

Explanation of numbers in parenthesis, from the Preface, pp. viii-xi: "To illustrate historical development of our hymnody, a careful selection of hymns is provided representing the types and periods under consideration. These illustrative hymns are given in the form in which they appear in contemporary hymnals. Such presentation is more practical for critical study than the reproduction of the same material in its original form. The numbers in parenthesis by hymn titles and tune names throughout each chapter refer to these illustrative hymns."

A Survey of Christian Hymnody

William Jensen Reynolds
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CHAPTER 3

Psalmody

About the couch of David, according to Rabbinical tradition, there hung a harp. The midnight breeze, as it rippled over the strings, made such music that the poet-king was constrained to rise from his bed, and, till dawn flushed the eastern skies, he wedded words to the strains.¹

Through the psalms of David and other writers the children of Israel found expression for religious experiences. Psalm singing was a vital part of the services of the Temple and the synagogue, and this practice was continued in the early Christian church. The psalms were sung in prose form, and the recitation melodies were known as psalm tones, one for each church mode.

INFLUENCE OF JOHN CALVIN

Not until the sixteenth century did metrical forms of the psalms appear, and this turning point in the stream of Christian song occurred in Geneva through the efforts of John Calvin. He recognized early the value of Christian song to nourish church piety and worship. His services were dignified yet simple and consisted of praying, preaching, and singing. Calvinistic theology and philosophy focused upon the Bible and centered upon the sovereignty of God. Calvin's firm conviction that congregational singing should employ only the psalms in the vernacular of the people excluded any hymns such as those which developed in the Lutheran tradition.

Calvin's philosophy of church music hinged upon two basic factors: simplicity and modesty. Since music was to be used by the people, it needed to be simple, and because it was used to worship a sovereign God, it needed to be modest. In singing, these qualities were best achieved by the unaccompanied voice.²

Origins of Metrical Forms. The metrical structure of the psalms sung at Geneva followed the pattern of the popular songs of the day, many of which were inherited from the *trouvères* and *troubadours* of previous centuries. Several stanzas of four or more lines were sung to the same melody, and the singing was in unison without accompaniment.

Literary Work of Marot and Beza. Clement Marot began making metrical versions of the psalms a number of years before his first contact with Calvin. For at least fifteen years following about 1523, he was a favorite in the court of Francis I at Paris, and, following the same style of his translation of Latin and Greek poems, he turned his attention to the book of Psalms.

History is full of strange ironies, but none more strange than the chain of circumstances which led to Metrical Psalmody beginning as the favourite recreation of a gay Catholic court and ending as the exclusive "hall-mark" of the severest form of Protestantism.³

Marot's publication of thirty metrical psalm translations in 1542 brought forth such opposition that he sought sanctuary in Geneva. Here he met Calvin who recognized his poetical ability and set him to work. For about a year he labored under Calvin's careful supervision and completed nineteen more psalm versifications. His death in 1544 left Calvin without a versifier until the appearance of Theodore Beza in Geneva in 1548. By 1551 Beza had completed thirty-four psalms, and seven more were added by 1554.

Musical work of Bourgeois. About the same time that Calvin settled in Geneva, 1541, Louis Bourgeois, a noted composer, arrived in the same city. Calvin enlisted his assistance and, for more than a decade, he served as music editor for Calvin's psalters. His scrupulous setting of the tunes to fit the poetry of the text was done in a most skillful manner. The tunes were carefully designed for ease of singing by the congregation.

As cantor of St. Peter's Church in Geneva, 1545-57, Bourgeois occupied a position of great influence, but, it was his work as a composer and editor of psalm tunes that brought him, more than to any other individual, recognition as the father of the modern hymn tune. Five of these tunes are: OLD 100TH (34), OLD 134TH⁴ (35), PSALM 42 (39), COMMANDMENTS (37) and DONNE SECOURS (38).

The Genevan Psalter. The writing and publishing of metrical psalms in Geneva culminated in the *Genevan Psalter*, 1562. This monumental publication was made up of previously published psalters: the 1542 edition, having thirty psalms by Marot;⁵ the 1551 edition, including nineteen more by Marot and thirty-four by Beza; and the 1554 edition, including seven additional psalms by Beza. With these psalms were included metrical versions of the Ten Commandments and the Nunc Dimittis, with tunes provided for each.⁶ The use of the Decalogue in this psalter seems somewhat strange, but the inclusion of the Nunc Dimittis can be accounted for by its regular use in the Genevan churches at the close of the Lord's Supper.

In this completed psalter of 1562, there were 125 tunes in 110 different meters. These tunes, almost entirely syllabic, had emerged under the careful editing of Bourgeois. Repetition of phrases, only one point of climax in each tune, and the frequent use of four-note motive, that is, the descending four-note pattern in the first phrase of OLD 100TH, are basic characteristics of these tunes. The presence of harmonic implications in the melodic lines of these tunes indicates a breaking away from modality.⁷

During the formative years of the French psalter, 1542-1562, more than thirty publications of words alone or words and tunes appeared. In 1562, the year in which the completed psalter appeared, more than twenty-five editions were issued. In the following thirty-eight years, more than eighty other editions were published, and during 1600-1685, at least ninety more editions were published. From Geneva the *Genevan Psalter* spread through France and on throughout Christendom. Perhaps no other publication has so influenced Christian song. Within a few decades after its appearance, it was translated into more than twenty languages. A complete English translation with tunes appeared in 1592, but because of the popularity of the work of Sternhold and Hopkins, it had little influence in England.

Goudimel and LeJeune. Two of France's finest musicians of the sixteenth century were fond of applying their skill at harmonization to the Genevan psalm tunes. Claude Goudimel, c. 1505-1572, published polyphonic settings of these tunes prior to his conversion to the Huguenot faith, for he published Catholic masses as late as 1558. Since only unison singing was permitted in the church services, these four-part settings were used outside the church. Sometime after 1558, while living at Metz, Goudimel became a Huguenot. In 1572, as a victim of the St. Bartholomew's Day massacres which spread throughout France in the wave of Roman Catholic persecution, he paid the supreme price for his faith. Claude LeJeune, 1528-1600 made polyphonic settings of the *Genevan Psalter* for four and five voices. These were published posthumously in 1613 and widely used throughout France and Holland. The collections of both Goudimel and LeJeune were published in Germany with translations of the Psalms into German.

STERNHOLD AND HOPKINS

It is quite possible that the early work of Marot had reached England and had come to the attention of Thomas Sternhold, Groom of the Royal Wardrobe of Henry VIII and later of Edward VI. Sternhold experimented in making metrical psalm versions, at first without any thought of publication, in the hope that they might replace the currently popular bawdy, obscene songs of his fellow courtiers. Written in ballad meter, originally two lines of fourteen syllables, Sternhold's psalm versions were designed to be sung to familiar ballad tunes of his day. The first edition containing nineteen psalms, undated, appeared about 1547, with the title *Certayne Psalmes chose out of the Psalter of David and drawe into English metre, by Thomas Sternhold, Grome of ye Kynges Maiesties roobes. Exudebat Londini Edvardus Whitchurche.*

A second edition, published posthumously in 1549, added eighteen more psalms by Sternhold. In 1557, a third edition appeared adding seven psalms by John Hopkins, a Suffolk clergyman and schoolteacher. These previous editions culminated in the publication in 1562 of *The Whole Book of Psalms*, which contained forty-six tunes, melodies only. The 1563 edition provided four-part harmony, with the melody in the treble. The work of

Sternhold and Hopkins became the accepted psalm book for English worship for almost a century and a half, until challenged by the “New Version” of Tate and Brady in 1696.

John Day’s Psalter. In 1562, John Day published an edition of the Sternhold and Hopkins psalter. Day included sixty-five tunes, one of which was ST. FLAVIAN (41); a harmonized edition appeared the following year. The tunes were largely of English origin, but some of the texts were altered to fit the longer meters of the French melodies, and in other instances, French melodies were altered to fit the shorter meters of the English texts. Each succeeding edition of the English psalter revealed an increasing influence of the French psalm tunes.

The Anglo-Genevan Psalter. The persecution of Protestants by Queen Mary, 1553-1558, caused many to leave England and settle temporarily on the continent. A large group settled at Frankfurt. However, dissension arose, and one group moved to Geneva where a church was established in 1558 with John Knox as its pastor. By 1560, after the death of Queen Mary, all the refugees had returned home to England, taking with them the influence of Genevan psalm singing.

A partial psalter for those displaced English Protestants appeared in 1556 in Geneva. Of the fifty-one psalms it contained, forty-four were by Sternhold and Hopkins, and seven by William Whittingham. Of the tunes which were included, two were from the French psalter, and the rest were of English origin. In 1558 another edition of this *Anglo-Genevan Psalter* appeared, containing sixty-two psalms with some substitutions in the tunes. William Kethe’s version of Psalm 100, “All people that on earth do dwell” (34), one of twenty-five psalm versions which he contributed to the 1661 edition, is the earliest example of the metrical psalm still in common usage.

¹Rowland E. Porthero, *The Psalms in Human Life* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1903), p. 13.

²Erik Routley, *The Church and Music* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., Ltd., 1950), p. 125.

³Richard R. Terry, *Calvin’s First Psalter, 1539* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1932), p. 111.

⁴This is the anglicized version of the original tune.

⁵Without Marot’s knowledge, Calvin altered twelve of his psalm versions for inclusion in the *Strasbourg Psalter, 1539*, which was Calvin’s first psalter. Later Marot repudiated these corrupt versions of his poems.

⁶The tune provided for the Nunc Dimittis is found today as NUNC DIMITTIS (36).

⁷For a comprehensive treatment of the music of this psalter, see Waldo Seldon Pratt, *The Music of the French Psalter of 1562* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939).

Christian History Institute (CHI) provides church history resources and self-study material and publishes the quarterly Christian History Magazine. Our aim is to make Christian history enjoyable and applicable to the widest possible audience.Â€ William J. Reynolds and Milburn Price, *A Survey of Christian Hymnody* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing, 1987). For a quick overview, see Chapter 4: â€œEnglish Hymnody, I.â€ Eric Routley, *Christian Hymns: An Introduction to Their Story* (Princeton, NJ: Prestige Publications, n.d.). These cassette tapes sketch the history of Christian hymnody in Routleyâ€™s animated and opinionated way. Cassette 4 covers Watts and Wesley. â€ John Wesley, *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of People Called Methodists* (London: J. Paramore, 1780).

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