In this paper I would like to pay tribute to one of the distinguished members of the Canadian Society of Church History, Dr. John Webster Grant. Many will be well acquainted with his work in the field of church history and as editor of Ryerson Press. Fewer may be aware of his significant contribution to Canadian religious experience through his role in the making of the joint Anglican and United Church *Hymn Book* of 1971. His interest in hymnody is the focus of this paper.

In July 1986 Grant spoke to members of the Hymn Society of America (now The Hymn Society in the United States and Canada), who had gathered at the University of Toronto for the society’s annual conference. The title of his keynote address was “The Hymn as Theological Statement.” He spoke about the need for “a proper blend of the timely and the time-tried” in worship; and he analysed developments in contemporary hymnody that were modernizing the practice of worship in Canada.

The joint Anglican and United Church *Hymn Book* (1971) was one of several hymn books that tested newly-written hymns, religious songs and service music during the 1970s. Others included the first edition of the *Catholic Book of Worship* (1972), the Presbyterian *Book of Praise* (1972), and the Baptist *Hymnal* (1973). Canadian hymn books were among the first to contain the new materials. This paper will examine how a religious tradition—in this case congregational hymnody—develops for contemporary use. It is a periodic process. A number of questions may be asked about the process: for example, what role do sacred texts and tunes play in shaping and
reflecting religious identity? What is the function of a hymn book in religious experience? How did Canadian hymn book committees manage to weave together the “timely and the time-tried” in their respective hymn books? En route the paper will highlight Canadian hymns.

Shaping and Reflecting Religious Identity

Herbert O’Driscoll, Dean of Christ Church Cathedral in Vancouver during the late 1960s, wrote a hymn that captured the era of The Hymn Book (1971). “From the Slave Pens of the Delta” is about the Exodus theology of that period. Its fourth verse sets the theology of the hymn in the context of its time:

In the maelstrom of the nations,
in the journeying into space,
in the clash of generations,
in the hungering for grace,
in man’s agony and glory,
we are called to newer ways
by the Lord of our tomorrows
and the God of earth’s todays.³

The attention paid during the 1960s to the present moment, the “now,” is evident; space travel, and generational conflict between “baby-boomers” and their parents are also elements of this hymn. O’Driscoll’s reference to the “maelstrom of the nations” is apt, given that he wrote the hymn after the Seven Days War, the outbreak of the “Irish troubles,” and other intermittent conflicts requiring the deployment of United Nations’ peace-keeping forces.

At this time a proliferation of hymn-writing was occurring globally. New hymns and religious songs were being sung by congregations days after they were written; within six months to a year some were circulating from the United Kingdom as far as Australia and New Zealand, appearing also in various centres across North America. The 20th Century Church Light Music Group (a group of British Anglican musicians and clergy formed about 1957 by Geoffrey Beaumont and Patrick Appleford) launched the new movement with their experimental music settings of well-known hymn texts, using the musical idioms of contemporary dance rhythms and music-hall songs. The experiments had begun with Beaumont’s composition of A Twentieth-
Century Folk Mass, where he set the Church of England’s communion service to the beguine and other forms of popular music. The Folk Mass was Beaumont’s contribution to new liturgy commissioned by the church in the mid-1950s. The group published its first collection of hymn tunes in 1960. At a summer music workshop held at the Prairie Christian Training Centre at Fort Qu’Appelle, Saskatchewan in 1962, John and Catherine Ambrose (later the managing editor and a music consultant respectively for the hymn book Voices United) were teaching songs and service music by the 20th Century Church Light Music Group. During the mid-1960s, working in Saskatchewan and in Winnipeg, they continued to teach these and other collections of contemporary British hymns and religious songs, including ones by the Notting Hill Group and songs by a folk singer who was beginning to make a name for himself by singing religious songs in the pubs and coffee houses of London and Newcastle – Sydney Carter. Carter is perhaps best known as the author and arranger of “I danced in the morning when the world was begun.”

Hymn-writing initiatives took root in various locations. Daniel T. Niles produced The East Asian Christian Conference Hymnal, edited in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and published in Japan in 1963. It was a collection of two hundred hymns, half of which consisted of translations of western Christian hymns. Niles also gathered or wrote translations of Asian hymns. Where a text could not be translated directly, he included new texts written on the themes of hymns set to Chinese, Thai, Japanese, and other Asian hymn tunes. The collection was intended for use at ecumenical services organized by the East Asian Christian Conference. It soon became a source of global hymnody for western English-language hymnals. In 1966 a small paperback collection entitled Songs of Faith was published by the Joint Board of Christian Education for Australia and New Zealand. It included five songs by Sydney Carter, hymns by the 20th Century Church Light Music Group and by the Notting Hill group, texts by a Congregational hymn-writer working independently with his congregation at Plymouth, England – Fred Kaan, black spirituals from the United States, and new Roman Catholic hymns by James McAuley, Australian poet and translator for the Jerusalem Bible. Meanwhile Lutheran churches in the mid-western United States were preparing paperback collections of folk songs and religious songs set out in formats appealing to their growing youth membership. Hymns for Now: A Portfolio for Good, Bad or Rotten Times was an issue of the Workers’ Quarterly published in Chicago in July 1967, a long, narrow paperback
Two years later the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship (formed in 1966) issued the first volume of a series of trial hymn and service books which would become known as the *Contemporary Worship* series. *Worship Supplement* contained newly-written hymn texts and tunes, older hymns which had not been included previously in Lutheran hymn books, translations, and new service materials. Several influential British hymnal supplements were also published during 1969. They included two volumes of hymns, songs, and service music published by the Scottish Church Music Consultations at Dunblane; a Methodist collection entitled *Hymns & Songs; 100 Hymns for Today* by the Church of England; and *New Hymns for All Seasons* by the Scottish Jesuit hymn-writer James Quinn.

**What Prompted This Outburst of New Hymn Writing?**

It was made essential by the rewriting of church liturgies into modern structures and language, by the numerous translations of the Bible (Revised Standard Version, New English Bible, and The Jerusalem Bible, among others), and by the ecumenical movement, which sponsored the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948, opening up another field of hymn writing. After 1960 the language of hymn texts was starting to sound antiquated in contrast to that of the new translations of the Bible and the liturgical texts. John Webster Grant had worked on the development of new liturgies before turning his attention to rewriting certain Psalms and translating ancient Latin hymns into contemporary English. In his address to the Hymn Society he commented: “It is scarcely open to question that hymns have reflected and affected the beliefs of those using them.” He explained that “people choose to sing what is on their minds. To note what people choose to sing, indeed, is to learn a good deal about what they believe.” The editor of the *Bulletin of the Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland* and leader of the development of British hymnody, Erik Routley, put this idea another way. He argued that people choose to adopt certain hymns as their own. Writing in 1964, Routley observed: “But because it is poetry, and more because it is a skilfully constructed congregational hymn, a person may sing it and say, ‘This is my view. I have always thought this.’”

Grant noted that the momentum of the liturgical movement had prompted hymn-writers to try their hand at creating hymn texts to complement the liturgies. Moreover, liturgical change (particularly for the
sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist) had created gaps in congregational hymnody which needed to be filled. The primary change was to transfer the perspective of the liturgy from that of the priest or minister to that of the congregation: liturgies being written at the time of Vatican II were designed to enhance the participation of the “people of God” in the practice of worship. Hymns became more closely integrated into the service: they no longer served primarily to prepare for the sermon and respond to it, or to complement the choir’s role in the service, or to provide music at moments of transition in the service. Instead, careful thought was given to the place and purpose of each hymn in the order of service, enabling members of the congregation to participate directly in worship, in response to the Old Testament, the Psalms, the Gospels, and the Epistles (some of which could be sung rather than read), to express contrition, to give thanks, and to participate in the service of the Eucharist. The role of hymns in congregational worship had been the subject of the Scottish Church Music Consultations held at the ecumenical centre at Dunblane between 1962 and 1968. Discussions and experiments in new hymn-writing conducted at Dunblane influenced the work of hymnal and liturgy committees well beyond the United Kingdom. The new liturgies and hymns included lay members of the congregation with clergy, organists, and choirs as active participants in worship.

Two Phases of Hymn Development

1) Modernizing Language and Liturgy

In Canada, the first phase of new hymn writing emerged in response to the work of four committees formed in the mid- to late-1960s to prepare new hymn books for the Anglican and United Churches, for the Presbyterian Church, the Baptist Church, and the Roman Catholic Church. Negotiations were underway towards union between the Anglican and United Churches: in 1962 the United Church committee on worship invited the Anglican Church to form a joint committee to prepare an ecumenical hymnal. Similar invitations were extended to the Presbyterian and Baptist Churches in Canada; both declined, choosing to compile their own denominational hymn books. The Catholic Book of Worship was the first Canadian Roman Catholic hymnal published in English after Vatican II.
The Joint Committee for the Anglican and United Churches began its work in 1965. John Webster Grant reconfigured the order of the hymns for _The Hymn Book_ (1971). He moved away from the standard format of the first half of the twentieth century, where hymns were set out in the sequence of a theological treatise, as occurred in the United Church _Hymnary_ (1930), which opened with hymns about the three persons of God. Instead, Grant created a new liturgical order of hymns, paralleling the new orders of service, beginning with hymns about approaching God in worship, and then hearing the Word of God, and on to the people’s response to God. Subsequent sections included hymns for the sacraments and other acts of worship (marriages, burials, ordinations and inductions, church dedications and anniversaries), hymns about times of worship (morning, evening, the Lord’s day, and the seasons of the year), and hymns for each stage of the Christian year, concluding with a comprehensive liturgical appendix (settings of the communion service for the Anglican and United Church rituals, psalms, canticles and other scriptural songs). The structure of this hymnbook attracted the attention of other hymnal committees.

Grant contributed several hymn texts to _The Hymn Book_ (1971). He is the author of a paraphrase in contemporary English of Psalm 122, a psalm about the City of God: “With joy we go up to the house of the Lord, / and enter his gates with a song,” (#17), and of several translations of Latin hymn texts: “O Holy Spirit, by whose breath,” a ninth-century hymn, Veni Creator (#246); “Holy Spirit, Font of Light,” a thirteenth-century hymn (#248); “The Flaming Banners of our King,” a a sixth-century hymn by Fortunatus (#445); and “King of the Martyrs’ Noble Band,” also from the sixth century (#500). In his _Panorama of Christian Hymnody_, Erik Routley recommended Grant’s translations of the medieval Latin texts to hymnal editors. His translation of Veni Creator has entered several hymn books:

O Holy Spirit, by whose breath
life rises vibrant out of death:
come to create, renew, inspire;
come, kindle in our hearts your fire.

You are the seeker’s sure resource,
of burning love the living source,
protector in the midst of strife,
the giver and the Lord of life.
In you God’s energy is shown,
to us your varied gifts made known.
Teach us to speak; teach us to hear:
yours is the tongue and yours the ear.

Flood our dull senses with your light:
in mutual love our hearts unite.
Your power the whole creation fills;
confirm our weak, uncertain wills.

From inner strife grant us release;
turn nations to the ways of peace.
To fuller life your people bring
that as one body we may sing:

praise to the Father, Christ his Word,
and to the Spirit: God the Lord.¹⁹

The plainsong melody to which this hymn is set was arranged by Healey Willan.

Speaking to delegates at the Hymn Society conference in 1986, many of whom were participating in the development of new hymn books, Grant commented on the changes in hymn writing which had taken place alongside the rewriting of liturgies during the preceding quarter century:

Other new impulses emerged out of the ferment that convulsed the churches in the 1960s. In the wake of Roman Catholic aggiornamento there was an explosion of lyrics and tunes designed to communicate in contemporary idioms. There was a sudden revulsion against all set orders of service, which were structures and therefore inhibiting and not to be tolerated. Above all, the suffocating rigidity and introspective melancholy of traditional worship were to give way to spontaneity and joy. For these related developments the key watchword . . . was “celebration.”²⁰

The idea of “celebration” was evident in the new services for the Eucharist where the focus of worship had moved from the suffering and death of Christ to the joy of the Resurrection. In The Hymn Book (1971) an expanded section of hymns for Communion (twenty-six hymns) included new ones such as
Brian Wren’s “I Come with Joy to Meet My Lord” (#328), a text that started with the individual’s search for God, moving in verse two to the gathering of the people of God to share the Eucharist meal, in the process forming a new community—“And thus with joy we meet our Lord.” It is an unusual hymn in its poetic representation of the experience of the Eucharist drawing people together into a worshipping community.\(^\text{21}\) This spirit of celebration is the central element of an immensely popular song for the Eucharist written by James Thiem: “Sons of God, Hear His Holy Word!” (#336) was published by Friends of the English Liturgy, an American Roman Catholic organization, in their *Hymnal for Young Christians*. It literally bounced with the energy of the youth audience for whom it was written:

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Brothers, sisters, we are one,
and our life has just begun;
in the Spirit we are young,
we can live for ever.\(^\text{22}\)
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It concluded with a refrain of “Alleluias” — not standard fare in communion hymns prior to this. Thiem’s song of celebration was used extensively for about ten years. It then dropped out of favour, replaced by newer songs written in inclusive language which reflected the experience of a subsequent generation of youth.

Grant also noted the absence of the person of the suffering servant and of the concept of sin in hymns of the 1960s, such as Thiem’s “Sons of God”: “Joy was in, gloom was out; there was little room for the tragic element and therefore for the suffering servant, for the passion and the cross.” He added: “Even in our hymnal committee, words reflecting the darker side of experience, admittedly often heavily introspective, had a hard time gaining acceptance.”\(^\text{23}\) What did enter the hymn books of the 1970s were religious songs about freedom, such as the spiritual “When Israel was in Egypt’s Land” (#143), and about civil rights, for example, Fred Kaan’s “Sing We a Song of High Revolt” (#177). Popular religious songs about social causes overtook older hymn texts about the theology of sin and salvation: “Sin came into the picture all right, but normally as *their* sins rather than *ours*.”\(^\text{24}\) Grant was not alone in this observation. In the United Kingdom Gordon Wakefield, a Methodist leader, was keenly aware of the loss of genuine pietism, personal faith and salvation. Speaking to the Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland in 1968, at a festival of hymns written since the end of World War
One, he described that loss as “the great casualty of the last fifty years.” Wakefield explained that, “We think of ‘sin’ more in terms of the frustration of the [human] race and the iniquities of the system than as personal transgression.”

The loss would become evident in popular charismatic hymns and songs of the 1970s and 1980s where texts focussed almost exclusively on themes of praise, prayer and thanksgiving (the celebration thesis). One exception was a new text for the hymn tune Jerusalem written by R.B.Y. Scott, a Canadian teaching Old and New Testament studies at Princeton. His “O World of God” concluded:

O world of time’s far-stretching years!
There was a day when time stood still,
a central moment when there rose,
a cross upon a cruel hill;
in pain and death love’s power was seen
the mystery of time revealed,
the wisdom of the ways of God,
the grace through which man’s hurt is healed.

2) Texts for the 1980s and Beyond

The first phase of hymn-writing developed rapidly between 1965 and 1975. It was a period during which ideas were being absorbed and forwarded, as improved means of communication expanded the dissemination of texts and tunes. The distribution of newly-written hymns and religious songs among hymnal supplements and hymnals published around the world during this period makes the point. The Canadian hymn books, for example, brought the work of British writer Fred Kaan to the attention of the international community (especially through The Hymn Book). His hymn, “For the Healing of the Nationsn” had been written for his congregation at Pilgrim Congregational Church in Plymouth to commemorate United Nations Day on 10 December 1965. In the first verse Kaan (joined by the people who choose to sing his hymn text) is praying for “a just and equal sharing of the things that earth affords.” The hymn makes a stronger statement on behalf of universal human rights in its third verse:

All that kills abundant living,
let it from the earth be banned:
pride of status, race or schooling,
dogmas keeping man from man.
In our common quest for justice
may we hallow life’s brief span.28

The new hymns were interleaved with older hymn texts throughout the four Canadian hymn books. Texts written in traditional and modern hymn language were used together in a service when the new hymns were being introduced. By the 1980s the issue of inclusive language was being debated vigorously by Canadian congregations, making the older hymns in the “new” hymnbooks seem dated. One solution to the problem was to turn once again to paperback supplements that served as bridges during the second phase of the renewal of hymnody. One of the first, and better-known, supplements was Songs for a Gospel People, edited by Gerald Hobbs and Darryl Nixon for the British Columbia and the Alberta and Northwest Conferences of the United Church of Canada.29 The experience of the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver in 1983 prompted this book. Gerald Hobbs described the situation which gave birth to a hymnal supplement only fifteen years after the publication of The Hymn Book (1971):

Today’s hymnody bears the mark of today’s church. It is ecumenical, drawing from all members of the family of God throughout the world. It is pluralist, recognizing that in the church we are a mixed community, and that our words and musical styles need to reflect that diversity. It is biblical and rooted in the Church’s story, because being faithful in the great issues of justice and peace in our world means drawing nourishment from our past. It is inclusive, imaging and nurturing the wholeness of the body of Christ.30

Songs for a Gospel People contained an assortment of new hymns and songs along with older hymns which had not been included in The Hymn Book. The editorial team’s call for new Canadian hymns to be considered for the supplement elicited an inundation of three thousand texts and tunes. Twelve were included in the collection. Among the new hymns were “Tho’ Ancient Walls May Still Stand Proud” (Walls that Divide, #32), and “Give to Us Laughter” (#107) by the hymn-writing team of author Walter Farquharson and composer Ron Klusmeier. Others included Sylvia Dunstan’s “You, Lord, are Both Lamb and Shepherd” (Christus Paradox, #64), and her translation of the ancient Greek hymn Phos hilaron:
O laughing Light, O first-born of creation,
radiance of glory, light from light begotten,
God self-revealing, holy, bright and blessed:
you shine upon us.31

1990s - The Importance of the Biblical Story

John Webster Grant spoke to the Hymn Society in Toronto shortly before the supplement was published: in his address he noted the shift in emphasis from “celebration” in the 1960s to the search for “stories” to tell about oneself or about the people of a community. He drew attention to the urgent need to re-educate people about the stories of the Bible. Roman Catholic hymn-writers told these stories in hymns written in vernacular language to be sung with their new liturgies. Other hymn-writers were also retelling the religious stories from their traditions in hymn form. Hymn books published in the 1990s incorporated this story-telling aspect of hymns. Grant anticipated, in 1986, that these stories would “restore to our hymnody the gamut of experience.”32 He hoped that, by retelling biblical stories about the work of the Holy Spirit, the story of salvation would also come forward once again: “Out of fashion for some years now, it seems to me the necessary complement to our rediscovery of our own stories.”33

Four Canadian hymn books published in the 1990s are the products of the two phases of hymnal development in Canada. They contain stories from the Bible told in numerous ways, and stories about the work of the Holy Spirit; these stories, along with a resurgence of interest in the Psalms, have caught the attention of hymn-writers. Proof of that interest may be found in the comprehensive indexes, listed by topic and by biblical reference, at the back of each of the new hymn books. The Canadian Catholic Book of Worship (1994), Voices United (1996), The Book of Praise (1997), and Common Praise (1998) were prepared and published during the decade following John Webster Grant’s address.34 They mark the end of a thirty-year cycle of hymn development. Scanning their pages it is evident that the hymnal committees adhered closely to Grant’s view that: “what makes a hymnody theologically good . . . is that it constitutes a proper blend of the timely and the time-tried, a treasury from which . . . a leader of worship can draw what a congregation needs for a balanced diet of worship.”35
Endnotes


3. *The Hymn Book* (1971), #170, v. 4. The hymn verses are quoted as they appeared in *The Hymn Book* (1971), and in *Songs for a Gospel People* (1987). Most have since been revised to take into account developments in religious language during the past three decades.


Grant, “The Hymn as Theological Statement,” 7.


Grant, “The Hymn as Theological Statement,” 8. He referred to the influence of Gregory Dix, and of the Scottish group (see note 15 below).


Grant, “The Hymn as Theological Statement,” 7-8.


Grant, “The Hymn as Theological Statement,” 8.

Brian Wren revised this hymn text in 1993: the new version, “I come with joy, a child of God,” may be found in *Voices United* (1996) at #477.


Donald Hustad, *Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal*, 2nd ed. (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing Company, 1993), 273-74, 279-97; and Donald Hustad, “The Historical Roots of Music in the Pentecostal and Neo-

27. The Hymn Book (1971), #89, v. 3.


