

TO GOD
I GIVE
MY *Melody*
Reflections for Worship

SUSAN PALO CHERWIEN


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*To David
whose music and imagination
give the printed words life
give the printed notes song*

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PRELUDE

Singing together in community is a powerful, life-shaping activity. The deep breathing required massages our inner bodies and quiets the brain. The resonance causes us to vibrate together, forming a community out of diverse people. And when we are singing holy stories together, holy thoughts together, we are lifted into a different way of seeing and being.

Over my entire lifetime, I have been surrounded by the hymns of the church, and for the last almost 40 years, I have participated in hymn festivals, mostly in partnership with my spouse David Cherwien. When we first began, I would pull just about every book of theology, poetry, spirituality, and devotions off the shelves, and there I would sit with these piles of books around me, trying to find the exactly perfect reading to help lead us into the singing of the hymn to come. Noticing my frustration at not finding *The Perfect Reading*, David finally suggested that maybe I should try writing the reflections myself. This is the third volume of those reflections, so kindly made available to others by Mark Lawson at MorningStar Music Publishers.

Well-known hymns can become like paintings hung in the same place for a long time—we walk past them and don't notice them anymore. We name them, we know them, we know what they mean, and that's the end of our thought. And so what I try to do in these reflections, on behalf of all of us, is to look at these marvelous texts with new eyes, with beginner's mind, asking myself, "what have I not seen before?" Or, if I have been reading Hildegard von Bingen's visions, for example, "what seems different in this hymn in light of Hildegard?" So, I hope to offer a new door into the hymn, a somewhat different vista. It is my hope that I have sometimes succeeded.

There are no original thoughts in these pages—someone else's sermon, someone else's scientific treatise, the newspaper, the Bible, conversations, books, books, books, paintings, poetry, and the natural world all weave together in these reflections. I hope you will forgive me a few repeated favorite stories, a few repeated favorite quotes. I hope you will forgive me if you had the idea first, and I no longer remember where I heard it or saw it. We are all on this pilgrimage together, and I am grateful to all the thinkers and dreamers and riskers whose writing or speech or art over the centuries has shaped the words I have woven together here.

*"To God I give my melody
And thanks for all eternity."*

Martin Luther, "A Preface for All Good Hymnals," 1538

—Susan Palo Cherwien

TE DEUM LAUDAMUS
LET US PRAISE GOD

- I. Theology and Song
- II. The Word and Song
- III. Community and Song

I. Theology and Song

You Are God.

All our worship
begins and ends with God.

All our praise
begins and ends with God.

Our liturgy begins
“The grace of God...”

and our liturgy ends
“Thanks be to God!”

“You Are God”

is the beginning of all our thought

it is the beginning

of all our questions

it is the ultimate answer we seek.

The holy writings teach us
that God spoke the universe into being.

God said...

God sent out sound—
vibration—

And the now-universe responded
by vibrating

with the Voice of God.

Everything that exists

is in vibration

and all vibrating bodies

affect all other vibrating bodies

earth vibrates at roughly 8 cycles per second

the Sun sends out sound waves

from its erupting surface

black holes in other galaxies

sing out their unique keys—

B-flats and D-flats and A-flats—

II. The Word and Song

In the beginning
was the Word—
the creative power of God—
and the Word became flesh
and dwelt among us,
Worthy of all worship.

Singing from the thirteenth century
Adam Scotus describes the Word as
“instilling sweet sound
in the faithful”
by bringing together
the perfect fourth
of the four cardinal virtues
with the perfect fifth
of the five senses,
creating
“the sweet melody
of the perfect Octave.”
Christ,
the Perfect Octave,
balancing
Flesh and Spirit
Human and Divine
Sense and Virtue
Earth and Heaven
brought together in perfection
in the Word.
In the musical harmony

III. Community and Song

From the fourth century,
St. Augustine joins in the singing.
In an Easter sermon he writes:
“You have heard the words
Sing to the LORD a new song.
You want to know what is God’s glory?
God’s glory is the assembly of saints.
The glory of the one who is sung about
is nothing other than the one
who sings about it.
Become yourself the glory that you sing of.”

When we sing hymns to God together
when we sing praise together
when we worship God together
we are being formed
into a glorious body—
a glorious “We.”
From the twentieth century
composer Nadia Boulanger adds,
“The music of the church
makes one forget self.
It is ridiculous to use
the pronoun “I”
in Chartres Cathedral.”
For Hildegard von Bingen,
we become part of the
“cosmic symphony.”
The universe vibrates with the
voice of God
the perfect Octave of the Word,
the Christ,
beckons us into like harmony

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APPENDIX I

HYMN FESTIVAL STRUCTURE

A BASIC FORM FOR A FESTIVAL OF HYMNS

Opening Hymn

Invocation

Prayer

Possible Scripture Reading

Reading or Meditation

Hymn or Anthem or both

*(This sequence may be repeated for a central core of perhaps three to seven hymns or choral works or combinations of the two.)**

Closing Prayers

Closing Hymn

Benediction

OR

Benediction

Closing Hymn

There is much room for flexibility and creativity within this form: it can be simple or festive. Hymns may be varied as to instrumentation, and the stanzas may be assigned various segments of the congregation (children, choir, sopranos and altos, tenors and basses, left side, right side (generally as the mood of the text suggests. Unaccompanied stanzas and stanzas in harmony can well establish the congregated people as a unified voice, and truly form “a body for praise.”

*A hymn festival with opening and closing hymns, and a core of seven hymns or anthems with reflections will create a service of about one hour and twenty minutes.

APPENDIX II

THE HYMN FESTIVALS

In the hymn festival and choral festival outlines that follow, the hymns listed were those in the original design of the festival, but they can be taken, for the most part, as suggestions, unless the hymns are quoted in the reflections, as in *To God I Give My Melody*. Anyone who chooses to use these hymn festivals as a template can surely adapt and choose carefully from the great body of hymnody for a particular occasion or gathering. In cases where hymns were used that I have written and that are not in any major hymnal, the hymn name is followed by an asterisk and note of which volume of collected hymns it can be found in; at the time of this writing there are three volumes published by Augsburg Fortress.

Composer's last names follow anthems in parentheses. A full listing of choral publications begins on page 332.

Te Deum Laudamus: Let Us Praise God

- Opening Hymn: Holy God, We Praise Your Name
- Invocation
- Reading: Colossians 3:12-17
- Chant: *Te Deum* (sung by all)
- Reflection I: Theology and Song
 - Hymn: As newborn stars were stirred to song
 - Hymn: Oh, Sing to God Above
- Reflection II: The Word and Song
 - Hymn: Christ Jesus Lay In Death's Strong Bands
 - Hymn: I Want Jesus to Walk with Me
- Reflection III: Community and Song
 - Hymn: O Living Breath of God
 - Hymn: If You But Trust in God to Guide You
- Closing Prayer
 - Hymn: Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart

Worship in Song: Joy, Hope, Peace

- Prelude: *Salvation Is Created* (Chesnokov)
The Word Was God (Powell)
Witness (Hogan)
Have Ye Not Known?/Ye Shall Have A Song (Thompson)
- Reflection I: Joy
Hymn: *Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee*
Anthem: *Zikr and/or Ute Sundance* (Sperry)
- Prayer (Joy)
- Reflection II: Hope
Anthem: *I Lift Up My Eyes* (D. Cherwien)
- Prayer (Hope)
- Reflection III: Peace
Anthem: *There We Shall Rest* (Arnesen)
- Prayer (Peace)
Hymn: *Come By Here* (Brown)
- Closing Prayer
- Closing Benediction: *The Lord Bless You and Keep You* (Lutkin)

A Thousand Voices Sing Praise

- Kyrie: "The Spheres" from *Sunrise Mass* (Gjeilo)
- Opening Hymn: *All Creatures of Our God and King*
- Invocation
- Reflection I: *Even the Sun Has a Song*
Hymn: *Angels We Have Heard on High*
Anthem: *Lord Now Lettest Thou* (Rachmaninoff)
- Reflection II: *Songs of Our Ancestors*
Hymn: *God Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens*
- Reflection III: *Letting Go*
Anthem: *Psalm 2, Op. 78* (Mendelssohn)
- Reading: *2 Corinthians 5:6-10, 14-17*
Hymn: *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*
- Reading: *Mark 4:26-34*
Anthem: *Keep Your Hand on the Plow* (Jennings)
- Reflection IV: *Songs of Peace*
Anthem: *Agnus Dei: Phoenix* (Gjeilo)
Anthem: *Dona nobis pacem* (Bach)
- Prayers
- Hymn: *To You Before the Close of Day*
- Benediction

APPENDIX III

CHORAL PUBLICATIONS

- “Agnus Dei” from *Requiem* (John Rutter)
Oxford University Press (9780193380707)
- “Benedictus” from *Messe pour double chœur a capella* (Frank Martin)
Bärenreiter Verlag (BA 7594)
- “Gloria” from *Missa Criolla* (Ariel Ramirez)
Alfred Publishing (LG51596)
- “Kyrie” from *Missa Papae Marcelli* (G. P. Palestrina)
Kalmus Classic Editions (K06365)
- “The Spheres” from *Sunrise Mass* (Ola Gjeilo)
Walton Music (WW1464)
- “Water” from *From Light to Light* (J. Aaron McDermid)
MorningStar Music (MSM-70-030)
- A Lenten Love Song* (Helen Kemp)
Choristers Guild (CGA486)
- A Time to Sing Praise* (Robert Leaf)
Choristers Guild (CGA615)
- Agnus Dei: Phoenix* (Ola Gjeilo)
Walton Music (WW1446)
- All Shall Be Well* (Libby Larsen)
E. C. Schirmer (4261)
- Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt* (Heinrich Schütz)
Several publishers
- Angels’ Carol* (John Rutter)
Oxford University Press (9780193431263)
- Benediction (The Lord Bless You and Keep You)* (Peter C. Lutkin)
Alfred (00-GCMR02479)
- Betelehemu* (Babtunde Olatunji and Wendell Whalum, arr. Barrington Brooks)
Lawson-Gould (LG52647)
- Christ Alone* (William Beckstrand)
MorningStar Music (MSM-50-6107)
- Create in Me a Clean Heart* (J. G. Winer/adapt. Regina Fryxell)
Service Book and Hymnal, Setting 2, Offertory III
- Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf* (J. S. Bach)
Several publishers