

# LESSON 7

## MUSIC IN THE NEW TESTAMENT WORLD

### Introduction

"A picture speaks louder than a thousand words." The truth of this old saying is indisputable. Regrettably we do not have any photographs of the early Christian Church, but we do have many word pictures or portraits which capture key moments in this unfolding drama. Our special interest in this lesson is in the word pictures that are set to music. Like the carefully executed work of a portrait artist who uses oil paint or water colours to express inner feelings, music is another art form which can greatly enhance the meaning of a thousand words. Having already discovered the many words of the Old Testament that are set to music during the development of Hebrew worship practices, our journey will continue as we search the emerging New Testament world for similar developments.

Very little has been written about the use of music in the formative years of the Christian Church. One may safely assume that Jewish psalmody becomes the inheritance of the early Christians.

The first part of our journey will expose us to the "Nativity Canticles" of Luke 1 and 2 which are probably the first joyous expressions of Christian praise. These songs, which are of a didactic nature, are gradually refined in oral tradition before reaching their final form as recorded by Luke. These canticles are widely used because of their biblical content.

Our journey will continue by searching for the implicit and explicit use of music during the public ministry of Jesus. Since Jesus was faithful in attending the Temple and the synagogues, the music which He sang undoubtedly is that which is familiar to these institutions. Music is also used more explicitly on other occasions in connection with Jesus' life near the end of His public ministry.

The pace will pick up considerably as we find more evidence of musical forms in the worship life of the early Christian Church. Our primary sources will be the Book of Acts and the Pauline Epistles.

The Book of Acts has little to say about the manner in which music is used in the churches. Because of the experience of Paul and Silas singing hymns at midnight in a Philippian jail, it is doubtful that even persecution is sufficient cause to prevent the early Christians from expressing

The special interest of this lesson is in the word pictures that are set to \_\_\_\_\_.

*(music)*

One may safely assume that Jewish \_\_\_\_\_ became the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Christians.

*(psalmody, inheritance)*

The music Jesus probably sang was music used in \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ services.

*(Temple, synagogue)*

their faith through song. Certainly Paul encourages Christians to sing and gives instructions as to their manner of performance. There are also lyrical passages in Paul's writings that indicate possible singing of these texts.

The New Testament portion of our journey will conclude with a brief look into the future. The apostle John, while in exile on Patmos, exudes praise that lends well to musical expression.

In a narrow sense the New Testament was written during the last half of the first century, but the dynamics that were unleashed into the New Testament world in a broader sense still affect us today. The impact of the New Testament upon the formative years of the Christian Church through the Middle Ages will provide a fitting climax to this part of our trip. Now that you are aware of our destination let's move through these early stages of church music together.

### The Nativity Canticles

These primitive expressions of praise may have been developed as didactic hymns related to Christ's birth. Nothing is known about the preservation of their original form until Luke records them in his Gospel, some seventy to eighty years after the birth of Christ. They are possibly preserved by Jewish Christians in Palestine, by Mary, herself, or by those who had known her well. It is highly possible that these canticles underwent alterations from the time of their origin until they were recorded by Luke.

The "Nativity Canticles"<sup>1</sup> are fresh expressions of praise that grow out of the Christians' own experience. They are very much like the psalms in both form and content. Canticles are identified by their Latin "first words" (*incipits*). The English words which translate these Latin titles will be underscored in the following listing of these canticles:

#### **Magnificat**

The Canticle of Mary precedes the birth of Jesus and comes from the joyous heart of an expectant woman who shares her feeling of exaltation with Elizabeth, her faithful companion who is about to give birth to John the Baptist. Mary said:

My soul *exalts* the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior . . ." (Luke 1:46-55, Italics mine).

<sup>1</sup> A canticle is a song found in the Scripture that is not one of the psalms.

The N\_\_\_\_\_ C\_\_\_\_\_ may have been developed as \_\_\_\_\_ hymns related to \_\_\_\_\_ birth.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

The Nativity Canticles are fresh expressions of \_\_\_\_\_ that grow out of the Christian's \_\_\_\_\_ experience.

(praise, own)

The Canticle of Mary is also known as the \_\_\_\_\_.

(Magnificat)

**Benedictus**

The Canticle of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, is an expression of praise following the birth of John. Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:

*Blessed* be the Lord God of Israel. . . (Luke 1:67-79, Italics mine).

**Gloria in Excelsis Deo**

The Canticle of the Angels follows the birth of Jesus and is given to the shepherds while they are taking care of their flocks at night in the vicinity of Bethlehem:

And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased*" (Luke 2:13,14, Italics mine).

**Nunc Dimittis**

The Canticle of Simeon is given in the Temple to the child Jesus when His parents brought Him there for a blessing according to Jewish custom. Simeon took the child up in his arms and blessed God and said:

Now Lord, Thou dost *let* Thy bond-servant *depart* in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation . . . (Luke 2:28-32, Italics mine).

According to Donald Hustad, "The Song of Mary," "The Song of Zachariah," "The Song of the Angels," and "The Song of Simeon" have been used more in historic Christian worship than any other biblical passages, outside of the Psalms.<sup>2</sup> The main theme of these canticles is one of exuberant joy occasioned by the fulfilment of ancient prophecy in the miraculous coming of Jesus Christ.

The excitement expressed by Mary, Zacharias, the angels and Simeon in these early Christian songs has provided us with four word pictures of great beauty, especially if you take the time to read the full text of each. This kind of exquisite refinement which reached its final form in Luke 1 and 2 is not matched in the public ministry of Jesus. We will have to settle for very scanty references at this point as we come back to earth.

<sup>2</sup> Donald P. Hustad, *Jubilate!: Church Music in the Evangelical Tradition*, (Carol Stream: Hope Publishing Company, 1981), p. 88.

The birth of John the Baptist was the occasion for the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.  
*(Canticle, Zacharias)*

The Canticle of the Angels was sung to the \_\_\_\_\_.  
*(shepherds)*

The Temple is the setting for the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.  
*(Canticle, Simeon)*

State the main theme of the Nativity Canticles.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
*(Compare your answer with the text.)*

## Music in Jesus' Public Ministry

According to William Hooper, emphasis on the Temple pattern of worship is not characteristic of the New Testament as a whole:

To understand Jesus' conception of worship, it is necessary to understand his mission. His sacrifice was to replace the sacrifices of the Temple (Mt. 26:1-2). The worship of God was personal and spiritual, not organized into elaborate buildings and ritual (Jn. 4:21-24). Jesus' gospel was consistent with the type of worship found in the synagogue, and he identified himself more clearly with the synagogue than with the Temple.<sup>3</sup>

Worship services in Free Church tradition today follow approximately the basic patterns used in the synagogue; however, one outstanding difference would be the development of music in worship.

The music that Jesus knew as a man is mainly the Jewish music of the Temple and the synagogue. Gospel writers leave little or no doubt concerning Jesus' faithfulness in attendance and participation in the synagogue. Nothing is said in the Scriptures concerning His participation in congregational singing or the employment of musical instruments in the services. Although there is silence about this, it does not mean that Jesus is pleased or displeased with the use of music in either the Temple or the synagogue.

Music is mentioned three times during the public ministry of Jesus, two of which occur during the last days of His earthly life.

1. There is one brief mention of flute (*aulos*, actually a reed instrument) players in connection with the raising of Jairus' daughter (Matt. 9:23).

The reference to musicians who had arrived for the funeral indicates that music was an integral part of the most somber of all worship experiences. It is quite possible that they had ample reason to "change their tune" and share in the joy that accompanied the resurrection of Jairus' daughter.

2. The second reference is during the "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem when the people, as a whole, sing to Jesus (Mark 11:8-10).

This ceremonial occasion takes place at the beginning of the last week prior to Jesus' death. As He enters Jerusalem riding on a donkey, the people sing and proclaim Him King.

<sup>3</sup> William Loyd Hooper, *Church Music in Transition* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1963), p. 18.

Churches in the Free Church tradition follow worship patterns similar to those used in the \_\_\_\_\_.

(synagogue)

The music that Jesus knew is mainly the \_\_\_\_\_ music of the \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_.

(Jewish, Temple, synagogue)

Music is mentioned \_\_\_\_\_ times during the public ministry of Jesus.

(three)

What reference does Matthew 9:23 make about music?

(Compare your answer with the text.)

What does Mark 11:8-10 tell us about the use of music during Jesus life?

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest! (Mark 11:9,10).

Jesus accepts the people's joyous proclamation because He is fulfilling the Scripture as expounded by the rabbis of that day: "Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble and mounted on a donkey . . ." (Zech. 9:9). Jesus was offering Himself to the nation as the promised Deliverer.

3. The third recorded instance in which music was employed in Jesus' public ministry was in *the upper room during the time of the passover*.

Jesus had observed the Last supper with His disciples. He concludes this intimate occasion by singing a hymn with His followers. They probably sang from the section of the Book of Psalms known as the "Hallel" (Pss. 113-118). These are the only times that music is mentioned explicitly in connection with the public ministry of Jesus. Yet there is every reason to believe that the familiarity of Jesus with the worship patterns of the Temple and synagogue is quite similar to the training of His earliest followers who may have been inspired to give musical expression to their feelings in ways that are not recorded in the Gospel accounts which are by nature very selective.

### **Music in the Early Church**

There is considerably more raw material to observe as we continue our journey through the earliest Christian communities as they develop during the New Testament period. Three sources will be of primary importance: the Book of Acts, the Pauline Epistles, and the Revelation of John.

#### **Book of Acts**

There are *two references in the Book of Acts* which deserve special mention. Although the Book of Acts makes little mention of music, enough is said to make it clear that singing holds a meaningful place in the worship of the early Christian Church. Since believers of this time have no written statements of the Christian faith and doctrine, the text of their songs and hymns may have been an important means of preserving Jesus' teachings. Certainly music in some form must have been an aid in keeping spirits high during times of persecution, even though their singing might have been highly restrained during times of danger.

*Thanksgiving.*-The early disciples of Jesus pray (and presumably sing) an expression of thanksgiving upon the release of Peter and John from prison (Acts 4:24-30).

Music is employed in the \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(upper, room)

Is the following statement true or false?

It is possible the believers sang the prayer of thanksgiving

According to Edmund Keith, this passage is the "only hymn recorded in the book of Acts."<sup>4</sup> It may be conjecture to consider this prayer a hymn, but it cannot be denied that it sounds like a choral outburst of praise, somewhat similar to the doxologies sung of victory and rejoicing.

And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is Thou who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our Father David Thy servant, didst say,

'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples devise futile things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ.'

"For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy Servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur. And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Thy bond-servants may speak Thy word with all confidence, while Thou dost extend Thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Thy holy Servant Jesus" (Acts 4:24-30).

This prayer-hymn quotes from Psalm 2 and is sung by the disciples upon the return of Peter and John following their appearance before the Jewish Council. Can it be that the first persecution of the Church resulted in the composition of its first hymn?

*Hymns at midnight.*-Paul and Silas surprise us by "praying and singing hymns of praise to God" (Acts 16:25, Italics mine) at midnight in prison so that the other prisoners could hear them; that is, with considerable volume and gusto.

Chained in a dungeon, these two faithful disciples lift up their songs in the night as they pray and sing praises unto God. Acts does not inform its readers as to what or how Paul and Silas sang. One can only surmise that the hymns they sang were psalms, or they might have improvised types of hymns or songs in order that the listening prisoners might hear their testimony.

<sup>4</sup> Edmund D. Keith, *Christian Hymnody* (Nashville:Con-vention Press, 1956), p. 12.

for Peter and John's release from prison given in Acts 4:24-

30.

(true)

Paul and Silas sang \_\_\_\_\_ at

(hymns, midnight)

## Pauline Epistles

Paul's Epistles contain specific admonitions concerning the use of music in the early Church. In the latter part of the first century, music in Christian worship tends to blend in with both Hebrew and Greek cultures. Christians had abandoned the professionalism of the Temple and the synagogue regarding the use of music. Russel Squire affirms: "Those who sang or spoke at public occasions were often met with immediate responsive song from the assembled group."<sup>5</sup> These early Christians were obviously fervent in singing: "Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises" (James 5:13).

The way in which Paul contributes to our understanding of music in the early church will be developed on the basis of two primary passages and a group of secondary references.

*Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16.*- These verses take us to the heart of Paul's admonitions concerning the use of music in the early Church.

Paul's exhortations concerning music which are found in Ephesians and Colossians are written to believers who were under the influence of Greek thinking. It is necessary to understand something of the prevailing cultures to grasp the meaning of these passages. As with James 5:13, one must recognize its Hebrew roots. "Let those who are merry sing psalms" is an expression aptly fitting to the Hebrews, for to them the Psalms are an essential part of their literature. Thus Paul's reference to "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19) indicates his awareness of the cultural mix of the folk nature of Hebrew music with the artistic basis of that of the Greeks.

Ephesians 5:19 is addressed to Greek-influenced Gentiles who have become Christians. Here Paul states the norm of conduct for these singing Christians as contrasted with pagan behaviour during their drunken orgies. Christians act differently because they are filled with the Spirit of God and not with wine. They express themselves as a unified congregation.

Since Paul admonishes the believers to speak to one another in "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," he must be referring to a practice well known to the congregation. These three different types of song (chant) were probably in use at this time. An explanation of these early Christian musical forms is given by Egon Wellesz, a leading authority on this period:

<sup>5</sup> Russel N. Squire, *Church Music* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1962), p. 35.

Paul urged the use of \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_ Church.

(music, early)

What standard does Paul set forth for the conduct of Christian worship in Ephesians 5:19?

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(Compare your answer with the text.)

1. *Psalmody*. The cantillation of the Jewish psalms and of the canticles and doxologies modeled on them.

2. *Hymns*. Songs of praise of a syllabic type; that is, each syllable is sung to one or two notes of the melody.

3. *Spiritual Songs*. Alleluias and other chants of a jubilant or ecstatic character, richly ornamented.<sup>6</sup>

Hustad comments:

Whether or not Wellesz is correct about the musical character of these forms, the nature and source of the texts seem well established. "Psalms" no doubt included all the psalms and canticles that were common to Jewish worship, in the tabernacle, the Temple and the synagogue. "Hymns" were probably new expressions in song, presenting the new Christology on which the new sect was based. There are a number of these hymns in the letters of Paul, written in the patterns of classical Greek poetry, and it is reasonable to assume that they were quickly adopted as "Christ songs" by the churches which read the epistles. . . . The *Koine* Greek phrase for "spiritual songs" is "odaes pneumaticaes" — "pneumatic odes," possibly "odes upon the breath" and "spirit." Some have conjectured that these were wordless songs like a vocalise, or possibly that they used a single super-word such as "alleluia." It has been suggested that they may have been soloistic, and possibly improvised in an experience of ecstatic worship — "singing in tongues." Pentecostals in our day claim to reproduce this biblical phenomenon, which may also have been related to the ecstatic music experiences mentioned in the Old Testament.<sup>7</sup>

Wellesz connects these "spiritual songs" with the common practice of most Near East cultures at the beginning of the Christian era and suggests that they were perpetuated in later Christian worship in the *jubilus* of the mass, the (originally improvised) melismatic prolongation of the final syllable of the "alleluia." St. Augustine describes this type of Jewish-Christian song:

<sup>6</sup> Egon Wellesz, "Early Christian Music," *The New Oxford History of Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), Vol. 2, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Hustad, *Jubilate!*, pp. 89,90.

Identify the following:

Psalmody: \_\_\_\_\_

Hymns: \_\_\_\_\_

Spiritual songs: \_\_\_\_\_

(Compare your answers with the text.)

It is a certain sound of joy without words . . . it is the expression of a mind poured forth in joy . . . A man rejoicing in his own exultation, after certain words which cannot be understood, bursteth forth into sounds of exultation without words so that it seemeth that he . . . filled with excessive joy cannot express in words the subject of that joy.<sup>8</sup>

Music had a powerful effect upon Augustine. He feared that the charm music held over him would cause him to be moved more by aesthetic pleasure than by the sacred words.

Ephesians 5:19 also tells how these songs are employed. They are to be inspired by the Spirit of God and should come from the heart of the believer. This inspiration seems to be in direct contrast with the use of music in both the Temple and the secular Greek music of the day.

Some writers believe that in the latter part of this verse Paul merely reinforces the idea of heart-felt singing and making melody to the Lord. However, the text seems to indicate a deeper degree of meaning, that of singing inwardly and meditatively. In other words, the Christian who is filled with the love and adoration of God will express his feelings outwardly through congregational worship and praise and also in the unvoiced praise of meditation and inward worship.

Paul sets out another principle in Colossians 3:16 which on the surface appears to be very similar to Ephesians 5:19. However, upon closer examination one will notice a difference in emphasis. The main point here is not necessarily on worship as in Ephesians but on "teaching and admonishing one another." This didactic emphasis points out another use of music during the early Christian era. These early believers sing of the divinity and the work of Christ as an expression of their faith. At the same time they are indoctrinating those who are being trained in the faith but have not yet been baptized ("Catechumens").

*Other musical fragments.*-Music is also associated with some additional Pauline passages which have a hymn-like structure.

In addition to passages already mentioned, there are certain Pauline fragments that are unmistakably lyrical and which may be regarded as possible quotations from existing hymns. These may have been cited for the purpose of illustrating a point in Paul's teaching:

Ephesians 5:19 tells how these \_\_\_\_\_ are

\_\_\_\_\_  
*(songs, employed)*

Is the following statement true or false?

According to the author, Ephesians 5:19 gives no indication that singing should also be done inwardly and meditatively.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*(false)*

In what way is Colossians 3:16 different from Ephesians 5:19?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
*(Compare your answer with the text.)*

Other Pauline passages have a

\_\_\_\_\_ structure.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*(hymn-like)*

<sup>8</sup> MigneL XXXVII, 1972; Nicene & Post-N, Ser. 1, VIII, 488. Quoted in Gustave Reese, *Music in the Middle Ages* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1940), p. 64.

Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you (Eph. 5:14).

He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, beheld by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory (1 Tim. 3:16).

He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords; who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen (1 Tim. 6:15,16).

For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we endure, we shall also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us; if we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:11-13).<sup>9</sup>

Is it possible that we are to glimpse a partial picture of early Christian worship from these hymn-like passages?

### **The Revelation of John**

*The Revelation of John provides for us an "unveiling" of the heavenly music of celestial choirs.* The music of Revelation is the music of the future; the vastness of the choirs mentioned by the beloved apostle can scarcely be conceived by the finite mind. No earthly choir could approach the magnitude of that great throng singing the song of Moses and the Lamb.<sup>10</sup> According to Garret Horder:

The Revelation of John is full of glowing references to song as the highest expression of worshipful feeling, indicating that in the future as in the past, song is to be one of the noblest mediums for the ascription of praise.<sup>11</sup>

Having transcended the limits of human existence on this earth in the brief allusion to the Revelation of John, it is necessary to come back to earth again as we look at the mundane development of church music through the Middle Ages. You will not be surprised to learn that this formative period is both stimulated and complicated by the presence of controversy within the churches.

<sup>9</sup> The following additional Scriptures are suggested by theologians as additional hymns or fragments: Romans 5:12-21; 6:3-11; 8:31-38; 13:11-14; Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Timothy 6:1,2; 2 Timothy 1:9,10; Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7. Other New Testament passages are John 1:1-5, 10,11, 14, 18; 1 Peter 3:18-22. The Book of 1 Corinthians is said to contain more than a score of hymns.

<sup>10</sup> See Revelation 1:4-8; 5:9,10; 11:17,18; 19:1-3).

<sup>11</sup> Garret Horder, *The Hymn Lover*. Quoted from Edmund D. Keith, *Christian Hymnody*, p. 15.

List three Pauline passages that may be quotes from existing hymns in Paul's day.

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*(Compare your answers with the text.)*

We read of the music of heavenly choirs in the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.

*(Revelation, John)*

## The Formative Years of Church Music

That the early churches actually engage in singing praise is clear from the record of Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia, who in A.D. 112 reported to the emperor Trajan that the Christians in his province held their worship assemblies on Sunday mornings before dawn and sang antiphonal hymns of praise to Christ as God.<sup>12</sup>

However, music plays another role besides praise in worship. The instructional aspect of hymns becomes of vital importance in indoctrinating those who enter the Christian faith. Sadly, the indoctrination is not carried out altogether by orthodox Christians. Since hymns are employed to teach the truths of the faith, they also may serve to convey heresy.

The Gnostics taught that since evil is in the world, God could not have been the Creator. Music was used to teach this heresy and other false concepts.

Arius (ca. A.D. 250-336), who is well known to students of Church History, almost brought chaos to the first great Council of the Christian Church (the Council of Laodicea, A.D. 367) by teaching the people a simple choral sentence and having them chant it: "There was a time when he was not." Arius sought to teach that Jesus was not eternal but was created by God. The Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) had already condemned Arius' theology and banished him to the country known today as Yugoslavia. Arius continued his heretical compositions from there. His songs became popular, whether or not the people understood their theology.

Since the unity of the church was threatened by the pressures of Arianism, the "Lesser Doxology" (*Gloria Patri*) was introduced. This doxology was appended to the chanting of the psalms as a praise to the Trinity.

When Chrysostom was bishop in Constantinople in A.D. 398, the Arians were prohibited from worshipping within the city walls. However, they would come to town on Saturday or Sunday evenings and hold music festivals and doctrinal hymn sings on the streets. These meetings attracted large crowds and created general confusion. Chrysostom's counter-attack consisted of hymn-sings of his own that resulted in bloodshed. After that debacle, the Arians were banned completely.<sup>13</sup> An effort was also made in Antioch to counter Arian heresy.

That early Christians used music in their worship is reinforced by the report of \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ in A.D. \_\_\_\_\_.

(Pliny, Younger, 112)

Music was used by early Christians both for worship and \_\_\_\_\_.

(instruction)

Gnosticism was spread through \_\_\_\_\_.

(music)

Identify Arius:

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(Compare your answer with the text.)

Is the following statement true or false?

Arians were finally banned from Constantinople.

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(true)

<sup>12</sup> Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 3-7.

<sup>13</sup> Hooper, *Church Music in Transition*, p. 25).

The practice of antiphonal singing is introduced early in the fourth century. Reese describes this practice as follows:

Its members were divided into two semi-choruses, one of men, one of women and children, and the groups alternated with one another in the singing of the psalm-verses and combined in singing Alleluia or, perhaps some new refrain. The intercalating of passages of song between psalm-verses became, in the course of time, an organized practice and was destined to be imitated with telling effect in the West.<sup>14</sup>

The assigning of the chanting of psalm-verses to the congregation was to make the services more attractive.

The unfortunate result of these doctrinal controversies is that the Council of Laodicea felt obliged to prohibit the participation of congregational singing and the use of musical instruments in the services of the churches. It further provided that only Scripture could be used for singing. Thus hymn writers are limited to the canticle and to the psalms, which accounts for the absence of hymns of personal experience during this period. From this point on until the Reformation, music is in the care of a professional clergy with the congregation assuming a passive role.<sup>15</sup>

### Summary

Although it has taken over a thousand words to explain this part of our journey, you are beginning to understand the significant dimension of meaning that music adds to the necessarily impersonal form of the written language. It is both the words and the music together that provide us with a spiritual experience or Christian portrait of eternal beauty. Look for these portraits as we review the high points of this lesson.

The early Christians face many problems. They are looked upon as heretics by the Jews and as a Jewish sect by the Romans. As a result, their worship is carried out under informal circumstances: in private homes and in clandestine surroundings, such as the catacombs, during times of persecution. In this environment music would have been used with great discretion. It is predominately vocal and congregational, influenced by both Hebrew and Greek cultures. Music is restrained until Constantine recognizes Christianity in A.D. 313.

<sup>14</sup> Gustave Reese, *Music in the Middle Ages*, p. 68.

<sup>15</sup> See William J. Reynolds and Milburn Price, *A Joyful Sound* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978), p. 5.

Identify antiphonal singing as used by the Christians in the fourth century.

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*(Compare your answer with the text.)*

After the Council of Laodicea, congregational singing and musical instruments were \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_.

*(prohibited, churches)*

From this point until the \_\_\_\_\_, the congregation assumes a \_\_\_\_\_ role in worship.

*(Reformation, passive)*

Whether sung or outbursts of vocal expression, joyous praises are made in relation to Christ's birth and infancy. As the baby Jesus grew, His life was similar to that of other Hebrew children. Obviously, He became familiar with music used in the Temple, synagogue, national religious holidays and family traditions. This training would indicate that Jesus was well versed in the Psalms. The New Testament records three specific occasions when music is used during Jesus' public ministry: (1) at the raising of Jairus' daughter, (2) during the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and (3) in the upper room with His disciples.

The Book of Acts relates Paul and Silas' experience in the Philippian jail. Conversions result from their midnight singing of praises to God. Acts also records a prayer-hymn which is sung when Peter and John returned from their appearance before the Jewish Council. Thus music is used both to praise God and to share in the presentation of the gospel message.

Although the apostle Paul is interested in conversions under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, he is also concerned with the quality of Christian worship in the early churches. Informality had been taken to the extreme, especially in regard to the Lord's Supper. The cultural mix of nationalities and philosophies also complicated worship practices. Therefore, Paul gives specific instructions in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 for the use of music in the churches and norms for Christian conduct during worship. There are also other Pauline passages that are lyrical and thought to be possibly used as hymn-texts.

Music did not always bring positive results to the early Church. During the first three centuries of Christianity, music becomes more than a means of praising God and building up Christians in the faith. Music also becomes a method of indoctrination. Both the Gnostics and the Arians took advantage of congregational singing to teach their false doctrines within the Christian Church. Because of this heresy which came through music, the Council of Laodicea gave the responsibility for singing to the professional clergy, thus eliminating congregational singing altogether until the time of the Protestant Reformation.

Concluding the biblical portion of our journey is a major accomplishment. A review of the past five lessons in particular will confirm the growing conviction that the Bible's main contribution to church music is the great variety of texts that it has left for Christian worship. Perhaps you can already sense the way in which the Church today

is indebted liturgically (no longer a "bad word" I presume) to the psalms and canticles of the Old Testament in general and to the canticles of Luke 1 and 2 in particular. Now that the indebtedness to our biblical heritage has been demonstrated in detail, the next step is to examine the cultural impact upon the development of our worship practices.

## Home Study Exercise

**Basic activity** (*Levels 1, 2, and 3*). After reading the study guide text, answer the following questions.

1. What assumption does the author make concerning Jewish psalmody?

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2. What is meant by the "Nativity Canticles"?

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3. List the Nativity Canticles. Give the Bible reference for each one.

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4. What pattern of worship do churches in the Free Church tradition generally follow today? Name one outstanding difference.

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5. What music was Jesus familiar with?

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6. State three instances where music was used during Jesus' public ministry.

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7. Give two principal occasions when music is mentioned in the Book of Acts.

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8. What does Ephesians 5:19 teach us about music in the early Christian Church?

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9. List three types of music used by the early Church.

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10. What does Colossians 3:16 teach us about music in the early Church?

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11. What evidence is there after A.D. 100 that Christians used music in their worship?

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12. Name two uses of music in the early churches.

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13. How did doctrinal controversies affect the use of music in the churches?

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14. Describe the practice of antiphonal singing in the fourth century.

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15. How did early worship conditions faced by the Christians affect their music?

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**Supplementary activity** (*Levels 2 and 3*). The activities in this lesson are taken from the study guide.

1. Give a description of the *Nativity Canticles*.
2. Describe the music found in Jesus' public ministry.
3. Identify: Psalmody, Hymns, Spiritual Songs.
4. Compare the teachings regarding music in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. What can we glean from passages like these about the worship of the early Church?
5. Identify: Arius, *Gloria Patri*, *Chrysostom*, Council of Laodicea.

**Advanced activity** (*Level 3*).

1. Write a paper entitled: "The Use of Music in the Early Church."
2. Discuss the effects of music upon doctrinal controversies after A.D. 100.

**Seminar Discussion**

1. Discuss the music Jesus must have known. Include the incidents where music is used in Jesus' public ministry.
2. What do we know about music in the early Church? Include the types of music used by the early Church.
3. Discuss two primary uses of music by the early Church.
4. Discuss how music was used with the doctrinal controversies after A.D. 100. What was the outcome? What brought about a change in this policy?