

**CHRISTIAN HYMNOLOGY:
A SERMON PREACHED IN
THE BRICK CHURCH, NEW
YORK, DECEMBER 12, 1869**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649297351

Christian Hymnology: A Sermon Preached in the Brick Church, New York, December 12, 1869
by James O. Murray

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JAMES O. MURRAY

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Christian Hymnology.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE BRICK CHURCH, NEW
YORK, DECEMBER 12, 1869,

BY

REV. JAMES O. MURRAY, D. D.,

ASSOCIATE PASTOR.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE SESSION.

NEW YORK:
CHARLES SCRIBNER AND COMPANY.

1870.

THE occasion of this discourse was the introduction of "The Sacrifice of Praise," a Hymn-book "designed for Public Worship and Private Devotion," compiled by a Committee of the Session, of which the author was chairman.

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RIVERSIDE, CAMBRIDGE:
PRINTED BY H. O. HOUGHTON AND COMPANY.

CHRISTIAN HYMNOLOGY.



"And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives." *Matthew xxvi. 30.*

"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." *Ephesians v. 18, 19.*

THE first of these texts shows us one of the many ways in which Jesus used his voice to the glory of God. He taught of God, He prayed to God, He sang the praise of God. We know what He and his disciples sang together in that upper room. It was the Hallel, or hallelujah psalms (113-118), used at the Jewish Passover. But it is the *fact* that He sang even more than what He sang, which interests the Christian mind and heart. For the singing in which He took part, was thus directly associated with a newly established ordinance of the Christian Church. It belonged to the new dispensation. Jesus by it gave to his church an example of worship in song.

The second of these texts shows us that the example of Christ had been followed; that the early Christians craved and used devotional singing in their social and public assemblies; that this had become of prominence enough

to be made a matter of apostolic teaching. The fundamental principles of sacred song are therein set forth, namely, that sacred music is of any worth in the sight of God and for the soul of man, just in so far as it comes from hearts filled with the Spirit: "Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." Again, that this singing should be something in common and not done by proxy. "Speaking to one another" conveys more exactly the meaning of the apostle than "speaking to yourselves." It denotes a congregational singing as the apostolic model for church music. Again, that vocal melody, artistic excellence, the science of music, should be valued only as they tend to beget a melody of heart to the Lord. This psalmody of the inward heart is the first aim of the service of song in the house of the Lord.

We are moreover taught by this passage that there were already found in the church and used by the disciples, Christian hymns. It is hardly possible to discriminate very sharply and say wherein the psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs differed each from the others. But it is certainly to be inferred from this teaching of St. Paul, that there was a class of uninspired Christian hymns or spiritual songs, sanctioned by apostolic authority, which were entirely different from the ancient psalms. Whatever

they were, they mark and constitute the beginning of a distinctively Christian hymnology. This is a subject, which of late years has so extensively and intensively engaged the Christian mind, as to demand for it some consideration by professed religious teachers. Never before in the history of the church, have hymns been so widely studied, so generally read, so deeply loved. A new mission, or at least a new enlargement of power, seems to have been given them by the Spirit of God. They are fulfilling their sweet and gentle, but powerful offices of quickening and comfort in thousands of hearts, that a few years since knew little of what rich stores of helpfulness and solace were laid up in them. It would be difficult to specify any theme more directly within the province of the pulpit, or one in which timely words needed more to be spoken.

Christian hymnology is not an independent and isolated product of the Christian Church. Like most of the institutions of that church, it is a growth out of a similar growth in the old dispensation. It has its roots in the inspired psalmody of the Jewish Church. Both are a development. Both grew from small beginnings. The parallel between these growths is close and instructive.

The traces of sacred music in primitive worship are very scanty. When we have noticed

the invention of musical instruments by Jubal,¹ the father of all such as handle the harp and the organ, and the defeated purpose of Laban,² to send Jacob away "with mirth and with songs, with tabret and with harp," we have exhausted all the information the Bible gives us as to the original introduction and use of music. It is probable, though by no means certain, that the music of the period was in some way associated with religion. But the first distinct assurance we have of this, is when on the banks of the Red Sea, Moses and the children of Israel sang their triumphal song. This had a decidedly religious character, and Hebrew psalmody may be traced to this as almost to its very source. The song of Deborah and Barak is metrical in its structure, and was without doubt intended to be sung. But we search in vain the books of Moses to find any clear trace of the incorporation of sacred music into his ritual of worship. In the first institution and observance of public worship, everything was subordinate to the sacrificial idea. It was needful to have the people thoroughly rooted and grounded in this, and that nothing should be introduced which should in any way divert their attention from it.

But when established in Canaan, and brought forward in their religious education so as to

¹ Genesis iv. 21.

² *Ibid.* xxxi. 27.

need and to demand a temple-worship, they needed and demanded a service of song. The popular heart was prepared for the strains of the psalmist, when God had prepared the Psalmist to compose them. The hour had come and the man, — both by appointment of God.¹ The individual felt the need of holy song in which to express his religious emotions; these found voice in the Psalms of David. The congregation felt the need of some service of song in the house of the Lord; that service was provided for in the psalms which the sons of Korah and the sons of Asaph chanted to the accompaniment of psalteries and harps.

Yet what demands our notice especially, is that all this worship of God in song, in psalms composed expressly for it, in a temple-worship which elaborately provided for it, was the slow growth of centuries. The earliest worship of God on earth was by sacrifice without song. Then came song on special eminent occasions, such as the deliverance of Israel from Pharaoh and his hosts. It may be true, — though no trace of this appears in the ritual of Moses, — that the "Levites all along practiced music, and that some musical service was part of the worship of the Tabernacle."² The growth of the institution of sacrifices, from the first offered by

¹ See 2 Chron. xxix. 25.

² See article on "Music" in Smith's *Bible Dictionary*.