

## Sacred Music of the World (2)

by Shirley M. Rider

In the twenty-first issue of *Kiyo*-1990, I presented a paper "Sacred Music of the World" in which I described sacred music as the "thread" which expresses the religious beliefs of a culture, and as such, can be traced through the ages in the religious music of the world. In that paper, I followed this thread from primitive society briefly through various cultures and in greater depth through Hebrew music as it led to the sacred music of the present in the Christian tradition.

In "Sacred Music of the World(2)", I wish to put forth my belief that this sacred music may also be conceived as a "river" made up of many fountains and streams which have contributed to its depth and enhanced its intrinsic value as it has continued to flow through our lives enriching our hearts and enlightening our souls. The purpose of this paper is to examine as many of these fountains and streams as possible in order to ascertain how they have contributed to the great body of sacred music which we treasure in our present-day culture.

Surely this examination must begin with a veritable fountainhead of sacred music, the hymn, in its various forms. We can trace the development of the latin hymns, but it was not until the latter half of the fourth century that the great importance of the Christian hymn became understood. Actually two more centuries would pass before these hymns would be firmly established in the life of the church.

Notwithstanding, we cannot fail to note the famous plain-chant melodies in Palestrina's "Great Hymni Totius Anni", a collection of hymns for every festival throughout the ecclesiastical year, or to be reminded that in the sacred works of Palestrina we reach the peak of

choral polyphony. Neither can we neglect the works of St. Ephrem of Edessa and St. Ambrose of Milan, for these men worked earnestly to add to the store of hymns and make them part of Christian worship. St. Ambrose also introduced the first metrical hymns paving the way for the great body of hymnody which we so easily take for granted. The Christian missionaries, St. Augustine, Boniface and Ill de fonso carried these hymns to England, Germany and Spain and began the tradition which missionaries have continued until this day.

The early protestant hymns were made possible because of the work of St. Ambrose and Martin Luther, the priest, minister, musician who fully appreciated the beauty of the latin hymns even as he began to compose hymns and chorales of his own in the German language. The chorale tradition he made popular was carried on by Bach to leave an indelible imprint on the hearts of the German people and so many others throughout the world. France enjoyed the metrical psalms of Marot and Beza, and in England, Sternhold's "The whole Booke of Psalmes" presented the works of Tallis and others. This collection was followed by the complete "Psalter" by Este, and a second edition by Ravenscroft became the foundation upon which others could build. Issac Watts did this so well that he is considered to be the real founder of English hymnody. Conder states: "He was the first who succeeded in overcoming the prejudice which opposed the introduction of hymns into our public worship" (Elson 290). His many hymns continue to be sung, and his "Our God, our help in ages past" and "When I survey the wondrous cross", can be heard in the native language of Christians wherever they raise their voices in song. Watts wrote over five hundred hymns, thirteen of which appear in the Presbyterian Hymnal, seventeen in the Japanese Hymnal and eighteen in the Pilgrim Hymnal. Charles Wesley's "Hymns and Sacred Poems" became a definite influence on the Methodist revival of the eighteenth century, and in a sense accomplished in England what Luther had made possible in Germany and Huss in

Moravia. There have been attempts made to collect the best hymns of various traditions to make them available for wider use. "Anglican Hymnology" made up of fifty-two hymnals used in the church of England at home and abroad, "The National Hymn-Book made up of thirty different hymnals, and "The Best Church Hymns" collected from one hundred and seven hymn-books are worthy examples. In each of these collections, an attempt was made to gather together hymns that were easy to sing, biblical and devotional, a practice which is still considered proper criteria in the writing of hymns.

Children's hymns are another streamlet and an indispensable part of hymnody. We can find worthy examples in the hymns of Ken, Watts and Wesley. We know that children sang hymns as in the well known story of the seven boys who sang "Gloria, laus, et honor" before the Emperor Louis and succeeded in getting St. Theodulph's liberation from prison, but it remained for Watts to publish his "Divine and Moral Songs", to form a choir of children and to write songs especially for them. Cennick wrote "Hymns for Children" in 1754, and in 1763 Charles Wesley published "Hymns for Children." However, his music was not considered appropriate for small children to sing. In 1810 Ann and Jane Taylor wrote "Hymns for Infant Minds." This was a very successful collection which helped pave the way for compositions by later composers. Helen Taylor, niece of Ann and Jane Taylor, is known for her "Missionary Hymns for Children" published in 1846. In 1848 Mrs. Cecil Frances Alexander issued "Hymns for Children" and set a new standard for children's hymns. Her "Once in royal David's city" and "All things bright and beautiful" are well known examples. Mary L. Duncan's "Jesus tender Shepherd hear me," and Frances R. Havergal's "Lord's Prayer", Jemima Luke's "I think when I read that sweet story of old", and Jeannette Threlfall's "Hosanna! loud hosanna" are all worthy examples which have continued to be favorites for many children in helping them to express their faith.

In my remarks concerning the beginning of hymns, I mentioned the latin hymns and plain chant melodies. Elson tells us that for nearly four hundred years after its introduction into the services of the church, plain song was transmitted from age to age by oral tradition, but that after Constantine had been converted and Christianity became the established religion of the Roman empire, and the church no longer had to worship in the catacombs, that singing schools were established to preserve the old tradition and insure a uniform method of singing(316). Elson goes on to state that St. Gregory the Great took over the work of St. Ambrose and added to it continuing to use the antiphonal style which St. Ambrose introduced to the western church but leaving us the definitive work "Antiphonarium." Elson also states that St. Augustine introduced it into England and the Emperor Charlemagne commanded its use in the Gallican Church (316). It goes without saying that plain song is sung in both the catholic and protestant churches and enjoys a singular place in present day worship. Indeed, plain song must be considered a part of the "river" as it is the basis for the Ambrosian, Gregorian, Anglican and metrical Chants which have become a part of church services in Roman Catholic, Anglican, Protestant, Episcopal and other traditions.

This firm foundation of chanting became the basis for the mass, another tributary which Elson states is derived from the phrase "Ite missa est" ("Depart! the assembly is dismissed") chanted by the deacon immediately before the service ends(319). Although the mass may be divided into categories, the mass for the regular church service to give glory to God, and the requiem mass sung to comfort the soul of the departed, we are aware that there are masses sung for different festivals and seasons. It may be said that many who have been privileged to sing this music have been touched by it, and Bach's "B Minor Mass", Mozart's "Requiem", Beethoven's "Missa Solemnis", and the "Requiem Masses" of Brahms, Faure, and Verdi are undisputed

masterpieces deserving of the special place in the "river" which they enjoy.

Another "stream" which cannot be overlooked is the motet which is sometimes sung at a high mass of the Roman Catholic church as a substitute for the plain-chant offertory or immediately after it though not limited to this usage. In fact, the motet became one of the most important musical forms in the Renaissance period of music. The "Ars compositionis de Motetis" by Philippus de Vitriaco is a definitive work which Morley tells us was highly thought of and used by the church for some time (Elson 330). The later works of Dufay, Dunstable, Binchois, Okeghem and others continued to develop the motet form, and passages from the Gospels are feelingly portrayed in such works as Jacobus Vaet's "Egressus Jesus", Jahn Gero's "The Pharisee and the Publican", and Dufays' "Magnificat. The "Lamentations of Jeremiah" were the subject of many motets by Tinctor, Hykaert, Gaspar, de la Rue, Agricola, and especially Carpentrasso whose "Lamentations" were sung in the Sistine Chapel yearly until they were replaced by the compositions of Palestrina. Palestrina has given us seven books of motets containing two hundred and two compositions for from, four to eight voices. He has composed around one hundred others including thirteen for twelve voices. Palestrina's music is recognized as the zenith of choral polyphony, a fact which is amply demonstrated in these works of rare beauty. There is a large collection of funeral motets, and the work of de Pres' is especially lovely. Furthermore, the motets of Vittoria and di Lasso, Tallis and Byrd, Scarlatti, Pergolesi, J. C. and J. S. Bach serve to assure the quality and beauty of the motet form which has made it an indispensable part of the sacred music which is ours.

Another "fountain" which continues to flow into the "river" is the chorale, a sacred choral song which has been given to us by the reformed church of Germany in which it began. Luther is responsible

for writing hymns in the German tongue and fitting them to rhythmic music and is the father of the Luthern Chorale. His "Ein feste Burg", and Cruger's "Nun danket alle Gott", are masterpieces of the chorale form.

The "stream" flows on from the motet of the Roman Catholic church through the chorale of the German church to the anthem of the Anglican church. The anthem may be said to be the culminating point of ritual music in the Anglican church. Its text content includes psalms or other parts of the bible or liturgy and is an integral part of the service. Usually, the anthem will be for solo, choir or double choir. From the simplest of beginnings, the anthem form has developed into complex counterpoint with separate organ and occasionally orchestral accompaniment, and English composers contribution in this field can not be underestimated. Elson states that the only time the anthem was not sung was during the Great Rebellion when music was banished and organs and choir books were destroyed. He goes on to say that the anthem has ever since held its place in choral service (334). Since the Reformation, master musicians of Great Britain have given us works of eminent beauty. Tye's "I will exalt Thee, O Lord", Byrd's "Hosanna" and Gibbons' "Almighty and everlasting God", are considered masterpieces of vocal writing. Gibbons is referred to as the "English Palestrina", and Sir Frederick Ouseley has published a "Collection of the Sacred Compositions" of Orlando Gibbons. The anthem tradition was furthered in the works of Humfrey, Wise, Blow, Purcell, Croft, Weldon and Clarke, and the renowned Purcell is credited with bringing the solo anthem to perfection. Also, from Humfrey on, we can see the influence on the anthem of instrumental music as it began to assume more importance. Purcell added trumpet parts to his famous "Te Deum", and Handel's "Chandos" anthems were also given instrumental parts. After the influence of Haydn and Mozart, we find the complete orchestration of Attwood's coronation anthems. The anthem tradition was further

enhanced by Greene, Boyce, Hayes, Battishill and Walmisley. Green's "I will sing of Thy power" and "O clap your hands", Boyce's "O give thanks", Hayes' "O worship the Lord", Battishill's "Call to remembrance", Attwood's "Withdraw not Thou", and Walmisley's "Remember O Lord", are especially worthy examples. Although Handel is German by birth, many English people regard him as an adopted son and cherish his "Chandos" anthems written for the Duke of Chandos as well as his anthems written for funerals and coronation ceremonies. The anthem tradition was carried on by the works of S.S. Wesley, Sir John Goss and Sir Frederick Ouseley and continues to be enhanced by present day composers of many countries and traditions. Arthur Frachenpohl is a very credible example from the twentieth century American tradition. Thus the anthem joins in the flow of the "river" as it continues on its journey.

Yet another "fountain" which adds strength and drama to this onward flow is the oratorio. Though in some respects it is similar to its secular counterpart, the opera, it reveals a sacred text from the bible or other religious source with such depth of feeling and drama that no stage setting or costumes are required to express its message. The only prerequisite for a successful rendering of the music is a sincere and reverent performance faithful to the text. One difference which is worthy of note however, is that the dramatic or emotional feeling in the oratorio is more often expressed as a group while in the opera this feeling is usually provided by individual performers. Handel's oratorio "Israel is Egypt" is a good example in that it begins with a succession of choruses. Such an example may not be found in an opera, however. Handel's oratorios, "Saul", "Samson", "Joseph", "Belshazzar", "Hercules", "Ocasional Oratorio", "Judas Maccabaeus", "Joshua", "Solomon", "Susanna", "Theodora" and "Jeptha" are a worthy body of music even without his masterpiece, the "Messiah". Bach's "Christmas Oratorio", Haydn's "Creation" and "Seasons", Mozart's "La Betulia liberate",

Beethoven's "Christ on the Mount of Olives", Mendelssohn's "St. Paul" and "Elijah", Franck's "The Beatitudes" and Gounod's "The Redemption" and "More et vita" provide a body of music the beauty and depth of which words fail in description. Nevertheless, the saga of the oratorio is not complete without the inclusion of the passion oratorios to which we are indebted by the exquisite "St. Matthew Passion" and "St. John Passion" of Bach. The idea of singing passion music in a dramatic form can be traced back to the third century in the work of St. Gregory Nazianzen, and the practice of singing the passion texts was carried out especially during the Lenten season as is done in our present day church services. The concert stage presentation of these works is carried out at other times of the year as well, a fact which is true of the entire body of oratorio music.

The "river" gains its distinction through the significance of its tributaries. Thus, it is imperative to include the noble tradition of 'black' music as it has evolved in the hymns and spiritual songs of American blacks. Through this music, we are reminded of the sorrows, hopes and faith which has sustained them and provided a unique contribution to the music of America and the world. W. E. B. Du Bois has said, "Our song, our toil, our cheer and warning have been given to this nation in blood - brotherhood. Are not these gifts worth the giving?... Would America have been America without her Negro people" (Southern 211)? "Songs of Zion" published in 1981 is an excellent hymnal bringing together a significant collection of over two hundred hymns and spiritual songs to supplement the hymn book in use by the United Methodist churches of the U. S. A. at their request. It received its fifth printing in 1983. Dr. Charles A. Tindley is a well known black hymnist, and it was his hymn that was adopted to become the freedom song, "We Shall Overcome". Spirituals are the gifts of the blacks of the southern United States and the gospel hymns that of the blacks in the north. The title of the hymn collection, "Songs of Zion" reminds



us of the poignant biblical message of Psalm 137 from which this title comes. This psalm tells the story of the people of Israel who were taken from their land as captives and commanded to sing one of the songs of Zion even as they worked as slaves. The black people brought to America in the slave trade ships have continued to sing the Lord's song in America and have made it their own country, no longer a "strange land." This is the essence of the message Du Bois brings to our attention. Although both the old and new testaments of the Holy Bible provide texts for the black spirituals, the Old Testament figures in many spirituals because of the common experience of slavery. "Go Down Moses" is a clear example. The New Testament has provided the life and death of Jesus Christ, and the texts for "Go Tell It on the Mountain", "De Glory Manger", "Were You There", "Steal Away", and "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" among others. These treasures are only a few of the many spirituals which were made famous by George White and the Jubilee Singers who traveled extensively in the U. S. and Europe over a seven year period and earned enough money to found Fisk University, a well known institution in the U. S. today. The Fisk Jubilee singers succeeded in making the black spiritual known on an international scale and firmly established it as a permanent American art form. Du Bois gives a moving account of this history in his collection of essays, "The Souls of Black Folk", an excerpt of which appears in Elieen Southern's "Readings in Black American Music (203-205). We can follow the progress of the acceptance of this sacred music as more black musicians gained the expertise to develop anthem - spirituals such as "Listen to the Lambs" by R. Nathaniel Dett and the well known "Deep River" by Harry T. Burleigh. Many concert singers have developed a tradition of closing their recitals with a group of black spirituals. Marian Anderson, Paul Robeson, Dorothy Manor, Roland Hayes, Todd Duncan and Leontyne Price are well known examples in this regard, and we can easily understand why they have

been able to make this sacred music known to a world-wide audience. Other black composers such as Samuel Colerage-Taylor and William Grant Still have written vocal and instrumental arrangements, and Anton Dvorak shows the influence of his student, Harry T. Burleigh in his "Going Home" theme of his "New World Symphony." Surely the contribution of the spirituals and gospel songs to the "river" can not be denied. The gospel songs take their cue from the spirituals and their content from the four Gospels of the New Testament. Thomas A. Dorsey is well known for his work in making the gospel songs well known although he credits his teacher Dr. Charles A. Tindley who so impressed Dorsey that he stopped working in the secular music field and devoted his time to writing only sacred music. His first gospel hit was "If You See My Saviour, Tell Him That You Saw Me". Dorsey lost his wife and child while on tour but was able one week later to compose his masterpiece, "Precious Lord, Take My Hand." Solo singers, gospel groups and black church choirs have provided worthy leadership in making the gospel songs a definite part of the American tradition for both blacks and whites alike. I was reminded of this fact when privileged to hear the Atlanta, Georgia Baptist Church Choir in person in Atlanta during a national church conference in 1983. Nevertheless, the experience which has left an indelible imprint on my heart was that of the black singer, Rosa Page Welsh standing on the steps of the newly constructed chapel at Baiko Girls School in Shimonoseki, Japan in the early 1950's. Tears glistened in her eyes as she looked down upon the thin, tired students making their way slowly up the mountain road to the school. They gathered silently in wonder at her feet as the sun sparkled in her tears. She was singing the spiritual "My Lord What a Morning", and time stood still in the beauty of that moment. She had been commissioned by the church women of America to come to Japan as an expression of their love at this time, but in 1958 she was asked to come as the director of music at the World Conference of Christian

Education. For this purpose, nineteen black spirituals were chosen and translated into Japanese so that both English and Japanese could be used. It was her hope that this small collection, "Negro Spirituals", would help people to understand the true meaning of the spirituals and make them their own. In this regard, she explains that these songs are to be treated seriously as they are the echo of oppressed black people's hearts. She goes on to say that they are the musical expression of hardship, sorrow, faith, hope and joy coming from the darkness of slavery. She feels that because there is much sorrow in the world today that many people's hearts will be comforted by these spirituals. She further states that for the people who sing these songs from their hearts just as they sing a hymn, these spirituals are then not just the songs of one particular race, but rather belong to the whole world. She gives us this insight in the forward of her collection "Negro Spirituals (1). It may be noted that of the ten spirituals included in the second Japanese hymnal published in 1974, seven are included in this Welsh collection. Furthermore, of the twelve African-American spirituals included in the new hymnal of the Presbyterian Church U. S. A. published in 1990, there are seven spirituals included in this collection which Rosa Page Welsh made possible thirty-two years ago.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to include every musical tradition which has contributed to the body of sacred music we enjoy in the final decade of the twentieth century, but it is my belief that the "river" will continue to flow on gathering depth and strength as it wends its way in our hearts and enriches our lives.

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