

**“A place in the soul, all made of tunes”: what church music
collections teach us about history, theology, and culture**

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In the text of his 1917 song “The things our fathers loved”, the eccentric but undeniably populist American composer Charles Ives wrote, “I think there must be a place in the soul all made of tunes, of tunes of long ago.” The words and music of this short song are an oddly mismatched but appealing conglomeration of quotations from the music of his people, from Civil War marching songs, to Tin Pan Alley ballads, to the familiar hymns “Come Thou Fount of every blessing” and “In the sweet by and by”. What Ives instinctively knew—in fact it was the bedrock of his musical thinking—was that a culture can be defined and observed in the music of its people.

Music is even more pertinent in the life of a religious culture. In a time that has seen amateur music-making in the home fade from view in favor of commercially produced entertainment, the music of the church is the only genuine “folk music” many Americans have. It is a living, ongoing development of their own local cultures, surrounding them from birth to death. It offers unique insights into the religious culture, and for this reason librarians (or as I prefer to call us, the guardians of civilization) see fit to preserve the tangible records of this culture.

Church music collections traditionally have contained hymnals and the personal papers of hymn writers and publishers. Current collection practice might also include worship handouts, church bulletins, PowerPoint presentations, and the papers or electronic files of worship leaders and committees. Such collections document over time the material culture of a religious group, its theology as expressed in its music, and its idealized and actual liturgical practices.

Hymnals as historical objects

One way of looking at the hymnals is as objects of material culture. There is surprisingly little written on this subject, with the majority of the attention going to the contents themselves. Part of this neglect may stem from a bias that rose along with the practice, beginning in the late nineteenth century, of churches providing worshippers with hymnals at the place of worship. In earlier times families purchased their own hymnals and used them in home devotionals as well, creating a market for a wide variety of sizes, bindings, and qualities. For example, our first two exhibits are both editions of the hugely popular nineteenth-century Anglican hymnal *Hymns Ancient & Modern*. The larger was a wedding gift to Frederick Coryton, the squire of Liss in Hampshire, from the children of the local school of which he was a board member. The smaller, measuring one-and-three-quarters inches tall, is bound in sterling silver and engraved “To Polly from Henry”.

As the practice of churches providing pew hymnals caught hold, however, the real money moved to bulk sales at low rates, leading to that C.S. Lewis described in *The Screwtape Letters* as a

“shabby little book containing corrupt texts of a number of religious lyrics, mostly bad, and in very small print.”¹ Remember that he was probably referring to *Hymns Ancient & Modern*, considered a classic repository of high-church hymnody. Publishing historian David Hall observes that at the turn of the last century, “a distinctive understanding and appreciation of the handcrafted book emerged as part of the reaction to industrialism. On both sides of the Atlantic, sensitive persons voiced their dismay at the mediocrity of the mass-produced and mass-consumed artifact.”

Yet these “mass-produced and mass-consumed artifacts” have something to tell us. Our next exhibit is an unusual specimen of a hymnal many of us know quite well—Elmer Jorgensen’s *Great Songs of the Church*, number two. No, it was not left in a windowsill in direct sunlight for the last fifty years—it is actually bound in sky-blue. The reason why leads us into the history of the hymnal, its relationship to the Churches of Christ in the United States, and the history of those churches in the middle of the twentieth century.

Jorgensen’s hymnal was a rising star from its first appearance in 1921, and the “Number Two” edition, first appearing in 1937, continued the expanding hold this book had on the Churches of Christ and Christian Churches. In fact, sales were so good that during the 1940s, in spite of wartime paper shortages, Jorgensen began to farm out printing to larger firms to keep up with demand. In 1949 he arranged for the Rand-McNally company of Chicago to print copies of *Great Songs of the Church*.² Some years demand was even so high that Rand-McNally ran out of the standard dark blue covers and had to use a different material. Thus for a few years the same sky-blue covers of the familiar Rand-McNally atlases came to be on copies of *Great Songs of the Church*.

The fact that a huge publisher such as Rand-McNally was contracted to print this hymnal is a testimony to its popularity; it was the standard hymnal of the Churches of Christ in the United States for many years during the mid-twentieth century, and sold in excess of two million copies in all of its editions.³ Is it coincidence that this need for expanded printing capacity coincided with the post-war boom in membership in the Churches of Christ? Even more to the point is the estimation by Norvel Young in the 1957 *Encyclopedia Britannica Yearbook* that “more than 1,000 church buildings were begun or enlarged in 1956”.⁴ All these new pews had to be filled with hymnals, and some of them had sky-blue Rand-McNally covers.

With this kind of thinking about hymnals as material artifacts established, consider our next exhibit, the revised *Great Songs of the Church* published by the Abilene Christian University Press in 1986. It is printed on beautiful, creamy paper with crisp typography and a tasteful embossed cover with a gilt title in a classic font. Altogether it is an attractive object with all the physical attributes that we associate with a fine book. Compare it now with its major competitor of the day, *Songs of the Church* from Howard Publishing. The typography in the Howard hymnal is notoriously sketchy, the paper is thin, and from personal experience I find the binding to be of much less durability.

What do these objects tell us about the cultures that produced them? The revised *Great Songs of the Church* was the product of a university press, following on a lengthy tradition of an

established hymnal, with the oversight of Forrest McCann, one of the leading historians of our hymnody, assisted by a large editorial board including college music faculty. *Songs of the Church* was the product of a single editor and a family publishing business; but the cultural nuances run much deeper. Alton and V.E. Howard were well-established on the gospel singing circuit, and *Songs of the Church* reflected that indigenous music by the inclusion of the quartet-style (or “Stamps-Baxter”) songs, a step beyond the less jazzy gospel repertoire from the nineteenth century. The revised *Great Songs of the Church* reflected the editors’ intention to promote a more ecumenical “great hymns” collection, not skewed toward the gospel-song culture of most of the Churches of Christ in the United States as the Jorgensen book had been.⁵ The cultural gap even extended to music notation: *Songs of the Church* was published only in shape notes, a rural Southern and Midwestern tradition; the revised *Great Songs of the Church* was published only in the round notes of standard musical notation.

The revised *Great Songs of the Church*, fine hymnal though it was, did not capture the broad market that its predecessor claimed, perhaps because it was such a marked departure from the traditional repertoire of the American Churches of Christ. Since Abilene Christian understandably began to retire the old “number two” edition when the new revision was issued, congregations that continued to use the previous edition began to find replacement copies increasingly scarce through the following decades. This brings us to our final object of material culture connected to hymnals: a circa-2000 reproduction of *Great Songs of the Church*, number two, by modern digital imaging techniques. A group of congregations in central Kentucky negotiated with the Abilene Christian University Press to authorize a one-time printing of these hymnals by the R.R. Donnelly company.⁶ Interestingly, these congregations are in the premillennial fellowship—as was Elmer Jorgensen—and communicate through the *Word and Work* periodical of which he was an associate editor.⁷ Their loyalty to his hymnal is evidenced by an advertisement currently on the *Word and Work* web site, offering good used copies of *Great Songs*, number two, in lots of fifty books each.⁸

Hymnals as expressions of theology

Alexander Campbell summarized a long-held view of the importance of the theology of hymns when he said, “The hymn-book of a Christian community, next to the Bible, is most generally read, and much and often read by all true Christians.”⁹ The theological views of a people tend to be reflected, deliberately or accidentally, in the songs they adopt for worship. An interesting case in point is the treatment of the Holy Spirit in hymnals commonly used among the American Churches of Christ.

There has been significant debate over the years, of course, on several fundamental questions. How does the Holy Spirit communicate and operate—through the Word only, or independently from the Word as well? What is the role of the Spirit in conversion, and what exactly is the “gift of the Spirit” in Acts 2:38? How does the Spirit “indwell” the Christian, and what does He do? These are not simple questions to answer, as evidenced by the differences (though sometimes exaggerated) between the views of Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone.¹⁰ By the turn of the century there was general consensus that the miraculous gifts of the first century had ceased, but other aspects—especially the nature of the Spirit’s work in conversion and indwelling—were

vigorously debated on the pages of the *Gospel Advocate* and other journals during the 1890s.¹¹ When the charismatic movement of the 1950s and 1960s began to impact the Churches of Christ, this old fault line emerged again in exchanges between heavyweights such as Guy Woods, J.W. Roberts, James D. Bales, and Roy Lanier.¹² Abilene minister E.R. Harper (a staunch “Word-only” advocate) perhaps best stated the fears of the times in his 1976 book *Order in Reverse*, in which he outlined an inevitable slippery slope from the “personal indwelling” position held by many conservatives to the full-blown charismatic practices of the Pentecostals.¹³

This lingering unease with the subject of the Holy Spirit is evident in the hymnals published among the Churches of Christ in the United States during the twentieth century. For example, though *Great Songs of the Church*, No. 2, had a subject heading for “Holy Spirit” in its topical index, most of its competitors did not. *Christian Hymns* numbers 2 and 3, published by Gospel Advocate in 1948 and 1966 respectively, had subject headings for “God” and “Christ”, but not the third Person of the Trinity. The same was true of the widely popular *Songs of the Church* series first published by Alton Howard in 1971; even the “21st-century edition” of 1990, which for the first time had a topical arrangement of contents, did not have a section of songs about the Holy Spirit.

Interestingly, however, a few older books of more regional popularity did have an entry for “Holy Spirit” in their topical indexes, for example *Sacred Selections*, first published by Ellis J. Crum in 1956; *Christian Hymnal*, published in 1963 by the Slater Company in Dallas; and *Majestic Hymnal*, published in 1959 by the Firm Foundation Publishing House. Hymnals from the last twenty years, such as the revised *Great Songs of the Church* published by Abilene Christian University, *Songs of Faith and Praise* from Howard Publishing, and *Praise for the Lord* from Praise Press, all contain subject headings for the topic “Holy Spirit”.

It is also instructive to look at the selection of songs provided under these subject headings. The earliest, *Great Songs of the Church*, was one of the most extensive, and has exerted a great deal of influence on how this topic is covered in later hymnals. *Great Songs of the Church*, No. 2, contains the following songs under the topic “Holy Spirit”:

Arise, my soul, arise
I am the vine
Love divine
More about Jesus
O to be like Thee
Our blest Redeemer, ere He breathed
Peace, perfect peace
Praise God from whom all blessings flow
Take time to be holy
The Father kind above
We praise Thee, O God
When I shall reach the more excellent glory

Two of these songs, “Arise, my soul, arise” and “Love divine”, are Charles Wesley texts, and not

surprisingly show the Methodist emphasis on the operation of the Holy Spirit. The selection of these is careful, however; the song “Arise, my soul arise” simply says,

“His Spirit answers to the blood, and tells me I am born of God”

a clear reference to 1 John 5:6,

“This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth,”

and part of the less controversial doctrine of the Spirit's work as a seal of our salvation, as taught in Eph. 1:13-14. “Love divine” is one of the most popular English hymns, and was probably admitted on that basis, though it is arguable that it teaches the Wesleyan doctrine of “second grace” in phrases such as “Take away the love of sinning / Take our load of guilt away / End the work of Thy beginning...” or “Finish then Thy new creation...” (Poetic vagueness has softened the original doctrinal impact of many a hymn; for example, few Protestants today realize, when they sing “Faith of our fathers”, that the author was speaking of a return to pre-Reformation English Catholicism.)

Some of the songs in this list have only tenuous connections to the topic. It is not apparent why “Peace, perfect peace” is included here, since it contains no obvious reference to the Holy Spirit. “I am the vine” does not mention the Holy Spirit either, but is probably taken as a reference to bearing fruits of the Spirit. Some of the songs are primarily Trinitarian statements, such as “Praise God from whom all blessings flow” or “We praise Thee, O God”.

More interesting are the songs that make a definite statement about works of the Holy Spirit. In “We praise Thee, O God”, we sing,

We praise Thee, O God,
For Thy Spirit of light,
Who has shown us our Savior, and scattered our night.

which speaks of the Spirit's role in revealing truth but avoids the question of means, allowing interpretations ranging from the word-only position to the Calvinist doctrine of direct operation on the heart of the unbeliever. The ongoing work of the Spirit as revealer of truth to the Christian is treated in a similarly vague manner in the following stanza of “More about Jesus”:

More about Jesus let me learn,
More of His holy will discern;
Spirit of God, my teacher be,
Showing the things of Christ to me.

“Take time to be holy”, which actually uses the phrase “led by His Spirit”, also avoids a strict definition of means, with sufficient references to Bible study to satisfy those holding a word-only

position. Less clear is the phrase found in the last verse of “O to be like Thee”: “O to be like Thee! Lord, I am coming, / Now to receive th' anointing divine...” It is unclear what anointing this references, or whether it refers to the Holy Spirit; the hymnal editor may have had John 2:20 in mind, “You have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things.”

Two songs in *Great Songs of the Church*, No. 2, are specifically on the topic of the Holy Spirit: “Our blest Redeemer, ere He breathed”, and “The Father kind above”.

Our blest Redeemer, ere He breathed

Text by Harriet Auber, 1829

Our blest Redeemer, ere He breathed
His tender, last farewell,
A Guide, a Comforter, bequeathed
With us to dwell.

He came sweet influence to impart,
A gracious, willing Guest,
While He can find one humble heart
Wherein to rest.

And His that gentle voice we hear,
Soft as the breath of even,
That checks each fault, that calms each fear,
And speaks of heaven.

O God of purity and grace,
Our weakness, pitying, see;
O make our hearts Thy dwelling place,
And worthier Thee.

The language “sweet influence” of the second stanza would probably give a word-only believer some qualms, though it could be reconciled to an influence imparted through the Word; but the “gentle voice” of the third stanza would be harder to give such an interpretation (though not impossible). This hymn was included in the Slater Company's *Christian Hymnal* of 1963, and is in the more modern *Praise for the Lord* (a hymnal strongly influenced by *Great Songs of the Church*, No. 2), but not in the Gospel Advocate or Howard Publishing hymnals.

The Father kind above (The gift of the Spirit)

Text by Palmer Hartsough, c1924

The Father kind above
Sent forth in tender love
His Spirit in full measure;
A gift divinely free,
In every heart to be

A comfort and a treasure.

Within our hearts shall be
This fountain pure and free
Of living waters springing;
And every tender grace
Shall flourish in the place
While songs of joy are ringing.

Refrain:

The gift of the Spirit,
In gently falling showers descending from above,
Shall we not receive it,
Sent to us from God in love?
Our hearts all renewing,
So peaceful and so pure, so beautiful and bright,
Our lives all bedewing,
With its holy joy and light.

This song was not included in any other hymnals consulted except for Ellis J. Crum's *Sacred Selections*, whose alteration of the third line of the first stanza is telling. It is likely that the phrase “His Spirit in full measure” references John 3:34, where context implies that Christ had the Spirit of God in full measure, but not necessarily every Christian. An understanding of differing measures of the gifts of the Spirit was of course critical to the refutation of Pentecostalism; thus the first few phrases of this song may have sounded alarm bells that doomed it from further adoption except in Crum's version, where it reads “His Spirit in *a* measure”. The song was also not helped by an exceptionally insipid tune by the usually more inspired James H. Fillmore.

Sacred Selections, first published by Ellis J. Crum in 1956, is known for its carefully conservative stance and especially for its editor's penchant for bowdlerizing texts. It is interesting, therefore, to find that this hymnal had a topical heading for “Holy Spirit”, including several songs from the selections in *Great Songs of the Church*, No. 2 (the altered version of “The Father kind above” just mentioned, as well as less controversial hymns such as “Praise God from whom all blessings flow”, “We praise Thee, O God”, and “O to be like Thee”). Crum also included J.W. Gaines's 1924 song “Take my hand and lead me”, which makes its essential point about the Spirit in the third stanza and in the refrain:

Let me each day Thy Spirit feel;
Increase my courage, Lord,
To walk by faith, endowed with zeal,
Directed by Thy word.

Refrain:

Take my hand and lead me,

Anywhere you need me;
With Thy Spirit feed me,
Till I'm safe at home.

Word-only and personal-indwelling believers alike could accept this language, interpreting it according to their differing views, as evidenced by the song's inclusion in the *Majestic Hymnal* edited by Reuel Lemmons. Lemmons, a Word-only advocate, held nonetheless that the specific nature of the Spirit's indwelling was a matter of opinion and conscience. His desire not to press this point to division was seen dramatically in his inclusion of Roy Lanier, Sr., a powerful apologist for the personal indwelling view, as one of the featured writers in *Firm Foundation* during Lemmon's editorship of that journal.¹⁴ His selection of songs in the *Majestic Hymnal* reflects the same “equal opportunity” approach to the subject.

Hymns that make direct doctrinal statements in some depth about the work of the Spirit in the life of the believer did not begin to appear in hymnals used by the Churches of Christ in this country until considerably later, with the exception of the Slater Company's *Christian Hymnal* of 1963, which included “Holy Spirit, faithful Guide”, “Gracious Spirit, dwell with me”, and “Holy Spirit, Truth divine”. The 1975 Supplement to *Great Songs of the Church*, No. 2, included “Breathe on me, Breath of God”. The 1986 revision also included “Holy Spirit, Light divine”, and “Gracious Spirit, dwell with me”. *Praise for the Lord*, first published in 1992, added “Come Holy Spirit, guest divine” and “Spirit of God, descend upon my heart”.

These texts were fairly old, written in a sixty-year span in the mid-nineteenth century, but most have not yet acquired wide circulation among the Churches of Christ:

Holy Spirit, Light divine 1817
Come Holy Spirit, guest divine 1832
Spirit of God, descend upon my heart 1854
Gracious Spirit, dwell with me 1855
Holy Spirit, faithful Guide 1858
Holy Spirit, Truth divine 1864
Breathe on me, breath of God 1878

The teachings of the hymns are of a piece: they emphasize the Spirit's role in sanctification and fruit-bearing in the Christian life. “Holy Spirit, Light divine” asks the Spirit to “Chase the shades of night away”, to “Cleanse this guilty heart of mine”, to “Cheer this saddened heart of mine”, and finally to “Dwell within this heart of mine / Cast down every idol throne / Reign supreme, and reign alone”. “Gracious Spirit, dwell with me” speaks of an even more subtle influence: “Gracious Spirit, dwell with me; / I myself would gracious be; / And with words that help and heal / Would Thy life in mine reveal”. “Holy Spirit, Truth divine” follows much of the same pattern, elaborating characteristics of the Spirit and asking help in cultivating those traits, as for example: “Holy Spirit, Power divine, / Fill and nerve this will of mine”. A role of revival is accorded to the Holy Spirit in “Breathe on me, Breath of God”, which asks for Him to “Fill me with life anew / That I may love what Thou dost love, / And do what Thou wouldst do.” Altogether, these hymns are not particularly controversial—they are far from Pentecostal in

nature—but their inclusion shows a thoughtful, deliberate adoption of texts that teach a sanctifying, fruit-bearing personal indwelling of the Spirit, yet not the miraculous manifestations of Pentecostalism. Perhaps the most vivid illustration of this type of text is “Spirit of God, descend upon my heart”, which affirms in its second stanza,

I ask no dream, no prophet ecstasies;
No sudden rending of the veil of clay;
No angel visitant, no opening skies;
But take the dimness of my soul away.

Whether because of the association of the contemporary Christian style with the neo-charismatic movement, or because that style has as yet produced relatively few quality songs on the topic, relatively few contemporary songs about the Holy Spirit made inroads into the later hymnals. *Praise for the Lord* had “Sweet, sweet Spirit”, and Howard Publishing's *Songs of Faith and Praise* of 1994 added “Holy Spirit, Thou art welcome” and “Breath of heaven”. While “Breath of heaven” fits doctrinally with the preceding hymns in its plea for sanctification and fruit-bearing, “Sweet, sweet Spirit” and “Holy Spirit, Thou art welcome” have a tinge of the charismatic about them in their association with the manifestation of the Spirit in the place of worship, rather than in the lives of the worshipers.

The changing degree of inclusion of songs about the Holy Spirit, and the nature of those songs that are included, certainly parallels the history of the discussion of this topic within the U.S. Churches of Christ. Particularly, the slowness to provide songs to address this Person of the Trinity seems to reflect a theological reluctance, by the mid-twentieth century, to take a position on an issue that had been vigorously debated by powerful, respected figures in the brotherhood, yet without reaching satisfactory consensus.

The Importance of Ephemera in Understanding Culture

The hymnal itself, however, never tells the whole story; the same hymnal may be used in completely different ways by congregations with radically different worship traditions. The ephemera of church music—for example bulletins, worship handouts, and worship leaders' personal files—become in this case an invaluable and yet often overlooked resource for understanding a church music culture. I have in my possession an Excel file of data gathered by a deacon of a Church of Christ in Nashville, Tennessee, documenting the songs sung in worship services of that congregation over the period 2000-2002, when they had just adopted the revised edition of *Praise for the Lord* after several years of using Alton Howard's *Songs of the Church*. Thanks to this deacon's enthusiasm about church music traditions, it is possible to create a limited profile of the congregation's church music culture, to demonstrate some possible effects of the adoption of the new hymnal, and to dispel possible misconceptions about what the new hymnal meant in actual practice.

The deacon's notes show that out of 990 songs, the congregation had sung 601, meaning that more than a third of the songs had never been sung to his knowledge during a three-year period. 193 songs had been sung only once or twice, and 253 from three to nine times, showing that 446

songs, or 45% of the hymnal, had been sung an average of three or fewer times each year. A group of 155 songs made up the rest, being sung ten or more times in the same period. The sample congregation tends to sing an average of 20 songs per week, so about 3,000 songs would have been sung in the period of 2000-2002. These 155 songs, a little less than 16% of the hymnal, made up more than half of all the singing during this three-year period.

In order to analyze this core of often-used songs, I will have to make some broad generalizations about styles, apologizing in advance for the clumsiness of the definitions; while there would be plenty of disagreement about individual songs, it is hoped that these are at least useful categories in the general sense. “Classical” hymns are here defined as those songs that have several verses but no chorus, and are written in a simple, syllabic style based on the congregational hymn traditions established in Protestant Europe during the 16th century. “Gospel” songs usually have a chorus, a simpler harmonic structure, and rhythmic patterns taken from folk and popular music of 19th century America. The gospel category may be further divided into “traditional gospel” of the 19th century; “quartet gospel”, a ragtime-influenced style of the early 20th century that often features bass and alto solo leads in the choruses; and “modern gospel” that comes from, or closely mimics, the popular-music influenced commercial tradition of Southern gospel. “Contemporary” religious songs are generally identified with the youth worship movement beginning in the 1960s; this style may also be divided into the quasi-indigenous “devotional songs” of the 1960s and '70s, and the commercially marketed worship music of the 1980s and later.

Grouped into these categories, the core of 155 most-used songs at the sample congregation consists of 24 classical hymns; 39 contemporary songs; and 92 gospel songs. That such a solidly conservative Church of Christ in Nashville, Tennessee would sing such a high proportion of gospel songs comes as no surprise to anyone familiar with our church music traditions; but under the surface a surprising congregational personality emerges. Of the 39 contemporary songs in this list, more than half come from the more recent wave of that style—the “Contemporary Christian” or “praise and worship” movement. If the gospel songs are similarly sifted, we find 16 quartet-style songs and 13 “modern” gospel songs. The 19th-century gospel song, so long considered the core of traditional worship in the Churches of Christ, actually makes up less than half of this list of most commonly sung hymns in the sample congregation.

These proportions shift somewhat when we look at the 262 songs that were sung from three to nine times during the three-year period. Of this group, 147 are from the 19th-century gospel tradition, a higher percentage than in the more frequently sung group. There were also 57 classical hymns in this group, and 26 contemporary songs. Of the contemporary songs, only 9 come from the older “devotional song” background; the rest are from the modern commercial tradition of contemporary worship music. Quartet and modern gospel styles make up the 32 remaining songs in this category.

Taking these two categories together—the songs sung from 3-9 times, and the songs sung 10 or more times—we have a body of 417 songs, of which 65 are in a contemporary style, and 81 are classical. This means that more than a third of this repertoire was *not* gospel of any description, and actually struck out in new directions with contemporary worship music and with some older

classical hymns that are not necessarily associated with the Churches of Christ. Departures also occur in the directions of quartet gospel and modern commercial gospel styles. Despite the predominance of the 19th-century gospel style—songs of that type make up fully half of this group of 417 songs—we do not find the monolithic church music culture that stereotypes have sometimes held forth.

Since the time period covered by this data coincided with the adoption of a new hymnal, it is worthwhile to consider the role the new hymnal might have played in this more variegated church music culture. The sample congregation had used *Songs of the Church*, published by Alton Howard in 1977, for several years prior to the purchase of *Praise for the Lord*. Howard's book contained only a handful of songs that could be identified as “contemporary” in style, such as the venerable “Jesus is Lord”, so almost all of the five dozen or so contemporary songs in the working group of 417 hymns, and of the two dozen contemporary songs that made the list of most frequently sung hymns, were being sung for the first time. No doubt many of these were familiar from contact with youth activities and with inter-congregational singings, but this represents a considerable shift in church music culture. The “modern gospel” songs, which make up a smaller but still significant portion of this number, were also new additions to the congregational repertoire, only a few of them being available in Howard's *Songs of the Church*. Interestingly, only 12 “new” classical hymns were found in this group of 417; though classical hymns significantly outnumbered contemporary hymns or modern gospel songs in usage, the worship leaders tended to stick with those classical hymns they already knew from the earlier book.

Here, in conclusion, is the caveat about what conclusions may be drawn from a hymnal. Just because a song is in a hymnal does not mean it was ever sung by a particular congregation, or even by an entire fellowship of congregations. The ephemera of church music—for example worship handouts, PowerPoint presentations, and songleaders' personal files—are also necessary to tell us how a congregation interacted with a hymnal. Three brief examples from the practice of the sample congregation will suffice.

First, there is the curious history of the altered text of Reginald Heber's “Holy, holy, holy”. In *Praise for the Lord* (and most other hymnals used by the Churches of Christ in the United States for the last century), the first and third stanzas conclude with the line, “God over all, and blest eternally”. There is nothing untoward about that phrase, until it is compared to the original wording, “God in three persons, blessed Trinity.” To my knowledge only the Churches of Christ and the Unitarians use the altered version of the text. Do we conclude, then, that there is an undercurrent of Unitarianism in the Churches of Christ? Hardly. One of the most frequently sung hymns at the sample congregation was “We praise Thee, O God”, which praises each person of the Trinity in successive stanzas. Even stronger evidence is the frequent use of “Glorify Thy name”, at that time a new song to the congregation, which directly addresses each person of the Trinity. If one does not accept Trinitarian doctrine, this song makes no sense. It is obvious, then, that the altered text of “Holy, holy, holy” does not reflect a corresponding divergence of beliefs. It is more likely an accidental acquisition that has been unwittingly replicated over the years due to the often insular nature of hymnal editing within the Churches of Christ.

Another example of the gap between hymnal contents and hymnal usage can be seen in the adoption (or non-adoption) of some of the new offerings to the repertoire found in *Praise for the Lord*. We have already seen that the sample congregation embraced new songs—more than a third of those most frequently sung were not in the previous hymnal—so it cannot be assumed that the congregation would not accept new songs. It cannot be assumed, conversely, that this willingness to learn new repertoire extended equally to all varieties of hymns. One unfamiliar with the “ground truth” of the situation might assume that the adoption of *Praise for the Lord*, which has a significantly higher proportion of classical hymns than does *Songs of the Church* (approximately 40% compared to 25%), was a step toward a more classical church music tradition. Most of the new songs in frequently-sung group, however, are in the contemporary style or the modern gospel style, with a much smaller proportion of new classical hymns added.

When we look at some of the specific classical hymn types favored in *Praise for the Lord* we find relatively little adoption from these new repertoires. The hymnal contains a much more extensive selection of German and Scandinavian chorales, for example, but the congregation did not expand much into this repertoire beyond “A mighty fortress” and “O sacred head”. Beyond these two old standbys, already familiar from *Songs of the Church*, there was some repeated use of the well-known “We gather together”, and once they sang Tersteegen's lovely chorale “God Himself is with us”, a song that in the last few years has settled into the periphery of the sample congregation's active repertoire. Several old standards of the chorale tradition, however, such as “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty”, “Now thank we all our God”, or “Jesus, priceless treasure”, remain untouched. The same situation holds for the fine selection of hymns from the early Christian era, such as “Shepherd of tender youth”, “All glory, laud and honor”, or “Hail, gladdening light”. Just because a hymnal has an unusual strength in a particular area, or is markedly different from its predecessor with a congregation, does not necessarily mean that actual practice has changed.

Finally, returning to the earlier topic of songs about the Holy Spirit, we observe that even though *Praise for the Lord* has an extensive selection of such hymns, compared to practically none in Howard's *Songs of the Church*, these newly available songs were not extensively used by our sample congregation. The exception was “Sweet, sweet Spirit”, which made it into the list of 155 most frequently sung hymns, suggesting that the problem was not an avoidance of the subject matter. “Breathe on me, breath of God” was also sung, infrequently, but other similar-themed songs such as “Gracious Spirit, dwell with me” or “Holy Spirit, truth divine” were never used. It appears that unfamiliarity, and perhaps the classical style of the rest of the hymns in this category, was the real barrier in this case, and not any discomfort with the doctrine espoused in the hymns.

The individuality and independence of congregations, and the general informality of most worship planning, makes the church music tradition of the Churches of Christ especially difficult to study properly. The physical record left by hymnals provides at least a starting point for understanding and comparing this history, and the field of research is wide open. Though we have done a better job in recent decades of preserving the hymnals themselves, we do not yet know enough about how they interacted with the churches. Though a good deal of research exists on *Great Songs of the Church*, we have yet to understand the true place of the Gospel Advocate

and Firm Foundation hymnals, or those of smaller publishers such as the Slater Company. Why were these hymnals published? What needs did they seek to fill? How were they accepted, and by whom? And beyond the hymnals themselves, we need more understanding of how they were actually employed, or we run the risk of jumping to unwarranted conclusions. Did a purchase of Ellis Crum's 1956 *Sacred Selections*, for example, indicate a congregation's alignment with his overtly conservative editorship, or their preference for quartet-style gospel songs, which it contained in larger numbers than other available hymnals at the time? Or did it result from a combination of both? Much of the information needed to settle such questions from the past was never recorded, much less preserved. With the growing trend toward more systematic worship planning, worship handouts, and maintaining digital archives of associated information, it can be hoped that an effort to preserve this data can help to settle the questions of future church music enthusiasts about our own times.

1 C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: MacMillan, 1946), 16.

2 Forrest McCann, "A History of *Great Songs of the Church*", *Restoration Quarterly* 38/4 (1996): 219-228, 226.

3 McCann, "History", 219.

4 Robert Hooper, *A Distinct People: A History of the Churches of Christ in the 20th Century* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing), 183.

5 See the section subtitled "Ecumenical hymnody" in Jack Boyd's *Leading the Lord's Singing* (Abilene, TX: Quality Publications, 1981), 75-76. Boyd was music editor for the revised *Great Songs of the Church*.

6 Information provided in frontispiece by Ernie Bailey, Murray State University.

7 McCann, "History", 220.

8 *The Word and Work Online* (<http://wordandwork.org/NewsandNotes.dsp>), 19 May 2008.

9 *Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs*, 2nd ed. (Bethany, VA: Campbell, 1854), 6.

10 Douglas Foster, "Waves of the Spirit against a rational rock: the impact of the Pentecostal, charismatic, and third wave movements on American Churches of Christ", *Restoration Quarterly* 45/1-2 (2003): 95-105, 97.

11 Foster, 99-100.

12 Foster, 102-103.

13 Foster, 103-104.

14 See, for example, Lanier's series of articles on the "Problem Page" in *Firm Foundation* vol. 88 (1971), nos. 1-3, in which he answers letters from *Firm Foundation* readers disagreeing with his position on personal indwelling of the Spirit.