

# Introduction to Hymnody

Class 1

## Hymns

- Poor person's poetry and the ordinary person's theology.
  - *Gloria in excelsis* and *Te deum laudamus* were sung as creeds
- Hymnal is a book of "grass roots theology"
- Hymns function in the church: worship, evangelism, education, and ministry.

## Are Hymns Constant through time?

## No: Hymns reflect developing theology/context

- In 1866, "The church's one foundation" was an assertion of High Church dogma in opposition to humanism, science, and higher criticism.
- Over time, the dogma expressed was questioned. Hostile words originally in the hymn have now been omitted:  
"Though there be those who hate her [the church]  
And false prophets in her pale,  
Against foe or traitor  
She ever shall prevail"

## Recent Developments - 1

- Some theologians and worship leaders express sorrow at the pains of separation in Christian communities that have resulted from the use of noninclusive language in many – even classical – hymns.

## Recent Developments - 2

### Joyful, joyful we adore thee (H 376)

Thou our Father, Christ  
our brother  
All who live in love are  
Thine;  
Father-love in reigning  
o'er us  
Brother-love binds man  
to man.

We on earth are all thy  
children;  
All who live in love are  
thine;  
All creation sings  
before us,  
Raise we now the glad  
refrain.

## "Noble architecture is frozen music" (Goethe)

- A noble hymn is frozen theologically unless the people who sing it melt in the fervor of devotional song. (Thawing the frozen chosen)
- Regardless of the precision and correctness of the theological teaching of a hymn, its doctrine will remain frozen in moribund wording and lifeless music until its meaning is devoutly embraced by the one who sings it.

"The fineness which a hymn or psalm affords  
Is when the soul into the lines accords." (George Herbert)

## The Hymn in Culture and History

- The Early Church drew upon
  - Hebrew Psalter (in the G. of Mt, Jesus sang Ps 113-118 at the last supper).
  - Nativity Canticles
  - Early Christian Hymns (found in Pauline and Pastoral Epistles)
  - Doxological (praise) hymns
  - Greek and Latin Hymnody

## The Hebrew Psalter

- The writer of Matthew wrote that Jesus and the disciples sang The Great Hallel at Passover. Is this history or a reflection of the liturgical practices of Matthew's church?

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." When they had sung the **hymn**, they went out to the Mount of Olives. (Mt 26:26-30)

## The Nativity Canticles

- Song of Mary (Lk 1:46-55)
  - The *Magnificat*, Hymn S-185
- Song of Zacharias (Lk 1:68-70)
- Song of Simeon (Lk 2:29-32)
- Song of the angels (Lk 2:14)

## Early Christian Hymns and Doxologies

- Pauline and Pastoral Epistles contain fragments of hymns or songs of praise (doxologies).

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:5-11)

## Greek Hymnody

- The language used by the early church was Greek. The Septuagint, translated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries was appropriated by the church for liturgical use.
- **Prose hymns** – the *Phos Hilaron*, and later adaptations (O gladsome light, O grace of God the Father's face (H36) are of Greek origin.
- **Classical Meter** – The Eucharistic prayers of the Didache, and adaptations (Father, we thank thee who has planted (H302) comes from this source.
- **Prose Canon** – Andrew of Crete and John of Damascus (8<sup>th</sup> C). Andrew invented the canon. "Come ye faithful, raise the strain" (H 199) is an Easter canon by John.

Next time . . .

Latin Hymnody and the development of  
Western Church Hymnody during the dark  
ages and early middle ages.