



Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association

OUR GOSPEL MUSIC HERITAGE

Over the centuries, thousands of great hymns have been written which have been a vital part of our Christian faith. From the earliest times, the church has been a *singing* church. Nothing in Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism, Islam, or any other religion, even begins to compare with it. Jesus has provided the theme for more songs than anyone who has ever lived.

To start, we will consider some of the great old hymns from years past, hymns which have stood the test of time. The dates when written should be carefully noticed.

A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD (1529)
AT THE CROSS (1707)
THE DOXOLOGY (1709),
CHRIST THE LORD IS RISEN TODAY (1739)
HALLELUJAH CHORUS (1742)
ROCK OF AGES (1776)
AMAZING GRACE (1779)
ALL HAIL THE POWER OF JESUS NAME (1780)
PRAISE HIM, PRAISE HIM (1869)
MASTER, THE TEMPEST IS RAGING (1874)
CHRIST AROSE (1874)
TO GOD BE THE GLORY (1875)
O WORSHIP THE KING (1883)
AT CALVARY (1895)

An elderly Christian man I knew quite well died. His family asked the young, new pastor at the church he had attended, to conduct his service. He had requested that the hymn **THE OLD RUGGED CROSS** be sung. The young pastor was a good man, had a heart for God, but in his church background, old hymns were seldom (if ever) sung. He had never heard the hymn **THE OLD RUGGED CROSS!** I think this is unfortunate.

Some years ago, I heard a guest speaker (who preferred newer worship type songs), actually say that the church should *throw away the hymn books!* We can appreciate new songs that are written, but (in my view) this is no reason to cast aside old hymns that have stood the test of time. They are “Christian classics.”

Songs with words directed to God have been categorized as **Worship** songs. Songs with words addressed to one another are **Testimony** songs. Each type can serve a valid purpose.

In Psalm 119 the words are addressed to God: “Your word I have hid in my heart, that I might not sin against you...Open my eyes that I may see wondrous things.... Forever, O LORD, your word is settled in heaven....your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

Other Psalms are in the testimony category: “I was glad when they said...Let us go into the house of the LORD” (Psalms 122:1).

“I will enter his gates with thanksgiving” (Psalm 100:4) or “Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised” (Psalms 145:3).

The early believers, as clearly stated in Scripture, used both Worship and Testimony songs and were certainly not limited to one style: “...teaching and admonishing *one another* in **psalms AND hymns AND spiritual songs**, singing with grace in your hearts *to the Lord*” (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19; cf. Acts 16:25).

“Music” has been defined as vocal **or** instrumental sounds (**or both**) combined so as to produce beauty of form and harmony.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) had a great appreciation for music, played a lute and flute, and wrote songs like **AWAY IN A MANGER**, still often heard at the Christmas season, and of course:



***A mighty Fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing,
 Our Helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing:
 For still our ancient foe, doth seek to work us woe;
 His craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate,
 On earth is not his equal.***

Luther affirmed: “Next to theology there is no art which can be compared to music; for it alone, after theology, gives us rest and joy of heart.”

When King Saul suffered from severe demonic depression, “David took a harp and played it....Then Saul would become refreshed and well” (1 Sam. 16:23).

Music in various forms goes clear back to ancient times. Early in the book of Genesis Jabal is mentioned as “the father of all those who play the harp and flute” (Gen. 4:21). In Exodus we read that Miriam and other women played tambourines as they sang praises (Exod. 15:20, 21). David appointed people to be “singers with instruments of music, psalteries [stringed instruments], harps and cymbals” (1 Sam. 16:23; 1 Chron. 15:16). Near the end of David’s life, 4,000 priests and Levites “praised the LORD with musical instruments” (1 Chron. 23:5).

No one disputes that musical instruments were part of *Old* Testament worship. But some groups oppose the use of musical instruments in gatherings of *New* Testament Christians. I respectfully disagree. Paul wrote about “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our **gathering** together to Him,” that he would “descend from heaven with a shout...and with the TRUMPET of God,” “for the TRUMPET will sound, and the dead will be raised” (2 Thess. 2:1; 1 Thess. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:52).