

must be brought to mind intentionally and regularly. The rhythmic beat of spring and summer and fall and winter—the overarching regularities that governed all daily life—provided the beat and the sequence for remembering Exodus and Sinai and Conquest and the Kingdom.

Yet the prophets of Israel denounce a faithlessness that always threatens the people of God whenever memory becomes mere repetition, and the surprising reality of God bows to the sameness of the seasons. What is regular and recurring and predictable and everywhere evident brings with it a powerful religion of its own. You may not approve of the sequence of Spring and Summer and Winter and Fall. But you had jolly well better learn to live with it, because that's just how things are in the world. And you had better thank God (or the gods) for these regularities. There is not room here for differences of opinion or ideology. If you intend to survive you simply have to gear your life into this sequence of sameness and learn which crops to plant when, and when to harvest, and when to store.

But the prophets perceived that the recurring seasons provided something more than a calendar for recalling the astonishingly new events of Exodus and Sinai and Conquest and the Kingdom. Over the years and over the centuries, the sequence of samenesses in nature began to overlay and dominate the memories of the startling new things of God. A powerful link was formed between the regularities the small farmer depended on for survival, and the notion of God enshrined in the regular celebrations of ancient memories. God was pressed into the service of sameness, to bring an added measure of control to the urgent business of survival and enrichment in the self-evident and regular world of agriculture.

Notoriously in agriculture, it is the surprising irregularities in nature that threaten life most: the untimely rains, hail and windstorm, drought and blight and locusts. There is something in every farmer that does not love to be surprised, especially when the fabric of sameness is ruptured, on which all farmers depend for their control of life and for their well-being. Gods are useful as long as one believes they are in control of the surprises, and thinks there are religious techniques for bringing the power of the gods into harmony with the daily struggle for survival. It is useful to know what things please and what things anger the unseen powers that can produce bounty or devastation at the flick of a divine whim. So one worships the God of surprise in the interest of sameness. And the worship of Israel tended toward the worship of the gross national product. And in the name of the surprising God of Exodus and Sinai and Conquest and the Kingdom, the prophets of Israel announced God's surprising "No!" to the religion of Israel.

It is a chronic illusion of Christianity, and perhaps especially the illusion of Christianity in the modern era, that we have somehow been emancipated from the tyranny of sameness that once turned the faith of Israel into worship of the gross national product. The Good Friday truth is that our lives tend to be dominated by a much more sophisticated and powerful and extensive investment in sameness than those primitive (?) agrarian people of the Old Testament ever knew. Since the 1800's, but much more dramatically over the past eighty years, people in the industrialized nations have been forced to recognize

seriously. That is, God's revealing acts are in history, and the meaning of God's own self-giving to the world and to human beings is known in and through time and history. Salvation is a reality based on temporal events. We remember and experience anew the mighty acts of God over time. Thus at the heart of Christian worship is hearing the Word and keeping the memories alive as present reality so that we may fully and joyfully "do this in memory of me."

The faith of the Church from the earliest times manifests in its pattern of worship an implicitly Trinitarian structure — God the Father made manifest in history, and supremely in the events of Jesus Christ, suffering, dying and resurrected, and in the Holy Spirit indwelling and making alive the community of those who believe. The early Church remembered Jesus especially with the keeping of Sunday, the day of creation, of Resurrection. The term "Lord's Day" had become a Christian term for the first day of the week by the early second century. Sunday was in essence a weekly anniversary of the Resurrection.

But even the hours of each day became a way of structuring praise and the Word of God. With monasticism came the development of the daily eight-fold cycle of prayer. The Christian day developed as a cycle of remembering God in Christ throughout the daily round of work and rest. The Reformation sought to restore morning and evening prayer to the laity once again. We would do well, by the way, to learn again the classical morning and evening psalms 63 and 141, along with appropriate hymns such as "Christ, Whose Glory" (*The Hymnbook*, 47) and "All Praise to Thee My God This Night" (HB, 63) for household prayer.

Crucial for the question of the recovery of hymnody is how the temporal structure of the year and the pattern of Scripture over time itself witnesses to the holy history of God's acts and especially to the unfolding story of Christ's redeeming life, death and resurrection. The center point for the early church was, of course, the Pascha — the celebration of the event of deliverance through the death and resurrection of Christ. This was the liturgy of all liturgies, the feast of all feasts. The whole mystery of Christ and of what it meant to be baptised into his death and resurrection was celebrated in the Pasche which eventually becomes the three days at the climax of Holy Week. The two other great feasts were Epiphany and Pentecost. Indeed, the new ecumenical lectionary and calendar recovers the relation between Easter and Pentecost, and the idea of the "Great Fifty Days" between Easter and Pentecost Sunday.

Celebrating the rhythms of the liturgical calendar bears directly upon musical choices. In entering into the rhythms of the days, weeks and years we must read, pray and sing our reception of the fullness of God in Christ. This process of keeping time with the Church involves continual growth in how the great hymn treasury itself gives our people the expressive range of the whole Gospel. The sensitive use of hymns keyed to the new lectionary and calendar enables our prayer and praise to be Scripturally grounded yet ordered to the narrative pattern of God's revelation. In what follows I suggest a few examples of how particular hymns bring this out, and have the power to both *form* and *express* our corporate experiences of the Christian community's common memories and the dramatic pattern of encounter with the full sweep of God's Word,

orienting us always toward growing in the grace and covenantal obedience to God in Christ Jesus.

II

Since hymns are *integral* to congregational worship and not merely an ornamentation, hymn choice requires full knowledge of what the hymn texts actually say as well as knowledge of alternative tunes to the same text. Planning for worship which takes seriously the annual cycle must therefore be aware of how the great biblical and christological themes of the two major sequences of seasons are to be expressed: (1) Advent-Christmas-Epiphany, and (2) Lent-Easter-Pentecost. The congregational experience of these sequences can be profoundly deepened by studying the hymns and discerning where in a particular order of worship these hymns — or perhaps only selected stanzas — best articulate the Word of God and the most appropriate images. Opening and closing hymns are the obvious places to consider, but also hymns between biblical readings and responses to particular acts — especially at the distribution of the Holy Communion — should be thoroughly planned.

The first of the two sequences focuses upon the Incarnation, with specific themes of expectation: eschatological hope, nativity and the manifestation of divinity and humanity in the person and work of Christ. The second sequence, to which we shall return, focuses our worship and proclamation on the disciplined preparation for and participation in the redemptive drama of the suffering, death, resurrection, ascension of Christ and pouring forth of the Holy Spirit upon the earth. Hymns chosen ought to be attuned to these great themes so that these parts of the year become the ever-deepening participation of the history of salvation accomplished in the birth, life, passion, death, resurrection and return of Jesus Christ.

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel” (HB, 147) is a classic Advent hymn text. Not only does it enable us to utter the cry for deliverance which is articulated in the great prophecies of Isaiah as they are read and proclaimed, it carries us forward with the immense historical and eschatological images: The Dayspring and Desire of nations. Other stanzas than the three found in *The Hymnbook* should be studied and used. This hymn is best illuminated by comparison with the ancient “O Antiphons” and by study of the lectionary readings from Isaiah such as 9:2-7, 11:1-9, 35, 40:1-11, 27-31.

The Hymnbook contains several other excellent Advent texts including the familiar “Come, Thou Long-expected Jesus” (151) which also focus our attention upon the meaning of Jesus’ coming; his reign and sovereignty over all things. Note again the flow of broad eschatological images. Less sung by most congregations is “Hark, What A Sound” (HB, 150) set to the magnificent Welsh tune, “Welwyn.” There are striking references to both personal and corporate hopes which are not merely for nativity, but for the redemption and fulfillment of all things by virtue of what Christ is to accomplish: “Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning, Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ.”

Christians ought to begin the church year with the first Sunday of Advent by reflecting about the end of history and the theology of time implied by the

coming of Jesus Christ in time and human history. However, it must be stressed that most congregations do not experience the full set of tensions between hope expectation of both first and second appearances of Christ. This is because we begin to sing Christmas carols too soon. This is heightened by the commercial use of carols in department stores or on television immediately following Thanksgiving. Why don't we hold on to the longer, deeper rhythms which the season of Advent gives to us in God's Word by not singing Christmas carols on the Lord's Day (though other gatherings will inevitably use them) until the Christmas season? Here is a clear case of how our treasury of Advent hymns and the liturgy itself is prophetically "counter-cultural."

We already have an extensive repertoire of English and German Christmas carols for the Nativity season, so I will refrain from comment other than to point out that their very familiarity invites exploration of choral elaboration, descants, or other more dialogical arrangement of these carols and hymns (for example, "Angels We Have Heard On High" with its glorious refrain) which involve the congregation and various singers and musicians in alternating stanzas and new harmonizations. The use of children on specific stanzas or refrains often can refresh our hearing and singing of the most well-known and oft-sung texts. The congregation's Christmas repertoire is the most extensively developed one in the whole year, at least in the majority of churches. Yet many Presbyterians have not sung "All My Heart" (HB, 172) or "Ah, Dearest Jesus, Holy Child" (HB, 173) which invites the use of Bach and a wide range of other organ and instrumental settings of the melody as service music.

Epiphany has not been well celebrated or understood in the Reformed tradition. But its Christological message is clear: the honoring of Christ by the wise men's gifts, the baptism by John in the Jordan and the first miracle at Cana all focus our hearts and minds on the manifestation of Jesus' identity and ministry. The predominant images are of the light and of the "showing forth" of the meaning of Jesus Christ. "As With Gladness" (HB, 174) ends with the prayer that we may at last be where we "need no star to guide, where no clouds Thy glory hide."

"Brightest and Best of the Sons of the Morning" (HB, 175) builds on the fact that our lives should be the best gifts given on the analogy with the wise men, as we pray that the light will "Dawn on our darkness" I suggest that Presbyterian worship leaders need to look beyond a single hymnal for other crucial Epiphany hymns such as "Who Is This Stupendous Stranger?" found in the marvelous *Ecumenical Praise* volume published by Agape (Carol Stream, Ill., 1979). This collection, by the way, is an excellent resource, containing both new and older hymns and psalm settings, for the choir and the congregation for the entire church year.

The second great sequence of Lent-Easter-Pentecost requires that our hymn choice and singing attend to the very central message of the Gospel: incorporation into and participation in the redemptive suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. Through Lent we are to be constantly reminded of our preparation to receive baptismal renewal at the Christian Passover of Easter. Lenten hymns should emphasize the theme of discipline, attentiveness to Christ's pattern, and repentance. There are relatively few explicit Lenten

hymns in the *Hymnbook*, among which, however, is the fine text, "Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days." The third stanza prays the great prayer of our Lenten journey: "And through these days of penitence, And through Thy Passiontide, Yea, evermore, in life and death, Jesus! with us abide."

Once again it is essential that we study prayerfully the lectionary texts over Lent in order to discern which hymn texts in which places in the order of worship will bring us to focus on the most telling images and teachings in the Word of God. For example, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul" may be very appropriate for Lent, especially if the congregation can be taught the Welsh tune "Aberystwyth" (HB, 216, First Tune). A neglected hymn is "Who Trusts in God, a Strong Abode" (HB, 375) which might be suitable for use with the temptation account read early in Lent.

Holy Week is the final intensification of our Lenten preparation and should articulate the Passion narrative in its whole range of emotional tensions, beginning with the irony of the triumphal entry on Palm Sunday. So we sing "Hosanna, Loud Hosanna" (HB, 185) or "All Glory, Laud and Honor" (HB, 187) only to be brought up short with the inexorable account of where Christ's obedience and messianic mission is taking him — to humiliation of the Cross! The great chorale tunes and texts such as "O Sacred Head" (HB, 194) have particular power for the congregation's worship if we have planned the liturgy and our house devotions well and have unfolded the Passion narrative over the time of Holy Week in home and church gatherings.

Music for the Paschal Triduum (Maundy Thursday through the Easter Vigil or first service of Easter morning) requires a separate essay. It must suffice for me to reemphasize the necessity of study of the biblical texts in their interrelation and careful planning of the liturgical actions and prayer texts through these days if the great Holy Week hymns are to truly express the heart of our faith and spirituality. A very helpful liturgical resource for planning is the book, *From Ashes to Fire* (Nashville: The Methodist Publishing House, 1979), in which I have made extensive musical suggestions for congregation and choirs.

Between Easter and Pentecost are the great Fifty Days which carry us experientially through the baptismal creed: resurrected, ascended, interceding for us and sending forth the Holy Spirit. Hymns should show over these Sundays the interrelation of the resurrection appearances and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Easter hymns such as "Thine Is the Glory" (HB, 209) can be sung at any point in this season. The Pentecost images and themes should be sung not simply after the Day of Pentecost but can be anticipated in the Great Fifty Days, likewise the Ascension theme need not be confined to one day. The powerful texts, "The Head That Once Was Crowned With Thorns" (HB, 211) or "Hail Thou Once Despised Jesus" (HB, 210), should be sung along with "At the Name of Jesus" (HB, 143) during the Sundays of Easter-Pentecost. Here again, a careful study of the biblical sources behind these hymns is essential, along with the fresh reading of both Johannine and Luke-Acts sequences of the resurrection and Pentecost accounts.

For valuable assistance through this Easter-Pentecost celebration let me commend once again *A Handbook for the Lectionary*. We should note that the

liturgical year really focuses only on half of the actual calendar year. There is a large freedom in the Sundays following Easter-Pentecost for hymn choice. But it is necessary to plan carefully the relationship of the hymns to the on-going experience of the Word of God. The teachings and ministry of Jesus which gradually build toward themes of the Kingdom suggest using texts which move us into encounter with his ministry and toward the coming Kingdom — the theme we experience in Advent. Other special celebrations such as the Fourth of July and Thanksgiving take care of themselves; but we should be alert to the glorious possibilities of All Saints', and no other hymn expresses this better than Vaughan Williams' "For All the Saints" (HB, 425). Indeed that text could suggest the whole structure of the liturgy!

There is no need to fear being locked-in by the calendar and the lectionary. Rather it is liberating — both to the unfathomable riches of Christ and to a broader, deeper range of congregational song.

III

Singing our faith through the church year is a challenge and a profound joy. An intentional approach to deepening and expanding the congregational repertoire of hymns involves theological, biblical, liturgical and pastoral considerations at every step of the process. While there are many dimensions of hymnody and hymn singing beyond the question of hymns and the seasons of the Gospel discussed here, surely the on-going experience of keeping time with the church universal is central to the recovery of experiential vitality and theological substance in congregational song.

A concluding practical note must be sounded. We must keep in mind that most congregations sing uncritically, and approach the matter of quality of text and tune with different assumptions than do those clergy and musicians responsible for hymn selection and for the general shaping of the liturgy. We must respect the fact that most congregations have already been formed (or ill-formed) in a hymnic tradition which is part of a way of worshipping musically. Changes and expansions in the range and quality of what is sung require solid teaching, well-planned occasions of learning such as hymn-sings and hymn festivals, enthusiasm from the choir and other musical leadership, a common vision among clergy and musicians, and above all a spirit of mature love, concern and wonder at the immensely rich treasury of hymns yet to be sung in praise of God. To sing well through the church year is to encounter new aspects of Christ, for the church year is itself a profound biblical and Christ-centered treasury.

May our new vision of the centrality of hymn singing and our intention to deepen the congregational experience of the Christian cycles of time be undertaken with the sung prayer "Veni Creator Spiritus!"