamation of the gospel. This, presuming there are no legal restrictions, will be done regardless of the author’s preference. In short, hymns, once offered to God in worship, may be retranslated and amended as needed to ensure their continued service to God.

We do not revise a hymn to suit ourselves or our own biases, but we do so under the authority given to us who are called to speak for the living God, and to represent God’s

interests in our age. So the only acceptable starting-point for the hymn-reviser is to approach the task at hand with honour and sensitivity. The truth and message of God warrant only the best of our human talents and abilities and attitudes. But more than that, they demand an openness to the leading and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This is God's message, not ours, and not even the original author's; we all are the messengers entrusted with the task of making God's message clear and understandable and appealing for today. "We must seek a model that will relate contemporary interpretation to both original meaning and, somehow, original intending."⁵¹

3. Is it legal? This is a consideration which is often overlooked by preachers and hymn-revisers. Preachers are used to searching for new ideas and interpretations to incorporate into sermons. We borrow thoughts and themes wherever we can find them, realizing that each generation rediscovers the same texts and themes over and over. No modern preacher has ever preached a sermon with a text and theme never before heard.

But while sermon texts and themes are used again and again, they are seldom copyrighted. How can one copyright a theme which is thousands of years old, and which was originally delivered by a prophet or apostle on behalf of God? The particular style or treatment of a theme or text in a sermon can be copyrighted, but many preachers have been hesitant to do so, preferring to allow others free access to the sermon in hopes that it will be found profitable for the spread of the Gospel. It was always assumed, however, that reasonable credit would be given.

Church music and hymns, however, are now almost always copyrighted when

⁵¹Ibid., 274.

published. The theology and the message of course are the property of all people who embrace them, but the wording used by the hymn-writer, usually in poetic form, is regarded in society and in law as artistic property. Copyright laws vary from country to country, but usually relate to the life of the author plus a number of years (normally fifty). Sometimes copyrights are renewed, by estates and others, well after this period. During all this time it is illegal to copy or publish the work of that author without being granted permission. It is also illegal to change even one word in a copyrighted hymn without permission of the author. In the copyright analysis published by the Royal Canadian College of Organists, we read,

Adaptation – no one may make changes to a copyrighted work without permission. This includes, but is not limited to, changing words, harmonizing or reharmonizing, making a choral or instrumental arrangement, or changing a music line...⁵²

In recent years, copyright licensing agencies have offered umbrella programs which, for a set annual fee, authorize churches and institutions to use copyrighted works of authors and publishers who participate in the licensing program. This permission is sometimes presumed to include the right to make minor alterations in those works. But it does not; the only permission granted is to use the original work in its exact form, with no alteration allowed, not even a change in punctuation. Those who revise hymns must be sure that what they are proposing is within the law. Churches and pastors are not exempt. As a spiritual matter, God is not glorified by the use of stolen property.

There is an obvious tension between the belief that hymns offered to God are the property (spiritually) of God's church, and the fact that certain laws have been passed to protect the rights (legally) of human artists and writers. We must work within that tension.

⁵²Alan Witmore. "Copyright and the Church". *Organ Canada: The Triannual Journal of the Royal Canadian College of Organists*, Vol. 11, No. 2; July, 1998, 7.

A Proposed Hermeneutic for the Revision of Hymns

The revision of hymns is not a new thing. It is a task which has confronted editorial boards since the first hymnals were published. Almost one hundred years ago, an editor wrote,

The most arduous labours of the Committee were in connexion with the texts of the hymns. Wherever common use has endeared a particular reading to the Church, the Committee have not deemed it expedient to revert to the original form: e.g. 'Hark, how all the welkin rings,' the original of 'Hark, the herald angels sing.'⁵³

What is new, and exceedingly relevant, is the recent development of computer and copier technology now within the reach of most churches, pastors and musicians.

Learning and applying all the theories of homiletics does not guarantee that a preacher will become a great preacher, though it will produce a more competent preacher. Similarly, applying all the theories of homiletics to hymn-text revision will not guarantee perfect results, though it will eliminate many of the failings and inadequacies attendant to such revision. In both cases, the product will have the benefit of the best help available, and will be more reliable for having been subjected to an appropriate hermeneutic.

Homileticians themselves do not agree on every point, but there is a strong enough consensus to warrant our confidence and trust as we are provided with clear direction and process in the preparation and revision of sermons. Wilson provides a graphic representation of the process of sermonic preparation, which he calls the Hermeneutical Square.⁵⁴ In it he identifies four steps: what the text says, what the text means, what experience says, and what the preacher says. This basic outline, with one addition, will be adapted for the proposed

⁵³*The Book of Common Praise*. Church of England in Canada. (Oxford: The University Press, 1908), xii.

⁵⁴Wilson, 127.

hermeneutic for hymn-text revision. He suggests that in following these steps, the preacher will at each stage ask the questions and do the research necessary to find the answers. Each step, when completed, leads to the next; and the process is incomplete if any steps are skipped.

The proposed hermeneutic for the revision of hymn texts takes a similar form, although the steps are appropriately modified to relate to the process at hand. Many of the conclusions sought, and the questions asked to reach those conclusions are the same in spirit and content as those asked by the preacher preparing a sermon. The major difference is that the preacher starts with a text from Scripture which already has a certain level of authority and standing with the faith community; otherwise it would not be used. The hymn-reviser starts with the text of a hymn which, though loved and given a level of standing with the faith community, has been alleged to contain in its words one or more problems which have lessened its appeal or usefulness to the community. This means that though the result sought may be identical – the proclamation of the Word – the approach taken will be modified according to the text at hand.

A HERMENEUTIC FOR HYMN REVISION

1. What do the words say? Of the preacher's task of retranslating Scripture, Buttrick says, "...spread out on a page, are words from long ago and distant lands. Preachers are supposed to decipher meanings, not for an ancient age, but for *now* (emphasis in original)."⁵⁵ The person who has been asked or feels compelled to revise a hymn also has a text spread out. This text may not be as ancient; in fact, even some modern hymns need revision. But the first

⁵⁵Buttrick, 263.

task is the same, to find out exactly what the words say. For the hymn, this step may have already started with the identification of the offending words. What do they say, and what is it about them which has caused some question or offense? Just as Scripture words must never be lifted from their context, but must always be viewed as part of a larger statement, the rest of the hymn must be analyzed to see what all the words of the hymn say, not just the few problematic ones. As quoted in Chapter 2, the hymn “Make Me A Captive, Lord,” says:

My heart is weak and poor
 ‘Til it a master find;
*It has no spring of action sure -
 It varies with the wind.*
 It cannot freely move
 ‘Til Thou hast wrought its chain;
 Enslave it with Thy matchless love,
 And deathless it shall reign.

Those words deemed problematic because of their out-of-date imagery are highlighted. They must be analyzed to ascertain exactly and literally what is being said. But this must be interpreted in context of what the other lines of the verse say, as part of the whole hymn.

2. What did it mean to the writer? This is the issue of original intent. The writer obviously felt that there was something to say, and used these particular words to say it. But how can we, with our modern understanding of words and language, understand what the words meant to the writer whose world and world-view were different from ours? Buttrick wonders, “Can we get at the psychological state of the writer?”⁵⁶ This involves trying to reconstruct the situation and the experience of that author, to see his or her world through eyes of that moment in time, to set aside some of the advantages of modern technology and life, and feel

⁵⁶Ibid., 275.

the surroundings as they were then. For instance, many Victorian-era hymns seem preoccupied with death. Children's prayers and hymns had ideas like "if I should die before I wake" which seem jarring to us. To the authors and writers, and the parents and children of that time-period, death was a very real prospect, at any age and at any time; and the poetry and hymns of that period reflected this very real part of life. To know what the author means in the words, we must comprehend and appreciate the Christian experience of that time, and what it felt like, day by day, without modern medicine to protect from the many epidemics which decimated the population, especially the children. When we are sure we understand what the author meant, we are ready to ask the next question.

3. Was the intended message valid at the time of writing? This is the extra step added to Wilson's four listed above. When the preacher deals with a Scripture text, there is the happy presumption that the message intended by the human writer *and* the Lord of the Word had a message that was valid. The fact that particular Scriptures were included in the Canon gives us some reassurance of their validity and reliability. The same assumption cannot be made of hymns, for though they may be greatly loved and have high standing with the faith community, they would never be seen on a par with Scripture in authorship or authority. (The exception would be those hymns which are direct quotations of Scripture, as Calvin restrictively taught that *all* hymns should be.)

So it is possible and probable that the hymn-reviser may come across words in a hymn clearly stating something which should never have been said, like the original third verse of Mrs. Cecil Frances Alexander's "All Things Bright And Beautiful," which will be thoroughly analyzed in Chapter 4:

*The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate,
God made them high and lowly,
And order'd their estate.*

At the time these words were written, this type of Calvinism was a strong influence in main-stream Christianity. As well, many still accepted slavery as being God-ordained. Since that time the vast majority of the Christian faith community has rejected this theology as being un-Biblical and un-Christian. To Christians today, there is bewilderment that words like these could ever have been written. So in answer to the question, the conclusion would be that the intended message was not valid even at the time of writing.

4. Is the message still valid? What does Christian experience say? If the message was not valid at the time of writing, then it is very improbable that the message will have become acceptable and valid in our age. Such cases will most often result in editing-out the offending words or phrases, and inserting a new and different message which meets the needs of the faith community. For those instances in which the original message was valid for its time, we must decide whether the message still has meaning for today's world. Is the approach to Christian mission identical to what it was centuries ago? Would the message of impending death lurking around every corner be as appropriate to our time, or does it need to be updated to reflect the state of medical science now taken for granted? Or, have we become too reliant on modern medicine, to the detriment of our reliance on God's tender mercy? As we decide whether the message is still needed and appropriate for today, we come to the final step of the proposed hermeneutic.

5. How can it best be reinterpreted for today's community? The preacher tells the story or retranslates the message of the Word of the Lord. In preaching, there are almost limitless

options for style and methods of delivery. Words can be chosen which will paint a picture, or tug at an emotion, or explain a difficult concept with a few simple words. The preacher can take as long as needed to deliver the sermon, and even has the option of adding some spontaneous comment at any time during the delivery. The hymn-reviser is limited to just the few words which need alteration. Unlike much modern poetry which is free verse, most hymns were written according to some very firm rules of poetry, stressing but not limited to rhythm and rhyme. Added to this is the fact that hymns are sung to musical tunes which have become closely associated with the words, and may have been composed with *those* words in mind. This creates even more difficulty in finding the perfect balance of message and meaning and poetic flow. New words which may say perfectly in modern language what was meant by the original author may fail as poetry or as musical lyric because the *em-pha-sis* is on the wrong *syl-la-ble*. The result is very unpleasant and unmusical. When all the verses have six lines, one verse cannot be altered with the addition of a seventh line!

This means that the hymn-reviser will primarily revise according to message and meaning, but will then have to address all the issues of prose and poetry, to ensure that the alteration will appear to fit seamlessly into the flow of the original. A well revised hymn will not have alterations which announce their own presence with poor matching of poetic quality.

The preacher delivers his or her sermon. It is an event in time and space, and the preacher is seen and heard as part of the message. It is impossible to preach a sermon anonymously. It is possible for the hymn-reviser to remain anonymous, but this removes part of the authenticity of the message. It is no longer the pure message of the original author. Some of the words have been amended, and therefore some of the message is altered. The

source of the revision should always be identified, so that the faith community may know who it is that has had a share in producing the gift of a hymn for all to sing and proclaim. The inclusion of the name of the reviser(s) as a footnote on the page would be very helpful.

Conclusion

Since it is certain that the call for hymn-revision is going to continue to become more pronounced as groups and individuals focus more and more on issues of language and imagery, it is therefore essential that pastors and church musicians be given the skills necessary to undertake the task. The identification in this thesis of the many current issues of language usage – gender, inclusiveness, archaic words, etc., – will help those facing these issues to know that others have faced them already, and that significant analysis has been done to assist in understanding the implications of retaining or changing particular words.

This thesis has also stressed a clear preference to retain the artistry and poetry of the original hymn-texts wherever possible, so that the beauty of the hymns will continue to inspire the faith community to sing them and even commit them to memory.

By careful application of this proposed hermeneutic for hymn-revision, many of the great hymns of the faith can be reclaimed for a new age. It would be a tragedy if such hymns were rejected and forgotten simply because a few words and images had become outmoded. The authors of these hymns were inspired to tell stories and teach doctrine, and share the gospel as they wrote their verses and poems, which were eagerly embraced by the faithful. It is to be hoped that others who are equally inspired will carefully, even lovingly, make the alterations needed to bring these hymns back to life again, and again. To this end this thesis is dedicated.

CHAPTER 4
CRITIQUES OF TWO ALTERED HYMN TEXTS

There is an old adage which claims that those who do nothing are not nearly as likely to be criticized as those who attempt great things. In 1993 the United Church of Canada, Canada's largest Protestant denomination, set out to replace its twenty-two-year-old Hymn Book, which had been jointly published with the Anglican Church of Canada. The intent was to produce a new hymnal which would bring together the best of traditional hymnody and a wide variety of new and contemporary hymns, with considerable representation of the diversity of Canada's ethnic community, as well as the world-wide Christian community's contribution to church music and worship. The end product of this commendable objective, called Voices United, was published in 1996, and has been widely acclaimed for its obvious attempt to include and celebrate many diverse styles and traditions of hymns and songs.

On the other hand, in 1990 the Baptist Federation of Canada voted to end production of The Hymnal (1973), and immediately by-passed any attempt to replace it with an indigenous book on the grounds that advance orders for a minimum of 50,000 copies could not be obtained. Instead they recommended an adaptation of a generic, non-denominational hymnal, published in the United States. Modification (limited to 10 percent) would include the removal of American nationalistic hymns, the insertion of others to reflect Baptist faith and practice (e.g. believer's baptism by immersion), and the deletion of such things as

George Washington's birthday from the indices of special events! Not surprisingly, this proposal was rejected, and the 1000 Baptist Federation churches in Canada are now individually purchasing whatever hymnal they please, while some are still using the 1973 Hymnal, the final one published by their own denomination. Hence there is no new Baptist hymnal which could be subjected to a critique as to its editing and revising. However, since the United Church of Canada took the risk, and produced its new Voices United, it can and will be critiqued.

The Co-Chairs of the Hymn and Worship Resource Committee, Nancy E. Hardy and Leonard Lythgoe, state their philosophy and intention in the Preface to Voices United:

The task facing the Hymn and Worship Resource Committee was daunting. The changes in our society, culture, and church over the past twenty-five years have been enormous. Since the publication of *The Hymn Book* [1971], issues of inclusiveness (as they relate both to persons and "God-language") have become critical in our society and in our church; these have demanded the close attention of our committee. In addition, the explosion of hymn writing during this period, much of it very fine quality, necessitated careful consideration of what kinds and how much of this material to include. We were also diligent in our efforts to include a selection of material from the world church to reflect the "global village" in which we live. As well, we recognized the necessity of culling several well-liked, but increasingly obsolescent hymns, but strove to restore, retain, and occasionally, revise the hymns which have played such an important and enduring part in the worship life of our church. We trust that *Voices United* strikes a judicious balance between the old and the new.

In the introductory pages following the preface, there are many helpful notes and explanations, including a list of abbreviations which are used throughout the book. The term *alt.* in italics is used to identify those hymns which have been altered. Though the Preface states that there were "occasional" revisions or changes made to hymns previously used, page-by-page research of the hymns in Voices United reveals that a total of 220 out of the 719 numbered hymns have the note *alt.* beneath them as part of the credits. This represents

over 30 percent of the entire body of hymns. When we factor in the laudable inclusion of fully half the hymns in Voices United being new, contemporary, or ethnic, and therefore needing no revision, it means that almost all the alterations were done on the remaining half – that is, the older hymns by authors such as Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley, and John Milton. The works of the newer authors, including Brian Wren, The Iona Community, and Natalie Sleeth are rarely changed. The result is that closer to 60 percent of the “hymns which have played such an important and enduring part in the worship life of our church” have been altered in Voices United. A cursory examination of these hymns suggests that most of these alterations and changes were made to replace archaic language (Thee, Thou, Thy, etc.) with modern terms. The same examination shows that the second most evident change was that of gender-inclusive language, as referred to in the Preface.

As helpful as it is to have each altered hymn identified, there is no indication of *what* has been altered. It is left to the reader or singer to find the changes. Many will not be aware that a change has been made, unless they happen to notice the *alt.* in the credits below the hymn. Some, who have sung the hymn for years, or have it as part of their “faith memory bank” referred to in Chapter 1, will find themselves singing the old words by memory, and noting that those around are singing different words. Many others will (mistakenly) presume that the way it is presently written is the way it has always been.

The changes in the texts of the hymns in Voices United did not happen by chance or without due consideration. The process was long and involved. From correspondence and records provided by Rev. Dr. John Ambrose, Managing Editor of Voices United, it is disclosed that the mandate for the preparation of a new hymn and worship book was given by the General Council of the United Church of Canada in 1990, fully six years before its

ultimate publication. The first three years were spent researching the preferences of local congregations, developing working principles, and creating criteria which would guide the actions of the committee as it completed the project. In the words of the Managing Editor, “It was a huge and complex (some would say, impossible) assignment.”⁵⁷

The committee wrestled with the issues related to hymn-text revision.

In translating the mandate into working principles, the committee decided that it would move carefully, especially on matters of language. It was realized that some older hymn texts would need to be **left alone**; it would be a travesty to edit them into current English usage. Other hymn texts could be **modestly edited**, which might assure that they would be used long into the future. In some instances it would be best to include both the older and revised texts side by side, giving congregations some options.⁵⁸ [all emphases in original]

The process used in developing the working principles was a major task for the committee, who collectively used their various skills and interests to make the judgments necessary to evaluate each hymn, each verse, and in many cases each word of the texts under consideration. Ambrose has affirmed that principles of homiletic theory were very much a part of these deliberations, and the issues of revision seemed quite similar to issues of faithful proclamation which are regularly faced by preachers.⁵⁹ By July 1, 1993, guidelines for language in the new hymn book had been developed; these list the concerns about language which would be encountered in the revision process. Ten issues or language concerns were identified. In conversation with Ambrose, these ten were compared, point-by-point with the sixteen issues identified in Chapter 2 of this thesis. The lists would be identical, were it not for the subdivision of some concerns in the larger listing. Wording and terms used differ, but

⁵⁷John Ambrose, in a personal letter dated September 24, 1998, relating his work with the committee.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹From an interview at St Paul’s United Church, Milton, ON., June 8, 2000.

the general interpretations of the need for revision were the same in each case.⁶⁰ It should be noted however, that the United Church list represents the theological stance of that denomination, while the list in this thesis is drawn from many sources and represents differing stances. Each person will interpret these issues according to his or her own stance.

We will now analyze two hymns which have been revised or altered. In the first, “All Things Bright and Beautiful” by Cecil Frances Alexander, the comparison will be between the text as printed in Hymns Ancient and Modern of 1904 and Voices United of 1996. The two versions of the hymn will be placed side by side in their entirety on a single page, for ease of study. Recognizing the similarity of the hermeneutic used by the editorial committee of Voices United and that proposed in this thesis, as well as the similarity of the lists of criteria for revisions, we will be allowed a high consistency of analysis, knowing that each change identified here, and each reason for change has been individually compared with those of John Ambrose’s committee, and that each has been individually affirmed by him.⁶¹ This also means that we will be able to use the sixteen language-usage concerns of Chapter 2 as being interchangeable with the ten of Voices United.

This process of comparison can help us identify clearly, through positive and negative examples, the need for standards and guidelines in hymn revision and alteration. The words in question will in each case be emphasized with *bold italic* type, and in each case an identifying number will be placed in square brackets. These numbers will identify the reason(s) why the committee’s revisions were judged to be necessary. In some cases more

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid

than one concern or issue will be identified. The sixteen categories listed here represent all the possible reasons for revision identified in this thesis, and as such are drawn from differing traditions and theological stances. However, this list also includes every one of the categories used by the Voices United committee.

1. Archaic language
2. Gender issues as related to persons
3. Gender issues as related to God
4. Dominance issues
5. Racial, ethnic concerns
6. Local images trapped in time and space
7. Historic inaccuracy or adjustment
8. Doctrinal difference between denominations
9. Interpretation of Scripture
10. Questionable theology
11. Simple inaccuracy
12. Militaristic imagery
13. Melding of nationalism and theology
14. Changing connotations
15. Unpleasant words
16. Removal of negative words and phrases

ALL THINGS BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL
Mrs. Cecil Frances Alexander (1818-1895)

Hymns Ancient and Modern,
1904, Church of England

1. All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.
2. Each little flow'r that opens,
Each little bird that sings,
He made their glowing colours,
He made their tiny wings.
3. *The rich man in his castle,*
The poor man at his gate,
God made them high and lowly,
And order'd their estate.
4. The purple-headed mountain,
The river running by,
The sunset, and the morning
That brightens up the sky,
5. The cold wind in the winter,
The pleasant summer sun,
The ripe fruits in the garden,
He made them every one.
6. *The tall trees in the greenwood,*
The meadows where we play,
The rushes, by the water,
We gather every day;
7. *He* gave us eyes to see them,
And lips that we might tell
How great is God *Almighty*,
Who has made all things well.

Voices United,
1996, United Church Of Canada

1. All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
In love, God [4] made them all.
2. Each little flow'r that opens,
Each little bird that sings,
God [3] made their glowing colours,
God [3] made their tiny wings.
- [verse entirely omitted]
[6] [7] [8] [10]
3. The purple-headed *mountains*, [?]
The river running by,
The sunset and the morning
That brightens up the sky;
4. The cold wind in the winter,
The pleasant summer sun,
The ripe fruits in the garden,
God [3] made them every one.
5. *The rocky mountain splendour,*
The lone wolf's haunting call,
The great lakes and the prairies,
The forest in the fall; [6]
6. *God* [3] gave us eyes to see them,
And lips that we might tell
How great is God *our maker*, [4]
Who has made all things well.

Mrs. Alexander's hymn is one of several written by her which are among the most-loved hymns in the English language. Her others include "Once In Royal David's City," "Jesus Calls Us O'er The Tumult," and "There Is A Green Hill Far Away." This particular one, "All Things Bright And Beautiful," was part of a book of hymns written for children, but has been embraced by people of all ages. The Yorkshire veterinarian, James Herriot (a pseudonym) used the second line, "All Creatures Great And Small," as the title for his first book of diaries, and each of the other lines as the titles for follow-up books, ending with the fourth line "The Lord God Made Them All." These phrases had become part of the language before Herriot adopted them and made them even more famous in the television series by the same name. Mrs. Alexander was married to a parish priest (Church of England) in an economically impoverished rural part of Ireland. She was well known for her kindness, generosity and social action. Her husband was eventually elected Archbishop of Ireland, and from her more privileged position, Mrs. Alexander donated all the profits from her book of hymns to support handicapped children. These details become more meaningful as we analyze her hymn, and try to understand and appreciate the attitude and actions of the author.

The most challenging concern about this hymn is the jarring social commentary and theology of the original verse 3. The belief that God "order'd the estate" of all, including the poor and needy, was Calvinist predestination at its worst. It was also the *status quo* thinking of Victorian England. As noted above, though Mrs. Alexander may have believed that God placed people in poverty and destitution, she didn't let that stop her from attempting to change what God had done, for she also believed that it was her Christian duty to use God's actions as her own personal call (and that of society as well) to change the terrible situations which were placed before her. However, verse 3 was quickly rejected by almost all the

evangelical Christian movements in England at that time as being an unacceptable justification for allowing intolerable social situations to continue to exist. The Baptists, Methodists, Salvation Army, and others who championed the poor and uneducated dropped the verse, but kept the rest of the hymn. By the turn of the century, the verse was rarely used, and is now not found in any current hymn book.

This fine hymn, with one very questionable verse, gives clear evidence that there are times when words used by an author not only can but must be challenged. The theology expressed in Verse 3 is abhorrent to many, if not all, Christians. When taken in context with Mrs. Alexander's work among the poor, it is clear that her own words do not do justice to her faith and practice; and the words proclaim a negative theology far beyond what she ever intended. Those leaders of society who wished to hold on to their positions of privilege at the expense of the poor would have been delighted with the apparent theology of verse 3, and the wording of the verse itself demanded its eventual removal from the body of hymnody used by those with social conscience as learned from Jesus.

The other changes noted in the revision of this hymn reflect a variety of concerns. The phrase *The Lord God* in verse 1, has been changed to *In love, God* by the editors of Voices United. The issue is unease with words of dominance or hierarchy. For some believers, dominance and hierarchy are seen as unwelcome remnants of male patriarchal dominance of the faith. Words like *king*, *lord* and *master* are blamed for perpetuating male domination of historic Christianity, as well as the obvious theological statement of such words. The seriousness of this claim depends on the feelings and experience of those most affected by it. For some, it is critical; for others, it is a non-issue. Each society of faith, each denomination, each believer must test their own motives and attitudes and responses to those

who feel threatened or offended by these words.

A major consideration with the phrase *Lord God*, however, is that it is a very prominent phrase in Scripture. While many other dominance and hierarchy words are used in an ordinary sense in Scripture, the pairing together of the words *Lord* and *God* in that order is a prominent and recognized way of referring to the Deity in both the Old and New Testaments. All English translations, past and present, use the phrase, often as one of the ways of speaking of God without using the unspeakable name of God. For this reason, it is a hard word to replace, especially as it occurs 532 times in the King James Version of 1611, which undoubtedly was used by Mrs. Alexander. It occurs 27 times in the more scholarly Revised Standard Version of 1946, and 88 times in the more contemporary New International Version of 1973. It is difficult to give up a phrase so deeply imbedded in language.

The next change of words made by the editors of Voices United occurs twice in verse 2, once in verse 4, and once in verse 6. The word *He* is replaced with the word *God*. This is clearly an issue of gender, as referred to in the Preface to Voices United. The view is held by many that if not necessary to the immediate story or thought, gender-specific words such as *He*, *Him* and *His*, should be avoided. Since English has little to offer in the way of gender-neutral personal pronouns, the obvious solution is to revert to proper names. If we are referring to God's attributes, then the word *God* is always appropriate. Masculine words are taken by some to indicate a belief that God is literally and physically masculine by gender, and elimination of unnecessary use of such gender-specific language is a focus for the editors of Voices United. In other hymns, feminine images are used to balance with the masculine. In "Bring Many Names" by Brian Wren, the second verse starts "Strong Mother God, working every day," and the third verse begins "Warm Father God, hugging every child."

These images confront and mix the stereotypical gender assumptions of our society, where men are supposed to be strong and macho, while women are supposed to be soft and warm and gentle. Some Scriptural images of God are feminine (the mother hen protecting her chick under her wings, as told by Jesus in Matthew 23:37). The Voices United guidelines state, “The [unacceptable] preference for male imagery is certainly related to the world in which writers of the texts lived, where social prominence was given to men, and women were subordinated.”⁶² On a poetic level, however, the constant repetition of the word *God* is much harsher than the softer *he*, which flows more freely.

One curious change between the original verse 4 and the revised verse 3 is the change of the word *mountain* into the plural *mountains*. The other three nouns in the verse, *river*, *sunset*, and *morning* are unchanged, as singular, only *mountain* is changed. This may appear at first to be a typographical error, for there does not appear to be any other reason for changing one image and not the rest in a single verse, impairing a desirable poetic parallelism. However, Ambrose relates that the democratic committee took very seriously the reasoning of a committee member who lived in the mountains, and felt that the plural term was more inclusive!⁶³

In verse 6, the word *Almighty* is replaced with *our maker*. This is another issue of dominance and hierarchical power. Again, the word *Almighty* is used extensively in Scripture in naming and addressing God. In modern English translations, it is even more common than the phrase *Lord God* previously referred to. Ambrose reports that the

⁶²*Guidelines For Language in the New Hymn Book and Worship Resource*, revised draft of July 1, 1993, 1.

⁶³Ambrose, interview of June 8, 2000, *Ibid*.

committee members were divided on this issue, and some are still of the opinion that it was a loss to remove *almighty*. When making changes, care should be taken to continue the original thought, if possible. By definition, *almighty* and *our maker* are not even close as replacements for each other. Hence the meaning of the verse has subtly been changed, as a by-product of word replacement.

Finally, the editors replaced the second-to-last verse with a beautiful new verse. While there is nothing wrong with the original verse, it is fairly general and could apply to many areas of the world, especially those familiar to Mrs. Alexander. The new verse is special in that it is fully Canadian in content, and draws a beautiful picture of God's loving creation of this great land. It could be further improved by the use of the missing initial capital letters on the words *rocky mountains*, *great lakes* and *prairies*. In Canada, these are regarded as proper names, and appear on atlases and maps as such with capital letters. This small change would reinforce the distinctly Canadian imagery of God's creation around *us*. It is regrettable that we are not given the name of the anonymous person who wrote this beautiful verse; even Ambrose did not have that information.⁶⁴

The second hymn-revision to be critiqued is "Be Thou My Vision," an ancient Irish hymn, translated by Mary Byrne, and versified by Eleanor Hull. It has been widely used in the hymnaries of most English-speaking denominations. It is full of archaic language and terms, and has examples of gender bias which offend some. But it has a strong poetic flavour, which has endeared it to many over the decades. One problem in revision is how far to go when correcting deficiencies, and what should be retained of the poetic form and flavour.

⁶⁴Ibid.

The hymn is printed on page 84 (foldout) in four versions side by side:

1. The versified version of Eleanor Hull (1860-1935), common to both the Hymnary, United Church, 1930, and the Hymnary, 1936, for Baptist Churches in Canada. (The Baptists purchased the actual printing plates of this hymnary from the United Church, and republished it as their own, with a number of hymns replaced.)
2. The revision in Let's Praise, Baptist World Alliance, 1988.
3. The revision in Common Praise, Anglican Church of Canada, 1998.
4. The revision in Voices United, United Church of Canada, 1996.

The many changes made in this hymn also point out an unwelcome by-product of the current interest in hymn revision. Prior to the publishing of new hymnaries by several Canadian denominations, "Be Thou My Vision" appeared as a virtually identical text in the Baptist, United, Presbyterian and Anglican books. Since the revision of hymnaries and publication of new ones, we now have at least four new versions of the hymn, differing from the former one held in common, and from each other. This means that a hymn which was once shared as a unifying force between the denominations of the church in Canada now serves as an example of our division. The Baptist hymnal, Let's Praise, 1988, is a British publication of the Baptist World Alliance, and is used some Canadian Baptists churches.

By happy coincidence, John Ambrose, who served as Managing Editor of Voices United, was invited by the Anglican Church of Canada to be a member of the revision committee which produced their Common Praise in 1998. Ambrose has confirmed in the same interview noted earlier in this chapter that the criteria used by the Anglican Committee were very similar to those used by the United Church committee, with the somewhat different stances of the two sponsoring denominations, and the resulting variations in interpretation of the various issues and concerns.

As in the first hymn critique, the altered words are highlighted in ***bold italic*** and the reasons for revision are identified by number in square brackets []. The asterisk (*) in the first line of the last two versions points out just the first of dozens of removals of capitals from words addressing God, which removal is now the established convention in religious writing. The merit and theological implications of this new convention in hymns, religious poetry, and modern translations of the Scriptures will make a good topic in some other paper.

BE THOU MY VISION

Ancient Irish Hymn, translated by Mary Byrne, versified by Eleanor Hull.

1. Be Thou my Vision,
O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me,
save that Thou art,
Thou my best thought,
by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping,
Thy presence my light.
2. Be Thou my Wisdom,
Thou my true Word;
I ever with Thee,
Thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father,
I Thy true son;
Thou in me dwelling,
and I with Thee one.
3. Be Thou my battle-shield,
sword for the fight;
Be Thou my dignity,
Thou my delight,
Thou my soul's shelter,
Thou my high tower:
Raise Thou me heavenward,
O Power of my power.
4. Riches I heed not,
nor man's empty praise,
Thou mine inheritance,
now and always:
Thou and Thou only,
first in my heart,
High King of heaven,
my treasure Thou art.
5. High King of heaven,
after victory won,
May I reach heaven's joys,
O bright heaven's Sun!
Heart of my own heart,
whatever befall,
Still be my Vision,
O Ruler of all.

Let's Praise, Baptist World Alliance, 1988,

1. *Lord*, [1] *be my vision,*
supreme in my heart,
[1] *bid every rival*
give way and depart: [1]
you [1] my best thought
in the [1] day or *the* [1] night,
waking or sleeping
your [1] presence my light.
2. *Lord*, [1] *be my wisdom*
and be [1] my true word,
I ever with *you* [1]
and you [1] with me, Lord:
you [1] my great father,
and I your [1] *true child*, [2]
[1] *once far away, but*
by love reconciled. [1]
3. *Lord*, [1] *be my breastplate*, [7]
my sword for the fight:
be [1] *my strong armour,*
for you [1] *are my might;*
you [1] *are my shelter*
and you [1] my high tower -
raise [1] *me to heaven,*
O Power of my power.
4. *I need no* [1] *riches,*
nor *earth's* [2] empty praise:
you [1] *my inheritance*
through all my days;
[1] *all of your* [1] *treasure*
to me you impart,
high King of heaven,
the first in my heart. [1]
5. High King of heaven,
when battle is done,
grant heaven's joy to me
bright heaven's sun;
Christ [1] of my own heart,
whatever befall,
still be my vision,
O ruler of all.

Common Praise

Anglican Church of Canada, 1998

1. Be **thou* my vision,
O Lord of my heart;
naught be all else to me,
save that *thou* art,
thou my best thought,
by day or by night,
waking or sleeping,
thy presence my light.
2. Be *thou* my wisdom,
and thou my true Word;
I ever with *thee*,
thou with me, Lord;
thou my great Father,
thine own may I be;[2]
thou in me dwelling,
and I *one with thee*.
- (3. verse removed) [12]
3. Riches I heed not,
nor *the world's*[2] empty praise,
thou mine inheritance,
now and always:
thou and *thou* only,
first in my heart,
high King of heaven,
my treasure *thou* art.
4. High King of heaven,
when victory *is* won,
may I reach heaven's joys,
bright heaven's Sun!
Heart of my own heart,
whatever befall,
still be my vision,
O Ruler of all.

Voices United

United Church of Canada, 1996

1. Be **thou* my vision,
O *joy*[4] of my heart;
naught be all else to me,
save that *thou* art,
thou my best thought,
by day or by night,
waking or sleeping,
thy presence my light.
2. Be *thou* my wisdom,
my calm in all strife;[8]
I ever with *thee*,
and thou in my life;[4]
thou loving parent;[3]
thy child may I be;[2]
thou in me dwelling,
and I *one with thee*.
3. Be *thou* my battle-shield,
sword for the fight;
be *thou* my dignity,
thou my delight,
thou my soul's shelter,
thou my high tower:
raise *thou* me heavenward,
O *power* of my power.
4. Riches I heed not,
nor *vain*[2] empty praise,
thou mine inheritance,
now and always:
thou and *thou* only,
the first in my heart,
great[4] *God*[4] of heaven,
my treasure *thou* art.
5. *Great*[4] *God*[4] of heaven,
after victory won,
may I reach heaven's joys,
O bright heaven's sun!
Heart of my own heart,
whatever befall,
still be my vision,
O ruler of all.

These revisions of this hymn involve issues of theology, language usage and the dilemma of poetic artistry versus modern functionality. The editors of Let's Praise identified a problem of excessive archaic language and made more than 25 changes most of which were the removal of the words *Thee*, *Thy* and *Thine*. They were responding to a perceived need for language to be updated because this hymn appears to use language and images which are disconnected from modern culture. For many people, archaic English is as strange to their experience and understanding as if it were a foreign language. Luther and others retranslated the Scripture into the language of the people because the issue of accessibility and understandability outweighed all other considerations. The editors of Let's Praise would consider themselves as part of that great tradition. The Preface to their hymnbook acknowledges their intent to make the language functional. "We believe that there is tremendous value in having hymns of deep spiritual content, which are also in a language understandable to today's generation, included in the Let's Praise collection."⁶⁵

Virtually all of the older hymns in Let's Praise reflect the removal of archaic language, and in most cases the result is acceptable and pleasing. The well known "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" becomes "Great Is Your Faithfulness," and "Thine Is The Glory" becomes "Yours Be The Glory." As a help for users, the old titles are included in the alphabetical index, though such users may be confused when that hymn does not appear in the text. These changes bring Let's Praise into line with many of the hymns written by contemporary composers, who operate according to a modern convention, that, "...one of the highest priorities [in texts for hymns] is that language be vernacular, even colloquial, in style, diction

⁶⁵David Peacock, Let's Praise. (London: Marshall Pickering, 1988), Preface, unnumbered.

and form. These are texts of direct discourse, of conversational speech. This language is self-conscious about avoiding complexity and nuance; it purposely eschews images that are subtle, elusive, and symbolic in favour of intelligibility and accessibility.”⁶⁶ With such alterations however, comes the possibility of other changes in meaning. In the case of “Thine is the Glory” becoming “Yours be the Glory” there is a change in the theological meaning. The indicative verb *is* asserts that something exists, while the subjunctive verb *be* only expresses potential. The issue is significant. Does God already have glory, or do we wish God to have glory?

The poetic sentence structure in the original version of “Be Thou My Vision,” makes it impossible simply to replace *thee* and *thou* with their more modern counterparts *you*, and *your* in all cases, so it became necessary to change the sentence structure to accommodate different phrases. The poetic “Be Thou” became “Lord, be.” Unfortunately, the intended intimacy of *thou* in the original is lost to the far more formal *Lord*, which itself is rejected by many other current editors as an unacceptable dominance or hierarchical word. Other phrases employing patterns of speech which are not archaic, but seem a little old fashioned, are replaced with simpler phrases: the poetic “by day or by night” becomes the functional “in the day or the night”, and “May I reach heaven’s joys” becomes “grant heaven’s joy to me.” The editors of Let’s Praise have been faithful to their intent to use functional, easily-understood language, but the poetic flow is lost. While this may be necessary if targeting particular groups, such as the young or those who have a mother tongue other than English, for those schooled in the richness of the language something is taken away and lost. Must Christianity

⁶⁶John D. Witvliet, “The Blessing and Bane of the North American Megachurch: Implications for Twenty-First Century Congregational Song,” *The American Organist*, (May, 2000) : 50.

be stripped of artistry so that it can become more seeker-sensitive?

Romeo and Juliet, by William Shakespeare, is written in archaic language, but the theme is timeless. Many new plays based on the same theme have been produced using modern language and expressions and images. The musical, *West Side Story*, is really *Romeo and Juliet* set in New York City. young lovers from different ethnic sub-cultures and street gangs. The language is appropriate to the setting, and the whole new product works. What has never worked is the attempt to re-write Shakespeare in modern context, that is to put modern words into the ancient characters' mouths. A sixteenth-century Juliet, wearing clothing of that period, and leaning over a balcony of that time and place, says, "Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou, Romeo?" (Act 2, Scene 2) Something is lost if, in the same setting, that plaintive question is replaced with "Hey, Romeo, where are ya?" There is beauty and artistry worth saving and worth teaching to new generations. Schools still teach Shakespeare as part of the rich heritage of the English language. There are some instances when hymns with archaic language should be afforded the same honour.

By contrast to Let's Praise, the editors of Common Praise, (Anglican Church of Canada, 1998) and Voices United, (United Church of Canada, 1996) in providing revisions of the same hymn, have chosen to retain the poetic quality of some of the archaic language. Both of these hymnals, as a matter of editorial policy, have determined that archaic language will normally be removed. But each has chosen several hymns in which old language and speech have been retained (with the removal of the capitalization of *thou*) for their obvious poetic value. The policy, stated in the Introduction of Voices United reads, "The language of many of the older hymns has been updated in the sincere hope of extending their usable life. Some have been left unchanged in deference to the views of particular authors, or because it

was felt that the poetry was not permitting of change.”⁶⁷ An example is “O God, Our Help In Ages Past,” which has beautiful phrases like “Under the shadow of Thy throne Thy saints have dwelt secure”; and “From everlasting Thou art God, To endless years the same.”

The *thee-thy-thou* issue is very complex, affecting Scripture translation as well as hymn-texts and other aspects of worship.

New translations of the Bible and their use in church services has influenced the language of hymnic literature. The American Bible Society published the New Testament in ‘Today’s English Version’ in 1966 and the Old Testament in 1976. [There have been many additional contemporary language translations and paraphrases since these dates.] In this context, for many people the “thee-thy-thou” language of many hymns seemed awkward. Authors of new hymns avoided such usage. Some hymnal editors attempted to carefully alter eighteen- and nineteenth-century hymns by using “you-your” language. Some difficulties have occurred in weakened lyric lines and destroyed rhyme. Other hymnal editors have retained the original words in the traditional hymns, but have accepted contemporary language in new hymns. *The mixing of “thee-thou-thy” with “you-your” seems acceptable in the same hymnal, but not in the same hymn.*⁶⁸[emphasis mine]

We come next to the issue of gender-bias in verse 2. While the editors of Let’s Praise chose to retain the gender of *father* as it relates to God, the change of *son* to *child* as it relates to us is accomplished in very pleasing fashion, with the original poetic flow intact. Common Praise also retains *father*, but replaces *son* with the very generic but specific *thine own may I be*, while Voices United replaces both words with *parent* and *child*, in keeping with their policy on inclusive language.⁶⁹ Ambrose, in the June 8, 2000 interview, makes the

⁶⁷John Ambrose, Managing Editor, Voices United, Introduction, x.

⁶⁸Reynolds and Price, 118.

⁶⁹Ambrose, Interview, June 8, 2000.

interesting observation that some current revisions have actually come full circle. If a committee were to change “Of the Father’s love begotten” to “Of the parent’s heart begotten,” there might be an outcry about the loss of the original wording. But when Prudentius wrote the hymn in Latin in the fourth century it read, “*Ex parentis corde*”!

As to the other gender issue, *man’s* in verse 4 is replaced by the far less meaningful *earth’s* (Let’s Praise) and the generic *the world’s* (Common Praise). Voices United has reflected the spirit of the proposed hermeneutic of this thesis by seeking for the deeper meaning of the phrase rather than a simple exchange of words. Their revision uses *vain* which states emphatically the real essence of the thought.

In verse 3, Let’s Praise makes a curious replacement of the term *battle-shield* with *breastplate*. Both are equally old terms describing ancient armour, so the proposed hermeneutic question “how can it best be reinterpreted for today’s community?” comes into play. In the attempt to replace a word which may be difficult to understand because of its ancient imagery, the editors have unfortunately chosen another word even less appropriate, for the original *battle-shield* is clearly the most instinctively understood of the two, being a composite word with both parts still in common usage. This attempt to replace archaic language has actually had the reverse effect. The Common Praise revision leaves out verse 3 entirely due to its supposed militaristic language, but it actually refers to Christian life-style and not human warfare.⁷⁰ The rich biblical imagery of our struggle against the evil *within* is lost with the removal of this verse which is based directly on Ephesians 6:11-18a. The essence is clearly shown in the New Testament in Today’s English, a modern paraphrase:

⁷⁰Ibid.

Put on all the armour that God gives you, so that you will stand up against the Devil's evil tricks. For we are not fighting against human beings, but against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities and cosmic powers of this dark age. So take up God's armour now! Then when the evil day comes, you will be able to resist the enemy's attacks, and after fighting to the end, you will still hold your ground. So stand ready: Have truth for a belt tight around your waist; put on righteousness for your breastplate, and the readiness to announce the Good News of peace as shoes for your feet. At all times carry faith as a shield; with it you will be able to put out all the burning arrows of the Evil One. And accept salvation for a helmet and the word of God as the sword that the Spirit gives you.

In the Voices United version of "Be Thou My Vision" the revisers give added attention to the removal of words which suggest dominance or hierarchy, and this is in keeping with their particular mandate. *Lord* is replaced with *joy* and the phrase *High King* has both words replaced, using *Great God*. As in the case of the other hymn critique where *almighty* is removed, the issue of dominance is more pronounced in the United Church criteria for hymn revisions than in some other faith communities.

The overall result of the revisions to "Be Thou My Vision" is mixed. The Let's Praise revision is a hymn which, if brand new and never before seen, would be fairly acceptable, though a bit cumbersome; but as a replacement for a hymn regarded by many to be representative of the poetic best of its age, the loss of literary character and structure is keenly felt. Wilson seeks poetic character in sermons when he says, "...sentence structure, rhythm, emphasis, and pace also can be used to communicate feeling. Read the sermons of great preachers through all ages and learn to spot passages that were delivered with passion."⁷¹ He concludes, "the Tradition of Poetics allows us to identify the limitations of current homiletics as well as its strengths with new opportunities for improving the quality of

⁷¹Wilson, 269.

preaching that are coming from attention to metonymy, metaphor, and mission.”⁷² By being faithful to their intent to make language understandable and functional, Let’s Praise has, in this case, sacrificed much of the imagery and passion of the idiomatic language. There is a time for simple, basic clarity, but there is also a time to celebrate, with the richness of language, past and present, being subject always to the primary message.

Either of the other two revisions, that is Common Praise (except for the unnecessary loss of verse 3) or Voices United, is preferable to that of Let’s Praise, because of the skillful changes made by both to the few matters which needed attention, and the retention of the poetic beauty of the original with its grand old language.

We end this section of analysis and critique by returning to the point of beginning in this thesis, the place of honour and importance rightfully afforded to hymns as part of the faithful proclamation of the gospel. John Ambrose, in the Introduction to the most widely used hymnbook in a Protestant denomination in Canada, Voices United, speaks for us all:

Hymns have always had a central place in the making of Christians. For many, next to Scripture, a hymnal is the church’s most important sourcebook. It is from hymns that many learn and retain Scripture stories. It is from hymns that many receive their primary and most enduring theological education. Hymns stay with us long after occasions of teaching and preaching fade from memory. Hymns and songs should convey the biblical and theological substance that will help form worshippers into thinking, passionate, loving and courageous disciples of Jesus Christ.⁷³

⁷²Ibid., 282.


⁷³John Ambrose, Managing Editor, Voices United, Introduction, x.

APPENDIX A

THE POWER OF MUSIC AND ITS USE IN WORSHIP

If a man were permitted to make all the ballads, he need not care who should make the laws of a nation.

Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun (1655-1716) "Conversation Concerning a Right Regulation of Governments for the Common Good of Mankind" [1704]
Bartlett's Familiar Quotations

Almost everywhere we go, we are surrounded by music. Most of the time we are hardly conscious of it; yet we are always affected by it. Supermarkets and stores spend large amounts of money for music systems which provide an atmosphere which, believe it or not, stimulates people to buy. Dentists often use special musical packages which have been shown to relax the patients. Children instinctively sway to rhythmic music and march in step with a military band. A mother's lullaby soothes her baby. And the familiar trumpet or organ fanfare,  sets the emotions in action at a hockey game. The National Anthem brings people to their feet, and the bagpipe's skirl sends shivers to all the Scots.

Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun considered the power of music so potent that he claimed that music outweighs even the laws of government in its ability to mold character and emotion. Modern psychologists would agree, as the power of the rock concert or rave would attest. One of the most basic teaching techniques used since the beginning of history is that of

rhythmic repetition. Until the middle of the twentieth century, children were still taught mathematical tables by this same method. Using a sing-song cadence and clear rhythmic pattern *ta-ta-ta-ta-tum*, the children were required to repeat *one and one is two, one and two is three*, etc., until the whole table was committed to memory. What the educators knew was that the learning process is enhanced by the use of the power of music, and though the mathematical tables may not have sounded like music, they did in fact use sound and rhythm. Andrew Fletcher claimed that if he were allowed to replace the words of the common ballads, or children's ditties, he would be able to train the people in any way he chose. In the school yard for instance, if the children were heard chanting to that same rhythm, *better dead than red*, the message of the simple phrase could be expected to survive into adulthood, and be the basis for further anti-communist indoctrination. The lectures delivered to children would be quickly forgotten, but the simple phrase put to chant or music would last forever. Hustad refers many times to this power which has always been found in music, and says,

The Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle developed the doctrine of ethos, a concept that certain music (based on certain modes, or scales) embodied certain attributes (e.g. strength, manliness, passion, lasciviousness) and thus affected human behaviour for good or evil. Hence, strong convictions about music education were expressed, based on concern for welfare of the state.⁷⁴

In modern terms of psychology, the power of music has been the focus of many studies which have shown to be true what people presumed all along. Music can affect heart beat, respiration level and speed, and can aggravate or calm certain emotional states. Changing the speed of a rhythmic beat can cause the human heart to change its beat in sympathy. Loud pounding music will intensify anger. (Those who are prone to road rage

⁷⁴Hustad, 13.

are advised to tune their radios to soft mood music, and avoid aggressive sounding music, because the latter will make them more susceptible to the anger associated with road rage.)

On the other hand, music has the power to release within us some of our most noble and admirable emotions. Karen Burton Mains (in the preface to Sing Joyfully, a hymnal published by Hope Publishing Company), says that music has the power to lift our spirits, at least temporarily, into a special experience of the divine:

Within its [this book's] binding and pages are contained the doctrines of the faith culled through the ages and saturated with the devotion of those saints who have been members of the church triumphant. Music by its very nature evokes the soul's response. If we allow it, music can lift our hearts to attend to God; singing heartily, suddenly we discover that for a moment, brief but powerfully, we are absolutely preoccupied with the divine.

Augustine warns us to be wary of something so powerful as to be able to tempt us away from the purity of worship, "When I am moved by the voice of him that sings more than the words sung, I confess to have sinned."⁷⁵ Hustad says, "In other words, it is wrong to find pleasure in the music as an end in itself, while missing its full significance as a spiritual exercise. This is a danger which may be present in the use of any type of music in church..."⁷⁶

This is of particular importance when we realize how prominent the various forms of music are in the average worship service in the Protestant tradition. Fully half the time spent in worship involves music of some kind, and this trend is growing as new seeker-sensitive services with their emphasis on music become more common. The musical portion of a typical (somewhat traditional) Protestant worship service is usually made up of selections (in whatever order) from the following components:

⁷⁵Cited in *Ibid.*, 30

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 30

prelude (instrumental)
 introit (choral)
 Doxology
 first hymn (
 psalm or responsive reading
 Gloria Patri (recited, chanted, or sung)
 solo
 anthem
 hymn or chorus with children
 offertory (instrumental, choral)
 choral response with offering
 hymn with sermon (congregational)
 last hymn (congregational)
 communion hymn (congregational)
 choral amen (choral, congregational)
 postlude (instrumental)
 cantatas (choral)
 the 'hymn sing' (congregational)
 sung prayer (choral, congregational)
 silence

Silence is a neglected part of Christian worship, and is actually feared by many. The organ is used to cover the awkward times when no one is speaking; a moment of silent prayer seems like an eternity, and a pause in the flow of a service brings an immediate presumption that someone has goofed or missed a cue. Yet scripture says: "Be still, and know that I am God," (Psalm 46:10), and "the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him." (Habakkuk 2:20). In musical composition and theory, silence plays an indispensable role. Carefully timed and positioned silences called *rests* become an essential part of the finished product. Sometimes the rests are to allow a change of mood, or speed, or time; sometimes the rests are used for dramatic effect. Anyone who has sung in a choir knows that it is just as important to know when *not* to sing as when to sing. The flow and emphasis and even the meaning of worship can be affected by silence – often with dramatic results. If silence is to worship what a *rest* is to music, then the musical understanding of silence will

help the worship leader to use this aspect of worship more effectively.

All of these musical components are used by the worship leader or preacher to reinforce the theme and the emotional response of worship. Joyful music and hymns are used to express praise and exultation. More somber music is used to set the mood for certain times and seasons. And the skillful pastor and church musician are able to lead the faith community where it is appropriate to go spiritually and emotionally.

It is also possible to use music to lead people in directions which may be open to question. Old-time evangelists used the hymn-sing to *soften people up* and make them more receptive to the Gospel message. At more contemporary seeker-sensitive services the use of repetitive, soothing choruses and praise songs has an almost hypnotic effect on the *audience*. (The entertaining style of some praise-teams blurs the boundary between performance and worship; hence the similar blurring of the terms *audience* and *congregation*.) At what point does the deliberate use of music to control people's emotions and responses become abuse? Some of the techniques used by *televangelists* (and studied in the course by that name at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary) clearly abuse those who are swept along by the emotional flow, and music is prominent in that process.

But for those who sing because their hearts are full of joy, religious music and hymns are a gift from God. For those who mourn and look for solace, hymns offer peace and comfort as the voice of God is heard. Those who wish to walk with the Lord in service and discipleship find hymns that lead them toward the fulfillment of their aspirations. And those who can no longer go to church or participate in corporate worship sing the old hymns in their hearts and remember that God is with them.

APPENDIX B

WHAT PREACHERS CAN LEARN FROM HYMN-WRITERS AND MUSICIANS

In the preparation of this thesis it has become evident that similarity of focus and intent between preaching and hymn-singing leads very naturally to the value of sharing information and technique between the two related disciplines. This thesis has demonstrated that the discipline of homiletical hermeneutics may and should make a significant contribution toward the renewal of great church music, specifically hymns. This chapter will present observations concerning some practical aspects of preaching which would benefit from the church musician's training and experience.

First, as noted in the Introduction, both Buttrick and Wilson make emphatic reference to the *voice*; that is, the voice of God or the voice of the Word being spoken. Wilson goes on in a later chapter of his book to explain that this voice of God, heard through the sermon, depends very much on the voice of the preacher, and that no education in homiletics is complete without training the human voice to prepare it for the awesome responsibility of presenting God's voice. He says, "Voice is one of the first things people notice, and it can mean the difference between people listening or not. Even our reading of Scripture should capture attention."⁷⁷ James Forbes puts it even more bluntly, "A preacher who doesn't

⁷⁷Wilson, 268

respect the word enough to strive for excellence in leading the congregation to hear it, doesn't deserve the opportunity to present his or her manuscript as if such words are somehow more important than the Bible."⁷⁸ Wilson advises every aspiring preacher to learn simultaneously the skills of delivery with the skills of sermon preparation, and encourages preachers to seek out a musician who can give valuable voice coaching.⁷⁹ The voice is an instrument for which training and practice are required. The preacher's voice is one of the gifts of God which accompany the call to preach, and it is a gift which matures with use.

A second and closely related aspect of the voice and the message is the musical quality of preaching. The best and easiest illustration of this is found in the unique and effective preaching style common to many African-American churches and preachers. One is immediately aware that the words preached are not merely spoken, they are almost sung. This style uses the flow and cadence of free verse poetry, but adds to it the richness of musical motion and expression. The particular raising and lowering of the voice, not just in volume but in pitch and tonal quality, has become a recognized trademark of these preachers. As the sermon starts, the voice is fairly restrained, and the words come clearly and with control. Then, as momentum and excitement build the voice is transformed until at the climax, which may last a considerable time, the whole congregation is swept into the event. This often becomes antiphonal, with listeners joining in to respond, sometimes word for word, with identical musical cadence, to the voice they have absorbed into their own being. Not every preacher can or should adopt this culturally unique voice, but every preacher

⁷⁸James Forbes, The Holy Spirit and Preaching, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 70.

⁷⁹Wilson, 268.

should be aware of the powerful effect that speech-as-a-musical-event can offer to preaching.

The third lesson to be learned, particularly from hymn-writers, is to make every word count. Sermons may run to several thousand words. Hymns seldom exceed a couple of hundred words. This gives the preacher the potential to use far more words than are necessary to say what needs to be said. Fiction writers during the Victorian era filled page after page with detail about the decoration of ‘the room where the murder took place,’ and readers happily read these details for hours. It was an accepted part of the culture of communication at that time. In preaching there is a danger that the sermon will become so full of detail, with word definitions and explanations of lesser points, that the main point(s) will be hopelessly lost in the mix. Preaching to our modern mind and mentality requires the ability to say what needs to be said in fewer rather than more words, and with great care shown in choosing the words which will best deliver the message. The hymn writer, on the other hand, knows from the beginning that the entire message or story in the hymn must be delivered in relatively few words. As a result, words which are rich in imagery and emotion and feeling will be chosen. These words will strike responsive chords in the hearers and singers, which will prompt them to fill in the details from their own experience or memories or feelings. The preacher might say, of Psalm 23, *“I sincerely want to become one of the sheep who follow the Lord, because He will feed me from the greenest pastures, and make sure that I always have enough to eat, especially in the dry season when good grass is hard to find.”* The hymn-writer Dorothy Ann Thrupp says, *“Saviour, like a shepherd lead us, much we need Thy tender care.”* In these words, rich images are seen and felt, being drawn from the experience and lives of the singers. The word *Saviour* connects us with God in a personal way. *Shepherd* is full of images of what a shepherd does; very little detail is needed. In the

choice and flow of the words, the whole line has emotional elements of yearning and pleading, and the word *tender* has emotional power which always evokes a response. The combined result is that in one dozen words we are brought face to face with feelings and memories and expressions which are embraced instantly, but which would take hundreds and hundreds of words to describe. Good preaching uses words skillfully, and takes advantage of the power of individual words to paint pictures which fill the listeners' minds with images.

Fourth, preachers can borrow from hymn-writers the desire to tell a story. Narrative preaching is currently undergoing a strong revival. It is not a new discovery, but is the rediscovery of the very first means of passing on the essence of a society's history and beliefs. The oral tradition, which we view as an image of the elders and children of the tribe sitting around the campfire, has the old men and women telling the stories of when they were young, and the events that their parents and grandparents passed on to them. The stories became the heritage of the people, long before the invention of writing and recorded history. Jesus was a master story-teller, skillfully weaving stories which drew the listeners right into the plot, and often left them squirming when he put in a surprising unexpected ending. A quick look at any hymn-book will reveal that many hymn-writers are story-tellers at heart. Their hymns take us on a short but meaningful adventure, and then deliver us safely to a new location. As noted in the quotation from Karen Burton Mains in the previous chapter, the combination of music and words in a hymn has the power to transport us momentarily into the presence of the Divine. Good sermons will embody this sense of adventure. They will attempt to take us somewhere in our minds and hearts, and deliver us safely a little closer to the Saviour. The words which paint the picture, or map out the journey, are by design a neat package which starts where we presently are, whisks us off on the adventure, and leaves us

better off than we were. Great hymns have always attempted this, and sermons must also.

Finally, hymns attempt to evoke a response in the singers. If it is a hymn of praise, it is more than a list of reasons why our God is worthy of praise; we are called to join in the praise. If it is a devotional hymn, we are drawn into an attitude of contemplation and prayer. If it is a hymn of challenge, we are given clear indications of what is desired of us as servants of the Lord. If it is a teaching hymn, we are encouraged to learn more and more. In every case, there is a presumed response built into the hymn, either stated openly or skillfully touching the subconscious yearnings of the singer. A sermon which does not have a presumed response built into it is just a lecture. Preaching which does not attempt to move the hearers from where they are to where God wants them is just a talk. In every real sermon, the voice of God is calling to his people – perhaps as a pleading voice, or a demanding voice, or a reconciling voice – but always as a voice asking for a response. Why bother preaching, if there is no anticipated movement toward God?

In fine preaching and great hymns we have the very best of friends who share each other's interests and hopes and dreams. They are made for each other by divine choice and purpose, and they serve God best when used to complement and support each other. The union of the spoken Word and the sung Word is like the coming together of God's children male and female, generously offering the unique characteristics of both genders to become God's complete people. John Greenleaf Whittier's hymn "O Brother man," which itself is in serious need of updating, reminds us that in the final analysis, all our worship and preaching and singing must be validated in our living;

***To worship rightly is to love each other,
Each smile a hymn, each kindly deed a prayer.***

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