

# STRAIGHTWAY

*And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him [Mark 1:18].*

## CHRISTIAN PURITIES FELLOWSHIP

The Witness Outreach of Foundations Bible College  
P.O. Box 1166 · Dunn, North Carolina 28335

VOLUME 25

MAY 1997

NUMBER 5

## **Rock and Roll Music & the Contemporary Gospel Sound (Part 4)**

Dr. O. Talmadge Spence

### **American Hymnology**

We should note with care in our present study the one hundred years which surrounded the Civil War (1820-1920). This period represents the birth of American hymnody out of the earlier revivals sparked by George Whitefield. However, the later years marked a decline in this hymnody because of the rise of Liberalism, Unitarianism, Universalism, and the "Social Gospel." Although hymns were sung in churches in America prior to the nineteenth century, American hymnology with respect to those hymns written by Americans did not come into fruition until the 1820s. Through both the first and second Great Awakenings, the hymns sung were largely those used by Whitefield, composed by Isaac Watts and the Wesley brothers.

American hymnology is extremely colorful. Throughout the entire nineteenth century, hymns poured forth from the pens of American hymn writers. The American hymn, however, stands unique and distinct from its forerunner, the English hymn. There was a distinct change in emphasis. Heretofore, hymnody had as its theme objective truth, either explicitly worded more directly from the Bible or theology and doctrine from the Holy Scriptures. The American hymn made a break-away from this and took its themes from the experience of

the Christian life. This expression of truth was practically applied and resulted from the experience of the individual Christian.

First came the *Revival Hymns*. This group was synonymous with the evangelical song of the great revivals in the American South and West in the period after 1800. These hymns began with the Revival of 1800 in Kentucky. The large numbers attending the camp meetings necessitated a new form of hymn. It must be one which was simple and could be easily and quickly learned by these large numbers of people. This hymn form was easy to learn since only two lines changed from stanza to stanza. Sometimes even these were sung by the song leader leading and the congregation only needing to join in on the chorus. It was the preaching that roused the hearers to this song form.

Rather than conveying the deep and sublime doctrines of the Holy Scriptures, *Revival Hymns* were concerned with the need of salvation and repentance. The labors and hardships of life were emphasized in contrast to the promised rest of heaven. But in those days, many of them addressed sound truth, and the subject matter was indeed the experiential truth of the Christian's life. But the music itself was something less than the former classical English hymns. It finally led, in its era, to the very popular Stamps-Baxter songs taught by shape-notes, especially used by the early pentecostalists. This became a half-way house to contemporary Christian music, having now been adopted in denominations and churches formerly rejecting pentecostalists.

There were several books of these hymns which were published throughout the early 1800s, such as the *Hartford Selection* (1799) and the *Village Hymns* (1824). These two works only contained the text of hymns without the tunes. By the 1820s books were published which contained both the text and the tunes. One of these was *The Christian Lyre*, compiled by Joshua Leavitt in 1831. Another was *Spiritual Songs for Social Worship*, edited by Thomas Hastings and Lowell Mason. This book contained a hymn which still appears in our present hymnals, "My Faith Looks Up to Thee," written by Ray Palmer.

Second, another type was called *Gospel Hymns*. This is also associated with the song form called *Gospel Songs*. These hymns were born out of revival meetings as well. These meetings, however, were different from the camp meetings in that they were held in urban areas. Albert Bailey calls the *Gospel Hymn* "a distinctively American phenomenon." This type of hymn dominated American hymnody throughout the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These were evangelical hymns and their themes

centered on leading lost souls into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. They also took on devotional themes dealing with the individual's relationship to Christ after being saved. These were the hymns of Dwight L. Moody and Ira Sankey. Moody had more of a keen appreciation of the possibilities of music for his evangelistic services rather than any ability, personally, with his own voice.

The Y.M.C.A. contributed to the spread of the *Gospel Hymn*. This organization began in 1844 in London and came to America in 1851.

Third, the *Soldier's Hymns* and their emphasis resulted from the Civil War through a hymnbook published for the army. These hymns contributed to the third period of revival in American history. It is said that 180,000 Union soldiers became Christians in the North and 210,000 Confederate soldiers became Christians in the South. Also, and companion to this song form, were *Soldier Songs*, which were more militant, spiritually, in both words and music. This song form is typically seen in "Onward, Christian Soldiers," "Stand Up for Jesus," etc.

During this same time *Gospel Songs* and *Gospel Hymns* (1874 & 1875, respectively) were popular titles. By 1894, *Gospel Hymns* had grown in size to six volumes. Thus, the idea of repeated refrain-choruses was in vogue, using the verse-refrain pattern of revival songs as well as refrain-choruses.

### The New Theology

The aftermath of the Civil War brought an end to the last great revival period and the beginning of the long downward trek of historic Christianity in America. Although the Civil War resulted in a unified nation, yet it produced a divided church. Every denomination, with the exceptions of the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches, suffered divisions between their Northern and Southern halves. These divisions weakened the power of the revivals and eventuated the demise of their fruits.

Beginning early, and slowly strengthening through the nineteenth century, Unitarianism infected the Northern churches and then slowly spread across the South. This is identified in history in three phases. The first (ending about 1835) was based upon a rejection of Calvinism. The second (beginning in 1835; ending in 1885) was the infiltration of French liberalism which taught the excellence of man as the measure of all things; thus rejecting the biblical teaching of human depravity. The third (beginning about 1885) was the fruition of Unitarianism in Liberal Theology. Thus humanism and the social gospel became the core-concepts of the new theology in America. Many new and different names would be added to the roster through the

new theology, such as Walter Rauschenbusch, Josiah Strong, Washington Gladden, and Charles M. Sheldon whose book *In His Steps or What Would Jesus Do?* drew large numbers of people to the social gospel. Even Pope Leo XIII did lend his support and that of the Roman Catholic Church to the cause of the economic reform and the humanitarian enterprise through his "Pastoral Letter" of 1920.

This New Theology grew up and did spread its apostasy throughout America. What has all this to do with American hymns? The following quotation should suffice in the answer.

As we study the hymns of the last seventy years (to 1950), we realize how completely they differ from the Evangelical hymns with their mystic approach, their zeal for individual conversion, their ideal of God's Kingdom as an Apocalypse or an eternal city in heaven; from the High Anglican hymns that looked back with nostalgia to the historic Church, its theology, its liturgy, and from the Unitarian Transcendental approach in which enthusiasm for the Kingdom took the form of vague wishful thinking. These modern hymn-writers have their eye on the object. They want the slums abolished, poverty and sickness banished, the will to grasp transformed into the will to serve, and all our faith and energy devoted to bringing into being a brotherhood on earth (Albert Bailey).

All of this, in the years afterward, would rush in the ecumenical movements which now, in the late twentieth century, are amassed through the World Council of Churches, the Charismatic churches and the return into fellowship with the Roman Catholic Church. It is amazing how the charismatics can possibly hope to salvage anything in historic Christianity by following Rome.

In the matter of the new theology and their new hymns, we have received many of their hymns without our own heart and its presupposition of historic Christianity, while they all along were motivated by another theological presupposition. These are hymns like, "O Master, Let Me Walk With Thee," by Washington Gladden; "Rise Up, O Men of God," by William P. Merrill; etc. In the latter hymn we mark the phrase, "Bring in the day of brotherhood and end the night of wrong" which is a thoroughgoing "new theology" of the social gospel. Jay Thomas Stocking wrote "A Master-workman of the Race," and he was a member of the executive committee of the Federal Council of Churches and served on the Commission on International Justice and Good Will. This places him directly with those who promoted the social, liberal gospel.

Jay Thomas Stocking concludes the period of the one-hundred years surrounding the Civil War (1820-1920). Although the American hymn was

born late, it grew up quickly into an apostasy. There was a mild contrast between the English hymns of the First and Second Great Awakenings; but the American hymns brought the end of revivals for true revival although men speak today of neo-evangelical and charismatic “awakenings” and “renewals.” The rise of liberalism brought about the social gospel but brought the end of the American hymn itself. By the 1950s the church would move on into a complete circle of the fast, full decibels of “Rock and Roll.” When you mix country, western, rhythm, blues, and the Stamps-Baxter sounds, man will come up with not only “Rock and Roll” of the secular kind, but “Contemporary Christian Music” of the heretofore reputed kind for the “gospel song” as well. The rhythm “rocks” the same. This is the time of gargling microphones and strangling guitars while worldly entertainment goes to church. This is apostasy, too. As the antiquated ballad needed a revival of the sonata to be classical; so, contemporary Christian music needs a revival through proper music from the composer to the performer, from the arranger to the accompanist, from the choir to the ensembles. More than anything, however, there is the need of the churches everywhere to have a spiritual revival for the use of music in the worship rather than the religious entertainment of the time.

We have now made a complete circle back to the beginning of this study of music as espoused in our twentieth century. The greater emphasis still joins Unitarianism and the “Social Gospel” to the prosperity theology of the Neo-Pentecostals and the Charismatics. The “Rock and Roll” music of our generation, along with its companions of drugs, the Hindu guru, and the occult of the New Age Movement, has plummeted us down into moral ruin in our beloved country of the United States. It has deeply infected the athletes of the sport’s world, the art of the music world, the politics of the governmental world, as well as the Christian churches through the world. It is our prayer that all Christians, everywhere in the world, will seek a return to historic Christianity through a return to the purity and sanctity of godly homes and biblical churches. Otherwise, only God knows the immediate agonies and ruins we will experience before the “catching away” of the saints to meet the Lord in the air if Jesus tarries. We still wonder how much tribulation saints will go through before the rapture of the saints who will not go through The Great Tribulation Period of the Book of Revelation.