

## Chapter Four: A Very Brief History of Latter-day Saint Hymnody

Besides the references shown, I have relied on “Mormonism and Music: A History” by Michael Hicks<sup>1</sup> and gratefully acknowledge his work.

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*"...our hymnals serve as instruments by which the spiritual heritage received from the past, is celebrated in the present, and transmitted to future generations. Next to the Bible, our hymnals have been our most formative resource."<sup>2</sup>*  
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### EARLY BEGINNINGS

*"Recipe for a first-rate hymnal: prevail upon an angel to direct a brilliant woman to compile it. So, at any rate, the Latter-Day Saints in 1835 acquired their first hymnal... Emma Smith's tiny volume... reveals remarkably sound taste and judgment; she knew a good hymn when she saw one and left Mormons a worthy standard against which to measure subsequent applicants for admission to their repertoire. (26 of her 90 selections appear in the present book.)"<sup>3</sup>*

Early Latter-day Saints came from backgrounds which either encouraged or forbade music in worship service. Those who sang were divided over burdening their singing with a book which confined them to an established set of hymns - and to create a book that might threaten to be more important than the Bible. Whichever background, their common ground was that they were all New Englanders with that famous New England work ethic – once they understood what was to be done they went out and did it.

Perhaps one of the earliest questions asked in the fledging church was – do we sing in our worship services or not?

Joseph Smith's family were singers in their worship – every night after dinner Father Smith read to his family from the Bible and they sang a hymn. Joseph's wife Emma also came from a singing background - some historians say she was the music leader in her father's church. If this is true then she was well prepared when the Lord spoke through Joseph, giving her what would become a life-long calling:

*"And it shall be given thee, also, to make a selection of sacred hymns, as it shall be given thee, which is pleasing unto me, to be had in my church. For my soul delighteth in the song of the heart; yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads."<sup>4</sup>*

Besides pronouncing upon Emma what would become a life-long calling, the Lord also settled the question of whether or not singing would be employed in worship. And so, with that famous New England determination, Latter-day Saints became a singing people.

Emma Smith first fulfilled her calling by performing duties many churches refer to as the Music Leader. She literally collected hymns compatible with Latter-day Saint (LDS) doctrine, and it was from this collection that the Saints sang in their services. Hymnals of the time only contained words; congregations sang the tunes

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1 - Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1989

2 - The Untied Methodist Hymnal (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1989) page v

3- Hugh D. McKellar, "Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1985" (Boston, MA: HYMN Magazine, April 1986), page 45

4- Doctrine & Covenants 25:11-12 (Salt Lake City: LDS Church, 1989)

they favored or knew. Some congregations had musical instruments; others did not – in congregations where there was no musical instruments, the Music Leader would set the key and tempo and everyone followed suit. Picture Emma doing this and you might have a good picture of what she did in the first years of the church.

Finally Emma was instructed by her husband to collect enough hymn texts that the church could print its first hymnal. This she did, turning her collection of a mere eighty-nine hymn texts over to W. W. Phelps for editing and printing.

W. W. Phelps, a printer by trade and one of the more-prolific poets of the early LDS Church, contributed many of his texts for the new hymnal, and he heavily edited several existing texts as well, bringing them in line with the Millennium-seeking, Zion-building fervor of the early Latter-day Saints.

As the new hymnal would be in the hands of the Saints just in time for the Kirtland temple dedication, text number ninety was added as the book was being handed to the printer: “The Spirit of God Like a Fire Is Burning”, penned by W. W. Phelps and a grand climax to a hymnal with so many texts centered on Christ's Millennial Reign and the society that would be waiting to greet Him

Besides borrowing appropriately from the vast library of Christian hymns, Latter-day Saints set out to write hymns based on the Latter-day Saint experience. W. W. Phelps, the Apostle Parley P. Pratt, and one of Joseph Smith's office assistants, Eliza R. Snow, were the nucleus of these early LDS hymnists. Three equally-strong personalities, one was a civic leader and printer (Phelps), one a fiery preacher whose tongue and pen were equally gifted (Pratt), and one a practical New Englander who had learned office management as a child in her own father's office (Snow).<sup>5</sup> It is remarkable how each of the three could experience the same events and yet write about them in such different views. Consider the texts each wrote as church members emerged from the Missouri Persecutions:

W. W. Phelps:

Now let us rejoice in the day of salvation,  
No longer as strangers on earth need we roam;  
Good tidings are sounding to us and each nation,  
And shortly the hour of redemption will come:

When all that was promised the saints will be given,  
And none will molest them from morn until even,  
And earth will appear as the garden of Eden,  
And Jesus will say to all Israel: Come home!

We'll love one another and never dissemble,  
But cease to do evil and ever be one;  
And while the ungodly are fearing and tremble,  
We'll watch for the day when the Savior shall come:

When all that was promised the saints will be given,  
And none will molest them from morn until even,  
And earth will appear as the garden of Eden,  
And Jesus will say to all Israel: Come home!

In faith we'll rely on the arm of Jehovah,

To guide through these last days of trouble and gloom;  
And after the scourges and harvest are over,  
We'll rise with the just, when the Savior doth come:

Then all that was promised the saints will be given,  
And they will be crowned as the angel of heaven:  
And earth will appear as the garden of Eden,  
And Christ and his people will ever be one.  
(Quoted here from the 1841 Nauvoo hymnal)

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Parley P. Pratt:

Come, O! thou King of Kings!  
We've waited long for thee,  
With healing in thy wings,  
To set thy people free;  
Come, thou desire of nations, come -  
Let Israel now be gathered home.

Come, make an end of sin,  
And cleanse the earth by fire,  
And righteousness bring in,  
That saints may tune the lyre,

5 - See Chapter Nine for short biographies on these three writers.

With songs of joy in happier strains,  
To welcome in thy peaceful reign.

Hosannahs now shall sound  
From all the ransomed throng,  
And glory echo round,  
A new triumphal song;  
The wide expanse of heaven fill,  
With anthems sweet from Zion's hill.

Hail! Prince of Life and Peace,  
Thrice welcome to thy throne,  
While all the chosen race,  
Their Lord and Saviour own; -  
The heathen nations bow the knee,  
And every tongue confess to thee.

(Quoted here from the 1840 Manchester hymnal)

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Eliza R. Snow:

Though outward trials throng your way,  
Press on, press on, ye Saints of God!  
Ere long, the resurrection day  
Will spread its light and truth abroad.

Though outward ills await us here,  
The time at longest, is not long;  
Ere prince Messiah will appear

Surrounded by a glorious throng.

Lift up your hearts in praise to God -  
Let your rejoicings never cease:  
Though tribulation rage abroad,  
Christ says, "in me ye shall have peace."

What tho'our rights have been assail'd?  
What tho' by foes we've been despoiled?  
Jehovah's promise has not failed -  
Jehovah's purpose is not foil'd:

His work is moving on apace,  
And great events are rolling forth -  
The kingdom of the latter days -  
The "little stone," must fill the earth.

Though satan rage, 'tis all in vain, -  
The words the ancient prophets spoke  
Sure, as the throne of God, remain,  
Nor men nor devils can revoke.

All glory to His sacred name,  
Who calls his servants-sends them forth.  
To prove the nations—to proclaim  
Salvation's trumpet, thro' the earth.

( Quoted here from *Times and Seasons*, January 15,  
1841, pg 287)

Emma Smith not only compiled the original Kirtland Hymnal, but the 1841 Nauvoo Hymnal was also her compilation. W. W. Phelps was not on hand to edit the Nauvoo Hymnal – he had been excommunicated, returning to fellowship after this volume's printing. Emma returned much of Phelps's editing to its original text – 'Joy to he World', for instance, was returned to its original Christmas theme but retained some editing as still contained in today's LDS hymnal. Increasing the volume from 90 to 304 hymns, many of her additions focused on the Savior and His mission as our Savior, Redeemer, and as the Atoner for our sins. John Newton's immortal "Amazing Grace" was included in this hymnal (#118).

While the Nauvoo Hymnal was being compiled, most of the Quorum of the Twelve had been called on missions to Great Britain. There, Elders Brigham Young, John Taylor, and Parley P. Pratt undertook the printing of a hymnal to serve the needs of the church there. Including most of the texts from the Kirtland Hymnal as well as fifty of Elder Pratt's original works, the Manchester Hymnal contained 271 hymns, including many by Isaac Watts and the Wesleys – John and Charles. Their additions to Emma's original hymnal included texts concerning the ancient House of Israel and its restoration prior to the Messiah's return as well as texts concerning the priesthood.

Isaac Watts is the name that appears most in these early hymnals as well as throughout the entire history of LDS hymnals, including such texts as Come, We that Love the Lord, From All that Dwell Below the Skies, He Died! The Great Redeemer Died (edited title), Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun, Joy to the World, O God Our

Help in Ages Past, Sweet Is the Work, my God, my King, and When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.

Watts appears, in fact, twice as many times in LDS hymnody than do the Wesley brothers, from whom the Latter-day Saints borrowed such texts as Christ the Lord Is Risen Today, Come, Let Us Anew, Hark! The Herald Angels Sing!, Jesus, Lover of My Soul, Jesus the Name that Charms our Fears, Rejoice, the Lord Is King!, and Ye Simple Souls Who Stray. It is not surprising that many more Watts texts appear over the Wesleys as much of the early persecution of the church was at the hands of Methodist ministers – why sing the hymns of your chief persecutors?

The Olney Hymnal by John Newton & William Cowper is also respectably represented in LDS hymnody, having borrowed such texts as Amazing Grace, God Moves in a Mysterious Way, Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken, Though in the Outward Church Below, and There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood.

In my personal research of LDS hymnody, I have noticed that from the beginning and still today Latter-day Saint worship favors the voice of the 'common man' as opposed to a more sophisticated, cultured voice. Although they have never settled for 'second-rate' language or music, texts and tunes that speak from the heart are those which hold the Latter-day Saint heart and allow it to worship vocally. Hence, Watts and Newton, in their *relative* simplicity, are borrowed from more often than the style of the Wesleys, who, as unquestioningly talented as they were, spoke better to the more-sophisticated mind than to the plain-speaking frontier folk who were the early converts to the Latter-day Saint Church.

## ESCAPE FROM THE 'BETTER MUSIC' MOVEMENT

While Emma Smith was compiling hymnals and LDS poets were cutting their teeth in preparation for greater things, the United States was for the most part a frontier country; arts and culture were to be had in a few large cities, but for the most part they were present only when a preacher came around with his Bible and his hymnal. Home-grown American hymn tunes were, by 'cultured' standards, crude and simple, not adhering to any known European (ie, 'cultured') musical rules. Opposite of today, tenors often carried the melodies while the women sang harmony, and tempo and volume were governed by the enthusiasm of the congregation, the topic at hand, and the mood of the music leader. American hymn singers were happy with the freedom of self-expression this gave them - and, men were happy to sing the melody, and they expressed this happiness by actually singing.

American hymnals themselves were small, vest-pocket sized books containing only the texts; very much like a small book of poetry. Being the only actual book of poetry owned by the common frontier family, they were carried in vest and apron pockets, to be pulled out and read in quiet moments. Despite rumors to the contrary, children learned to read from the hymnal before the more-challenging language of the Bible. Families and congregations were free to chose which tune they wanted to use while singing a particular text, making the hymns personal, intimate companions on a Christian's journey through life - as portable and easy to carry as a large Bible was *not*.

Hymns at this time were seen as methods of teaching the Gospel, building Faith, and cementing Hope into the person's heart and mind. While many of the great hymns were in fact great art as well as great hymns, until the nineteenth century the emphasis had been on the hymns' mission of raising the spiritual life of the individual and the community, as opposed to being works of art. As one modern hymnist has so well explained,

*"...the Hymnal is not a book to be admired primarily for its poetry, although great hymns are always masterfully shaped as poetry. It is a book of devotion for the people, and they are the final critics."*<sup>6</sup>

As Charles Wesley explained in his preface to "A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists",

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6 - Austin C. Lovelace, ANATOMY OF HYMNODY, (Chicago, ILL; GIA Publications, 1965, 1982), page 22

*"That which is of infinitely more moment than the spirit of Poetry, is, the spirit of Piety [devotion]... It is this view chiefly that I would recommend it to every truly pious reader, as a means of raising or quickening the spirit of devotion; of confirming his faith; of enlivening his hope; and of kindling or increasing his love to God and man. When Poetry thus keeps its place, as the handmaid of Piety, it shall attain, not a poor perishable wreath, but a crown that fadeth not away."*<sup>7</sup>

Into this world of innocent harmony and unbridled enthusiasm in frontier hymn singing came what has been alternately called the "Reform" or "Better Music" movement. Not satisfied with what they saw as crude and uncultured melodies, master musicians such as Lowell Mason and Thomas Hastings set out to tame these native creations into something they considered cultured, changing them to conform with established musical rules. They also did their best to banish all 'secular' tunes from hymn singing, replacing them with more acceptable and dignified tunes. (Fortunately, the 'Battle Hymn of the Republic' managed to escape this reform!) Once the tunes were tamed, they attacked the poor language of the texts, taking these heart-felt expressions and retrofitting them into far more proper language.

While the LDS church was centered in Nauvoo, Illinois, there was an attempt by one person, Gustavus Hill, to introduce the work of Mason and Hastings into Latter-day Saint worship. His excommunication for immorality, however, discredited everything else he did, and LDS worship continued unhindered by Lowell and Hastings' very hard work.

This is not to say the Saints were uncultured beings! They took great pride in the arts. They created choirs, bands, and orchestras wherever they went to nurture the arts within their society. They maintained drama societies and reading circles. But to them art and worship were two separate endeavors, and worship was from the heart, whether it met someone else's standards of culture or not.

This Better Music movement caused an additional change to hymnals besides cultured tunes and texts: for the first time, American hymnals began printing the musical notations as well as the texts - now they were too big to fit in the vest or apron pocket and became relegated to a table top or a shelf - and to collecting dust alongside the big old Bible. Additionally, hymns that were more art and culture began to replace hymns that had once been the heart-felt expressions of frontier communities were slowly being replaced with their revised, cultured clones or with new hymns that expressed art more than heart.

## GOSPEL SONGS

Through this movement, another form of worship music was being created – 'Gospel Songs'. Not specifically meant for worship, these songs were born around campfires, inside revival tents, and in the fledging Sunday School movements, creating more upbeat, bouncing songs which, although not meant for sacred worship, reminded the singer of their God and of their various duties to Him – and to inspire them to stand up and get to work for the Lord. Many churches resisted allowing what they saw as vulgar creations within their walls, but eventually gospel songs such as 'Count Your Many Blessings', 'Love at Home', 'Let the Lower Lights Be Burning', and 'Onward, Christian Soldiers' were invited through the chapel doors. Proper hymns (by definition) they may not be, but they have inspired generations of Sunday School children to “Stand up, stand up for Jesus...”

As the Better Music movement as well as the Gospel Songs movement both began to travel across the country, Latter-day Saints were moving into the untamed West to escape persecution, taking with them texts, tunes, and hymnals untouched by both movements. After sixteen years of unrelenting persecution, Latter-day Saints were ready to turn their back on the rest of the Christian world and create their own society.

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7 - quoted here from Lovelace, ANATOMY OF HYMNODY, page 23; comment added by this author

*"By settling in isolated Utah just as the flood of gospel songs began to sweep over America, the Saints were able to retain their preference for tunes in eighteenth century idiom, as well as that era's concept of a hymnbook as a believer's vade mecum,<sup>8</sup> replete with lines designed to lodge easily in the memory, and to provide encouragement and guidance in any situation the believer might face.*

*"And this concept once again makes good sense, now that people, even residents of small places, need no longer depend primarily on their churches for such music as they hear, but have ample means of cultivating their literary and musical tastes as far as they please..."<sup>9</sup>*

Speaking of the current LDS hymnal, the Hymn Society review of it gives a single great clue as to why the Better Music movement didn't overwhelm LDS worship:

*"Mormons attend public worship not to have their general cultural level raised, but to have their faith deepened and strengthened; and this book's editors have taken very seriously their responsibility towards their own constituency, if not toward connoisseurs of music and poetry. Deeming the offering of praise to God a task laid on each worshiper personally, not to be delegated to a choir or shirked behind the strains of a powerful organ, they have challenged their membership in the cortex rather than the larynx..."<sup>10</sup>*

To Latter-day Saints, singing in their worship services has never been a spectator sport - it is a means of worship required of more than just the choir; it is a form of prayer through which, with every song they sing, they allow the Holy Spirit room in their hearts and minds while sharing that freshly-received witness with whomever is singing with them.

*"For my soul delighteth in the song of the heart;  
yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me,  
and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads."<sup>11</sup>*

## HOME GROWN COMPOSERS HAVE THEIR CHANCE

Unlike most frontier settlements, Latter-day Saints made a point of bringing the secular arts with them, not depending on the scriptures and the hymnal to provide their only means of culture and entertainment. As communities were established, choirs and bands and drama societies sprang up with the community. The social/cultural hall was built alongside and often connected to the chapel, the community ready to nourish both the senses and the spirit in every clean, wholesome way possible. The first opera house west of Saint Louis was built in Salt Lake City, and most of its productions were home-grown and attracted patronage from San Francisco as well as Saint Louis - once the railroad was completed. Choir and band competitions were the fiercest competitions in the Mormon West, and locals were trained and encouraged to produce secular as well as spiritual productions. As converts arrived from England, Wales, Scotland, as well as other European countries, their musical talents as well as their employable trades were considered as communities competed for singers, musicians, and composers as hotly as they did for farmers, stone masons, and carpenters.

Composers joined the church and emigrated alongside the farmer and the stone mason and gave of their

8 - "go with me"; a book for ready reference; something regularly carried about by a person (Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary, <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/vade+mecum>)

9 - McKellar, *Hymns*, pg 45; comment in brackets by this author

10 - McKellar, *Hymns*, pg 45

11 - Doctrine & Covenants 25:12

talents in building the new society in the far west. Those born in the west who showed talent were sent east for schooling, and most returned to add their gifts to the community, composing both secular and sacred works.

The question continued: should worship music be sophisticated or plain? These homegrown or transplanted composers had as many answers as there were composers. To fulfill their artistic needs they wrote operas and great choir pieces for the drama societies and choirs in the territory while also writing more simple hymns for the congregations to sing, thus fulfilling their need to write with sophistication as well as in the voice of the 'common man' – and to fulfill the need of hymns written specifically from the 'Mormon' experience.

This author finds it of note that the only music most of these composers are still remembered for is that which they wrote for the 'common man' and can be found in the hymnals of the day as well as today.

When the Better Music movement finally reached the Utah territory, LDS writers and composers were ready to meet the change on their own terms. With the secular arts already established, they had no need to change their hymn tunes and texts in order to bring culture into the community; culture was already established in its proper place, allowing hymns to continue their role of teaching the Gospel, worshiping God, and bringing hope and comfort those in need. LDS hymnists were able to look at each new or revised tune and text on an individual basis and ask: 'Will this improve our worship?'; 'Will this better express the message?'; 'Will this better invite the Holy Spirit into our hearts?', and 'Will this better move us towards godly works?' Thus the Better Music movement was used by the Latter-day Saints and not the other way around. To illustrate how cautiously Latter-day Saints accepted the Better Music movement: it was not until 1889 that the Latter-day Saints produced a hymnal with musical notation that would no longer fit in a vest or apron pocket - and even then it was merely considered by the masses as a choral companion to the 'real' hymnal still in their pocket.

Although LDS hymnists and composers were every bit as trained and professional as their counterparts outside their faith, those still remembered today did not write hymns for the glory of art – they wrote to worship God, remind themselves of His commandments and covenants, and to give comfort, strength, and encouragement where needed. These guiding principles were met *before* the requirement of 'good art' was considered, although with proper training good art became a member of the equation - but merely an equal member; it did not become the main requirement.

*"...Accordingly, hymns of proven value predominate, including several (e.g. "Come, Ye Disconsolate") which ordinary churchgoers like so much that arbiters of taste feel bound to disdain them. Many selections, of course, set forth beliefs held only by Latter-Day Saints, so that other Christians cannot easily borrow them - though a cameo like "Reverently and Meekly Now" would enhance a communion service in any church. But if such nuggets are less thick upon the ground than might be wished, literary and musical drivel, antique and new-minted alike, has been excluded as rigorously as Emma Smith could desire."<sup>12</sup>*

And here lies the great secret as to why home-grown LDS hymns and hymnals are different than others. While the rest of the hymn world took time off to become "good art", Latter-day Saints stayed the course of worship, Spirit, comfort, and guidance before culture. While they *do* in fact have a high level of artistic merit to them, Latter-day Saints hymns and hymnals keep their emphasis on worship, Christian service, and personal growth. Does this work for them?

*"...If a hymnbook is to be truly serviceable to the great majority of its projected users, should it seek, as this one frankly does, to reach them right where they are, and draw upon their judgment about which words and tunes have, in their experience, provided most spiritual sustenance?"<sup>13</sup>*

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12 - McKellar, *Hymns*, pg 45

13 - McKellar, *Hymns*, pg 45

To meet the challenge of the Gospel Songs movement, the first LDS Sunday School hymnals were published, starting in 1884, including homegrown as well as borrowed gospel songs printed alongside established hymns to inspire and motivate the rising generation. Where gospel songs fit the need they were used, but Latter-day Saints were careful to note the difference between 'inspirational' and 'motivational' songs and 'worship' hymns.

## INSPIRATIONAL SONGS

In the 1950's and 60's a genre of 'Inspirational Songs' grew up (also called 'religious popular songs'). LDS church music committees resisted giving such works as 'I Believe', 'I'll Walk with God' (it had appeared in a movie!), and 'How Great Thou Art' a place in LDS worship services as they were ... well, they were 'popular' songs. (*I submit that if the committee had heard my mother sing 'I'll Walk with God' it would be in the LDS hymnal - she was no Mario Lanza, but when she sang it, it was a hymn.*) When the current hymnal was compiled, however, President Ezra Taft Benson, then head of the Quorum of the Twelve and in a position to do so, directed the inclusion of 'How Great Thou Art' as it was his 'favorite hymn'. No one bothered to explain it wasn't really a hymn; they simply included it. To make clear his feelings on the song, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir sang it at the 1986 General Conference session in which he was sustained as President and Prophet of the church. Happily, those who opposed its inclusion have since agreed it was a good addition to LDS hymnody.<sup>14</sup> Will other songs once rejected as not being “hymn-enough” eventually find their way into LDS hymnals? Those who say 'absolutely not; no way' must remember there was a time that 'Count Your Blessings' and 'Onward Christian Soldiers' would have received an 'absolutely not; no way' and would never have been considered worthy of a place in an LDS hymnal – nor would have 'How Great Thou Art'.

*"We know that hymnody not only withstands the threats of its challengers, it conscripts the best of their ranks. Religious folk songs, gospel songs, and praise choruses, each in their turn, challenged mainstream hymnody. These contenders sought to usurp hymnody by popular demand and acclamation. Yet, hymnody marched ever forward, absorbing into its hymnals the best along the way."<sup>15</sup>*

Gospel songs, inspirational pop songs, praise choruses, and even contemporary Christian music (CCM) that prove their mettle and last the duration will eventually be invited into the Hymnal Library and be given their place - but it usually takes at least one generation being raised with said music; their gospel testimonies being built on the best of any specific genre. Until that time, enjoy them at home and with friends. Your heart and spirit tells you what songs build a reverent, worshipful attitude within you, and these are the songs to surround yourself with – to you they are hymns; treat them as such. This author's collection of worship music includes many genres of religious music with which his soul communes with the Divine – much of which will probably never appear in a hymnal. Such is the joy of private worship.

## QUESTIONS THAT WILL BE ASKED FOREVER

- Should worship music be great art, or should it be the heartfelt expression of a simple soul?
- Should all our hymns be self-written within our own ranks, or do we adopt the hymns of others, including those who persecute us?

14 - This author attended a hymn recital at which the head of the committee which compiled this hymnal made this public confession.

15 - Terry W. York, Add One Hymn: Recipe for CCM and “Modern Worship” Congregational Song (Boston MA: the HYMN, July 2004) page 29

-- Should we allow new musical forms into our hymnal?

There are as many answers to these questions as there are people asked the questions, and each believe they speak for God on the subject, when they really only speak for their individual heart. Latter-day Saints were and are no different than other people in their answers, and the challenge of any hymnal editor is to meet the varied replies as well as possible, and in doing so they have answered those questions differently from one hymnal to another.

The history of LDS composers and hymnists debating these questions and asserting their own answers is long and often reads like a soap opera – the honest soul in me can readily admit that we artists are stubborn and opinionated human beings, no matter our religious affiliation. And this is why it is the leaders of the church that make final decisions in hymnody; not the artists.

Studying any given LDS hymnal, one can see the thoughts and feelings of the committee who compiled it in regard to these questions – or the instructions they were given by their church leadership. Each hymnal is inspiring in its own right and our hymnal heritage would be incomplete without each one of them. But they each *do* tell their own story.

The Manchester Hymnal became the primary hymnal for the church as the Saints fled Nauvoo and trekked west. As more and more converts came from the British Isles, this is the hymnal they brought with them, bringing extra copies for those Saints in the west who had no printing press just yet. Thus LDS hymnody, at first a Puritan New England entity, took on a decidedly British feel.

Homegrown hymns began to find their way into subsequent editions of the Manchester Hymnal, bringing LDS heritage into the vocal worship. At one time the First Presidency even directed that as many as possible of the hymns used in LDS worship services should be LDS-written and not from the Christian community that had persecuted us and driven us from our homes and communities – although this was at one time the goal, it has never been met as there are just too many good hymns from the general Christian library that speak as spiritually through a Latter-day Saint heart as through any other Christian heart. Nevertheless, LDS composers from Britain and other parts of Europe contributed the best of their cultures while their American-born counterparts added the sparkle and shine of their relatively young country, and LDS-composed hymns again took on a whole new flavor.

By the time the 1927 'Latter-day Saint Hymns' was published, the church was also printing its second Sunday School songbook, which contained many gospel songs as well as hymns. The attempt was made to bring more sophistication into the hymnal with this volume, it being full of more Watts and Wesley texts than any other LDS hymnal before or after. It was also the last hymnal to so predominantly showcase the three main pioneers of LDS hymnody – Phelps, Pratt, and Snow. The music was arranged so every hymn was nearly a choir piece in hopes of raising congregational singing to that level - the result was that most congregations continued to sing from the more-singable Sunday School songbook.

The 1950 'Hymns' was created to glean the best from both the 1927 hymnal and from the Sunday School songbook, which had been discontinued. Because of this gleaning, gospel songs made their debut into the LDS hymnal, and many arrangements were simplified down, although the number of choir arrangements in the back of the book were increased, their arrangements worthy of grand choirs. This book also brought the Church out from being a Utah, 'pioneer' church and made it at least an American church.

Answering the question of sophistication verses devotion, the main instruction given for the current, 1985 'Hymns' was -

*“...to compile the new hymnbook with the general membership of the Church in mind, not just the musicians. I told the committee that they had only one disability: they knew too much about music,” said Elder Hugh W. Pinnock, managing director of the Priesthood Department and adviser*

*to the Music Division. 'Sometimes musicians, with their deeper understanding of music, will choose music that is artistic and technically correct, but not as singable for the average person. The committee has been sensitive to select hymns of worship that people will enjoy singing...'*  
*"We've tried to select music that people would want to hum as they walk down the street and go about their daily work... We also wanted texts that could come to people's minds during times of trial or temptation, reinforcing gospel truths... the hymns are to meet the needs of the members as individuals and as families, as well as groups of Saints in meetings."*<sup>16</sup>

The new hymnal may not fit in our vest or apron pocket as did hymnals of old, but the goal was to fit it into our minds and hearts.<sup>17</sup> And, to fit it into the hands of the many, many English-speaking Latter-day Saints not born and raised in North America, as by this time the church was unquestioningly a world-wide church. Some pioneer themes remain to remind us of our heritage, but hymns praising Utah or the United States as the only place Zion could prosper have been replaced with hymns to encourage and help Zion flourish in all its world-wide outposts.

### **“GO YE INTO ALL THE WORLD”**

The challenge LDS hymnody faced during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and will continue to face in the future is how it will find a place in the hearts of those of different cultures; those whose cultural dictates already prescribe specific rules on worship and music.

*"Many societies regard music as a magic that invokes the divine in virtually every act that accompanies it. Indeed, in some societies music is so much a part of other activities ... that their languages lack a separate word for 'music'. To them, the meaning of tonal art lies precisely in its use, its power to complete some human action, without which, in turn, the 'music' could not fully exist."*<sup>18</sup>

Dancing and drumming while worshiping has been a challenge faced by LDS missionaries as they have preached to the Native American, the Polynesian, and the 'black' African, for whom worship was inconceivable without dancing and drumming. The use of musical instruments by such cultures while worshiping - but not used in LDS worship - has been and will be an issue. How much of their native culture must they give up to worship in an LDS fashion? If they *do* worship according to traditional LDS fashion while in public worship services, how much of their traditional worship may they continue with while in private or family worship, or even while in a large informal gathering?

Through encounters the church has already made with various cultures, guidelines both formal and informal have begun to emerge concerning music used in worship services. The Handbook of Instructions carries some very specific instructions for music in LDS worship services:

*"Stake presidencies and bishoprics determine whether musical selections or instruments are suitable for a particular meeting. Careful selection and proper performance of music can greatly enhance the spirit of worship. Guidelines are provided in the following paragraphs.*

*"The hymns of the Church are the basic music for Latter-day Saint meetings and are standard*

16 - Kathleen Lubeck, 'The New Hymnbook: The Saints Are Singing!' (ENSIGN Magazine, September 1985)

17 - Hebrews 8:10: "... I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people..."

18 - Michael Hicks, *Mormonism and Music: A History* (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1989) page 222

*for all congregational singing. Hymns are also encouraged for prelude and postlude music, choir music, and special events. If other musical selections are used, they should be in keeping with the spirit of the hymns of the Church. Texts should be doctrinally correct...*

*"Music in Church meetings should help members worship, feel the sacred spirit of the Sabbath, and feel the spirit of revelation. This music should not draw attention to itself or be for demonstration. Some religiously oriented music in a popular style is not appropriate for sacrament meetings. Also, much sacred music that is suitable for concerts and recitals is not appropriate for a Latter-day Saint worship service.*

*"Organs and pianos are the standard instruments used in Church meetings. If other instruments are used, their use should be in keeping with the spirit of the meeting. Instruments with a prominent or less worshipful sound, such as most brass and percussion, are not appropriate for sacrament meeting.*

*"Live accompaniment is normally used in sacrament meeting and other ward meetings. If a piano, organ, or accompanist is not available, appropriate recordings may be used. Such recordings are listed in the annual Church Materials Catalog."*

*"Music in Church meetings should usually be sung in the language of the congregation."<sup>19</sup>*

When dealing with members in new cultures, directions not found in any current Handbook of Instructions have been given by various leaders at various times:

-- Songs and worship forms used to specifically worship a deity or spirit being other than the Christian God are not to be used in public or private worship; by simply substituting the name of one deity for another one is still performing the *act* of worship to one's former deity.<sup>20</sup>

-- In the mid 1940's the First Presidency directed that songs and actions used by other religions or denominations for specific liturgical or ceremonial purposes should not be used in LDS worship services as it give the appearance of said liturgical or ceremonial actions. Choir robes, musical invocations and benedictions, music being played while the Sacrament was being passed, and the congregation standing for each and every hymn all were discontinued in order to differentiate further between LDS and other church's worship practices. (Although standing for each and every hymn has been eliminated, neither the First Presidency or the Music Committee has *never* eliminated standing for rest hymns, national anthems, and other particular reasons.<sup>21</sup>)

-- 'Excitement' should not take the place of 'Spirit'. Songs that rouse one to excitement (or even frenzy) - as opposed to inviting the sweet, calming influence of the Holy Spirit - should not be used in LDS worship services.<sup>22</sup>

As the LDS church goes into more and more areas of the world, such decisions will continue to be evaluated and made according to the cultures being met.

## **THE BEST IS YET TO COME**

We who are part of the "established" LDS culture must realize we are on the brink of finding ourselves accepting and learning hymns from the "emerging" cultures that are just beginning to express their new-found religion through music and the other arts. Just as my Puritan ancestors had to learn to love British-written hymns and then the hymns of the western frontier, so we today are embarking on a similar journey as we accept the

19 - Handbook of Instructions (Salt Lake City UT: LDS Church, 1989) page 289

20 - See Hicks, Mormonism and Music, chapter twelve

21 - Although Hicks (page 139) mentions this almost in passing, most of what this author knows of this was told to him by his parents and aunts, all of whom were involved with church music at the time the directive was issued.

22 - This was stated in an LDS General Conference – I am searching for the source and will post it when I find it.

musical gifts of many new cultures and incorporate the best of them into mainstream LDS hymnody. It will be an exciting journey, and if we are as wise as we think we are, we will not only greet each new culture and glean from it that which is clean and wholesome, but we will also make it part of our joint worship of He who is the Father of All Nations and Cultures.

## THE RESULTS OF PLAIN AND SIMPLE HYMNODY

*"... a living faith must have both roots and wings.  
A hymn book is one place we find both."<sup>23</sup>*

*-----*  
*"If hymns whose worst crime is their disregard for fashion can inspire rank-and-file Mormons to go out from worship week by week and put their faith into practice, might not editorial committees of other denominations profitably take note? 'By their fruits ye shall know them.'"<sup>24</sup>*

Ask the survivors of Hurricane Katrina who live along Mississippi's Gulf Coast about the power of Latter-day Saint hymnody - they were not able to stop the flow of organized caravans of Latter-day Saints from the surrounding states from coming in and cleaning up and repairing communities in which they did not even live - while refusing any sort of compensation from the confused residents. A friend's husband was one of these men - coming from Florida, he explained to the Gulf Coast residents that his willingness to help his neighbors in Mississippi was a test from God he intended to pass - echoing an informal LDS saying that Service is the rent we pay to the Lord for the blessing of coming to earth for this leg of our eternal progression. And with a characteristic smile he added: "Just remember us'uns in Florida should a hurricane go through there."

When Homestead, Florida was destroyed by hurricane, battalions of Latter-day Saint volunteers in specially-designated shirts were allowed into the destruction zone *before* the local authorities would even trust the military. Military members who were Latter-day Saint traded their uniform shirts for the yellow 'Mormon Volunteer' t-shirt so they could get in sooner and assist, angering more than one military commander that the yellow shirt was more trusted than the uniform.

When singer/songwriter Bob Geldof held his 1985 "Live Aid" concerts to raise funds for famine relief in North Africa, Latter-day Saints in the United States and Canada held a one-day fast, donating the money that would have been spent on food to a special fund for the LDS Welfare Services to use to go into the famine area and not only relieve the immediate needs but to also teach irrigation, agriculture, and animal husbandry. Their one-day fast raised funds that equaled the Live Aid concerts, and Welfare missionaries spent the next ten years teaching and training their way across North Africa.

When the Teton Dam in eastern Idaho burst in the 1970's and wiped whole communities off the map, Latter-day Saints chartered buses to reach the devastation and help rebuild - thousands who rebuilt did so *without* government aide because of the busloads of Latter-day Saints who gave of their time, materials, and abilities. Federal officials who were on-site to give loans and grants ended up returning to Washington DC as they had nothing to do.

Latter-day Saint trucks haul supplies to any disaster they can reach - in fact, each regional Bishop's Storehouse has at all times at least one semi-truck trailer loaded with basic supplies and ready to roll literally in a moment's notice. They charter planes and work with local relief agencies, not caring who gets the credit.

To send such supplies, Latter-day Saint men, women, and children not only donate time and labor at a local farm or canning plant run by the welfare services arm of the Church, but they go through their own closets, pantries, and toy chests to share with those who have lost everything, whether they live across the globe or

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23 - Singing in the Living Tradition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993) page vii

24 - McKellar, *Hymns*, pg 45

across the street - I remember when a house burned down in my own neighborhood and we Latter-day Saints who lived on the street were bringing food, clothing, and blankets to give to the family even before the firemen had the fire out. A convoy of children's red wagons strained under the power of LDS hymnody that night.

This need to be of service will cause a man with a fear of heights to help re-roof a neighbor's house. It will cause someone with a bad back to help move someone else's piano. It will cause a woman to save the best of her baked goods for a home with a sick mother, whose laundry she's brought into her own home to wash and iron.

When asked why they are so willing to share and serve, the typical Latter-day Saint *can* quote scriptures to justify their actions, but more times than not they will start with a hymn or two considered by the rest of the world as quaint and irrelevant to *real* hymnody. As Christians, we should *all* be so quaint and irrelevant in our thoughts, words, and deeds!

If a hymnal considered so 'second-rate' by most Christian hymnists can inspire acts of Faith, Hope, and Service as they do among the Latter-day Saints, then I *willingly* cling to such an inferior hymnal with great affection, devotion, and fondness, and I will expose my children to it with every opportunity. If I am inferior for writing hymns in the spirit of such a hymnal, then I bear this burden with honor, hoping and praying my own artistic endeavors will someday be so beautifully second-rate.

Meanwhile, there's a piano I need to go help move...