CHURCH HISTORY LITERACY

Lesson 76

History of Christian Music – Part 3

The last two classes have given us a chance to read and hear music from the first 1,000 years of the church. We began with a discussion of the Biblical information on Jewish and early Christian music and worship. Then, we considered the chants and hymns that have made up the liturgy and worship of Christians well into the Middle Ages. One consistency of the music we have heard is the uniform voice and melody line. Unlike our modern singing, harmony was by and large absent in the early music of the church. Even when instruments accompanied the music, the instrumental sound was usually mimicking the melody line being sung. What brought the changes? When, where, and how did the medieval chant become the multilayered songs we hear in more modern times? Did church music imitate secular music or was Church music the leader in these developments? Why did these changes occur? What were the immediate fruits of the changes? These are the questions we seek to answer this week.

MUSIC AFTER 1000

Last week, we considered the liturgy in the church at the turn of the first millennium. As we roll into the 11th century history we see the appearance of songs scholars term "*versus*." These songs were very rhythmic and actually rhymed! Rhyme had never really been a major poetic feature of songs before this time. Another unique aspect of *versus* was the melody. These songs were not based on chants. The South of France seems to have been the genesis of this form of music in the church.

Along with the lyric and melody line, other changes began in this time period. Scholars link many of these changes to the economic prosperity Europe enjoyed between 1050 and 1300. Population boomed, agriculture was strong, and cities began to grow. With concentrated populations in cities, more and more craftsmen could specialize in their areas. Schooling was available on a larger scale, and the effects of these changes snowballed on Western Europe's cultural development.

To see the effects most easily, one can look at architecture. By the mid-12th century, craftsmen were using a new approach to Church architecture emphasizing intricate stonework. The churches themselves were built on a massive scale showing the ethereal heavens as the buildings reached unheard of heights. The columns thinned out and the interiors of churches were spacious. The windows told stained glass stories in elaborate patterns and detail. This method of design and building eventually carried the term "Gothic." Understandably, these changes

were not limited to architecture. The services and songs of the churches underwent changes that paralleled the buildings.

Music received many decorations just as the buildings did. The main musical development is termed "polyphony." Polyphony was the use of multiple voices singing independent parts in a song. These changes were made possible because of the advances in musical notation we discussed in the previous lesson (the Do Re Mi[1] of Guido of Arezzo, for example). This polyphony grew in four significant directions: (1) singers began singing different lines at the same time; (2) singers began to sing different parts bringing harmony to the songs; (3) sight reading became a learned art as the singers relied on the notated music rather than memory or improvisation; and (4) certain talented people became composers as distinct from merely performers.

Nowhere were these developments more significant than in Paris, one of the early large cities. Around 1160, the foundation was laid in Paris for one of the middle ages great Gothic Cathedrals, Notre Dame. Although Notre Dame was not fully finished until1250, celebration of the mass began there in 1183. The Notre Dame musicians are credited with the first polyphony "primarily composed and read from notation rather than improvised."[2] This music was written for multiple voices and was considered a musical decoration of the scale and magnitude the Cathedral's architecture required. Notre Dame was also the source for the notation innovations that allowed for precise timing of the songs ("note duration").

From this time, we see the development and notation of multiple parts singing multiple harmonies in the same basic rhythm. This is the early advent of the renaissance music we now consider "Classical." It brought the chants of the first 1,000 years of the church into a whole new era, paving the way for the music we hear today. For the first 1,000 years, the songs were basically a single melody line. By 1300, we have multiple parts, counterpoint and harmony, readable notation, professional songwriters, and growing efforts at writing complex musical and lyrical pieces.

Vocal music was not the only change occurring. The economic prosperity of Europe at the time allowed greater opportunities for learning and growth among the artisans and craftsmen. Musical instruments were beneficiaries of these changes. More artisans began experimenting with ways to make instruments better in sound and playing ability. The instruments used at the time included the vielle (the predecessor of the violin and viola, but typically with 5 strings tuned in

[1] Admittedly, it was originally "ut re mi fa so la ti," but we now consider it "do re mi!"

[2] Burkholder, J. Peter, *et al*., *A History of Western Music*. Norton and Co., 7th Ed. (2006) at 94.

fourths and fifths), the hurdy-gurdy (a vielle type instrument with 3 strings played by turning a crank which rotated a wheel inside the instrument striking the strings), and the psaltery (the predecessor of the harpsichord and piano with strings over a sound board). There were also flutes and other pipes, harps, trumpets, bells, and various percussion instruments. Primitive organs started finding placement in churches by the 1100's and were commonplace by the 1300's. Still, even at this time, musical accompaniment of song was generally limited to one or two instruments per vocal piece.

As the renaissance grew, people sought out the old classical culture of Greece and Rome for inspiration and direction. Greek teaching on music placed emphasis on the need for people to receive music education as part of a balanced life. Greek thought on music also emphasized music's ability to shape emotions and affect behavior. As these ideas were taught in new and growing universities, those with musical gifts began applying themselves to using music for the same purposes. The idea of tying words of worship to melodies and instrumentations that emphasized songs in ways to produce emotion and conviction took hold.

These goals were noticeably easier to achieve with Gutenberg's invention of the printing press in 1450. Suddenly, entire choirs and ensembles could have sheet music available at an ever-decreasing cost, making group song with complex parts easier to teach and implement.

The effect on instrumentation was profound. For a few hundred years, songs that had multiple melody lines had been written out with vertical staffs much as we still see today. With instruments, the notation system lagged significantly behind. Once printing was easily accessible, however, instrumental notation took off as well. Suddenly, composers could easily and relatively cheaply write pieces with multiple lines for various instruments that were "readable" by the musicians.

Another effect of the printing press was making music more accessible to the public as well. With cheaper and readily available copies, the public interest in learning to read music, singing and playing instruments snowballed the popularity of music itself.

POST-REFORMATION HYMNODY

As Europe rolled into the 1500's, the major cultural and political earthquake started to rumble. Martin Luther took 95 debate issues with aspects of Catholic teaching on forgiveness and nailed them to the church door. The actions and reactions of the Church, the government, and Luther resulted in rending the church apart (See lessons 50, 53-55). Luther did not merely rebel against Church doctrine on justification, but on many other matters as well. As Luther sought to bring the

Scriptures to the common people, translating them into the common German of his day, he also sought to make the church service itself more user-friendly.

Luther took everyday melodies one might hear in the local tavern and converted them into use for Church hymns. For lyrics, Luther wrote hymns that reflected his theology and doctrines as needed for services and personal devotion. These songs are credited with bringing many into the religious folds of the Lutheran garments.

Luther also taught and promoted congregational singing. Up to the time of Luther, clergy who constituted the trained choir did most of the church singing. Luther took melodies with popular appeal and made them the sounds of worship. At the time, many Roman Church men lamented the songs of Luther as if they were siren cries that brought the unwary onto the treacherous rocks of heresy.

Luther was a natural musician. He played the lute and was a trained singer. Luther wrote not only lyrics (in the people's German rather than Church Latin), but also melodies. Luther insisted that any of the schoolmasters under his care be trained as musicians also. To Luther, music was a necessary part of any church education. For Luther, "next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise."[3] But not all the reformation fathers agreed with Luther on this point!

Ulrich Zwingli (see lesson 52) was musically talented, but he took a different position than Luther on some points. Zwingli himself had a wonderful voice and was trained in multiple instruments. Zwingli did not believe that the New Testament authorized singing in worship. He understood passages like Colossians 3:16 ("sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.") to mean that such songs should be sung "in your hearts", in other words, "not out loud!"

The third arm of the Reformation movement was that of John Calvin. Calvin viewed singing as an integral part of worship. Calvin saw it as a form of prayer. Calvin believed that the music behind the words had the power to propel the word's message into the heart. Therefore, music could be used for either good or bad for the hearer. To ensure that the song blessed the hearer, Calvin taught that the only appropriate lyrical content were the Biblical Psalms. In Calvin's churches and hymnals, the Psalms themselves were put into metrical form for singing. As for the melodies, Calvin believed that the Biblical texts necessitated tunes that he considered "majestic" as opposed to the frivolous melodies of popular music in his day. So, Calvin allowed the singing of Psalms[4], but with

[3] Luther, "*Preface to Georg Rhau's Symphoniae Iucundae,*" *Luther's Works*. 53 at 324.

[4] He also allowed the Apostles Creed and certain early church passages.

very strict musical guidelines. The melody was the only line sung (no harmony), there was one note for each syllable (no "melismas" or runs), and there was to be no instrumentation or chanting.

A good example of a "Calvin hymn" is that written by his follower, William Kethe in 1561, put to music written by Louis Bourgeois ten years earlier. Those familiar with the hymn will quickly recognize how each syllable matches its own single note. The hymn itself is a metrical take on Psalm 100 (compared below):

Hymn	Psalm 100
All people that on earth do dwell, Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice. Him serve with mirth, His praise forth tell; Come ye before Him and rejoice.	Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.
Know that the Lord is God indeed; Without our aid He did us make; We are His flock, He doth us feed, And for His sheep He doth us take.	Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
O enter then His gates with praise; Approach with joy His courts unto; Praise, laud, and bless His Name always, For it is seemly so to do.	Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.
For why! the Lord our God is good; His mercy is forever sure; His truth at all times firmly stood, And shall from age to age endure.	For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

In the early Reformation, we see Luther embracing the past of the church (instruments, lyrics, etc.) while also embracing the present age (melody, complex harmony, common tongue, and congregational singing). Calvin shunned the church's past (denying non-Biblical lyrics, instruments, and chanting) while also isolating the church from the present age (melody, harmony, instrumentation and non-Biblical lyric). All the while, Zwingli had the third arm of the Reformation eliminating music altogether.

What happened in England? As we remember the transitions of the Anglican Church out from under Roman Catholic authority, back under Rome, back out, and finally into a middle road that avoided both Catholicism and Continental Reformation, we are not surprised to hear that music flip-flopped similarly. Ultimately, the church put its worship into English instead of Latin, including the

songs. The songs were written with spiritual lyrics often inspired by Psalms, but by no means limited to Psalms.[5] During certain times the words matched the melodies syllable for note while at other times the melodies ran as the composers saw fit. English churches had congregational singing, but also had services that were spoken only and not sung at all. In short, when it came to music, the churches of England bounced all over the map!

English services and the English Churches produced some wonderful hymns and hymnists. Around 1690, a 16-year-old Puritan complained to his father, a Puritan minister, about the songs of his church. The young man was not happy with the songs restricted to the Psalms nor with the quality of the actual songs. His father responded that if the boy did not think the songs good enough, the boy should write something better. So, young Isaac Watts began writing songs, composing the classic, "Behold the Glories of the Lamb." Watts would go on to write amazing hymns including, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," and "O God, Our Help in Ages Past."

"When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" used Galatians 6:14 as its inspiration. The Galatians passage reads, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." Using this, Watts wrote,

> When I survey the wondrous cross
> On which the Prince of Glory died
> My richest gain I count but loss
> And pour contempt on all my pride
>
> Forbid it Lord that I should boast
> Save in the death of Christ my God
> All the vain things that charm me most
> I sacrifice them to his blood

Watts then used a contemplative model much like that Ignatius Loyola taught in his Spiritual Exercises (see lesson 66) as he contemplated Christ on the Cross and its ramifications on those who comprise the church, writing:

> See, from His head, His hands, His feet
> Sorrow and love flow mingled down
> Did e'er such love and sorrow meet
> Or thorns compose so rich a crown.

[5] Puritans, on the other hand, typically based their services on metrical psalms much like Calvin's churches on the European continent.

Were the whole realm of nature mine
That were a present far too small
Love so amazing so divine
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Watts wrote another well-known hymn, getting a boost from the melody composed by his contemporary, a German born Opera writer who had recently moved to England in 1723. This composer made a good living at Opera until 1737 by which time fortune struck by leaving! (In other words, he went broke, fortunately!) In an effort to pay the bills, this fellow turned to Church music. He composed a masterpiece in 1742 and the world is eternally grateful for George Frederick Handel (1685-1759), *Messiah*. It was Handel who contributed the melody to one of Watt's best-known hymns:

Joy to the World! The Lord is come
Let earth receive her King
Let every heart prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! The Savior reigns
Let men their songs employ
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy

No more let sins and sorrows grow
Nor thorns infest the ground
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace
And makes the nations prove
The glories of his righteousness
And wonders of his love.

Watts first vocalized arguments in favor of his hymns that today seem commonplace. When Watts was arguing, the issues were controversial and heated. Watts asserted that the importance of hymns lay first and foremost in the content, not the form. For Watts, the hymns were appropriately suited to the time and current experience of those in the church. Watts also taught that the goal of singing in worship is ascribing to God the glories properly due him. For Watts, this meant that confining one's service to the Psalms was to cut short our proper expressions of praise. Watts took issue with Zwingli's teaching on music in the

New Testament arguing forcefully and logically[6] that Paul in Ephesians (5:19-20) and Colossians 3:16-17 commands the church to sing.

On the heels of Watts (1674-1748) came the hymn maestro Charles Wesley. We considered his "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing" last week, one of over 6,000 he wrote in his lifetime. Wesley not only wrote hymns, but he also translated Latin hymns of the church into English for use in services. One example is a 13th century Latin hymn that Wesley translated into a form suitable for a melody written in 1708 that many churches still sing today:

> Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!
> Sons of men and angels say, Alleluia!
> Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
> Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply, Alleluia!

Coming next week…More hymns and hymn stories!

POINTS FOR HOME

This week, we let the hymns themselves speak to us as we leave for home. We join in Psalm 100 "Shout[ing] to the Lord." We "worship the Lord with gladness" and come before him with joyful songs." We "enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise." Because "the Lord *is* good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations."

We stand humbly before the cross, contemplating the suffering Messiah as we join in Paul's words to the Galatians memorialized by Isaac Watts, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

We remember that this dying Savior did not languish in the grave "but Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep!" (1 Corinthians 15:20)

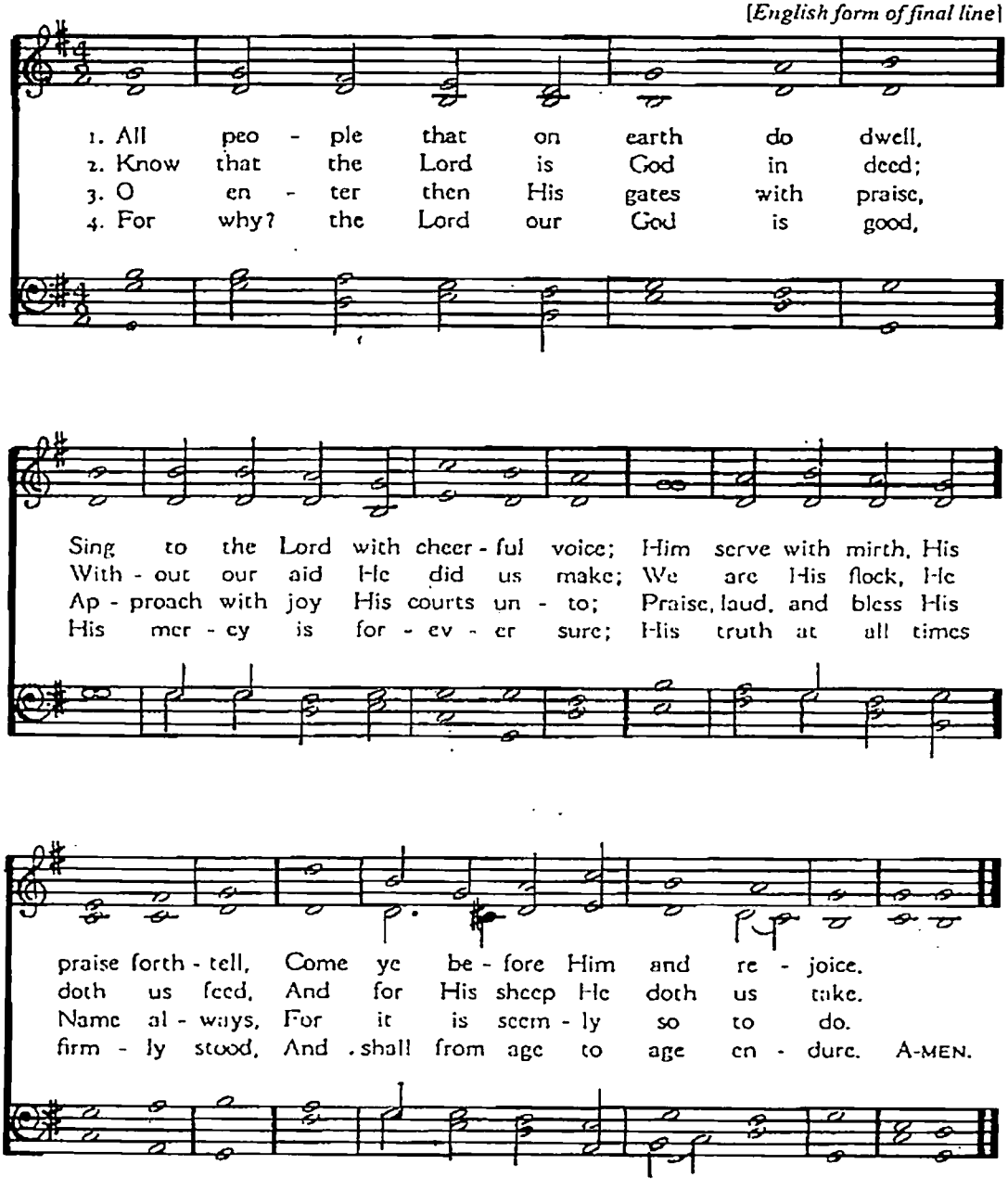
Hallelujah!

[6] Watts was quite proficient at logical analysis. Aside from his ministerial duties, Watts also published a well-received book on logic that was used as a textbook at both Harvard and Oxford.

All People That On Earth Do Dwell

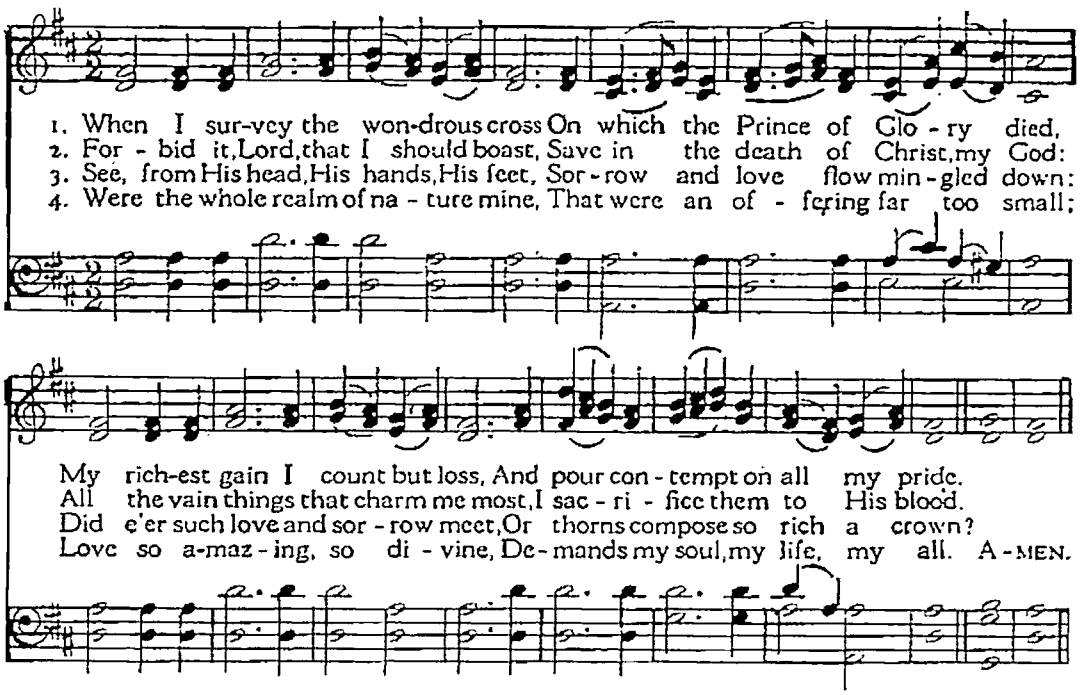
Psalm c. Rev. William Kethe, 1561

Old Hundredth
Louis Bourgeois, 1551
[English form of final line]



When I Survey The Wondrous Cross

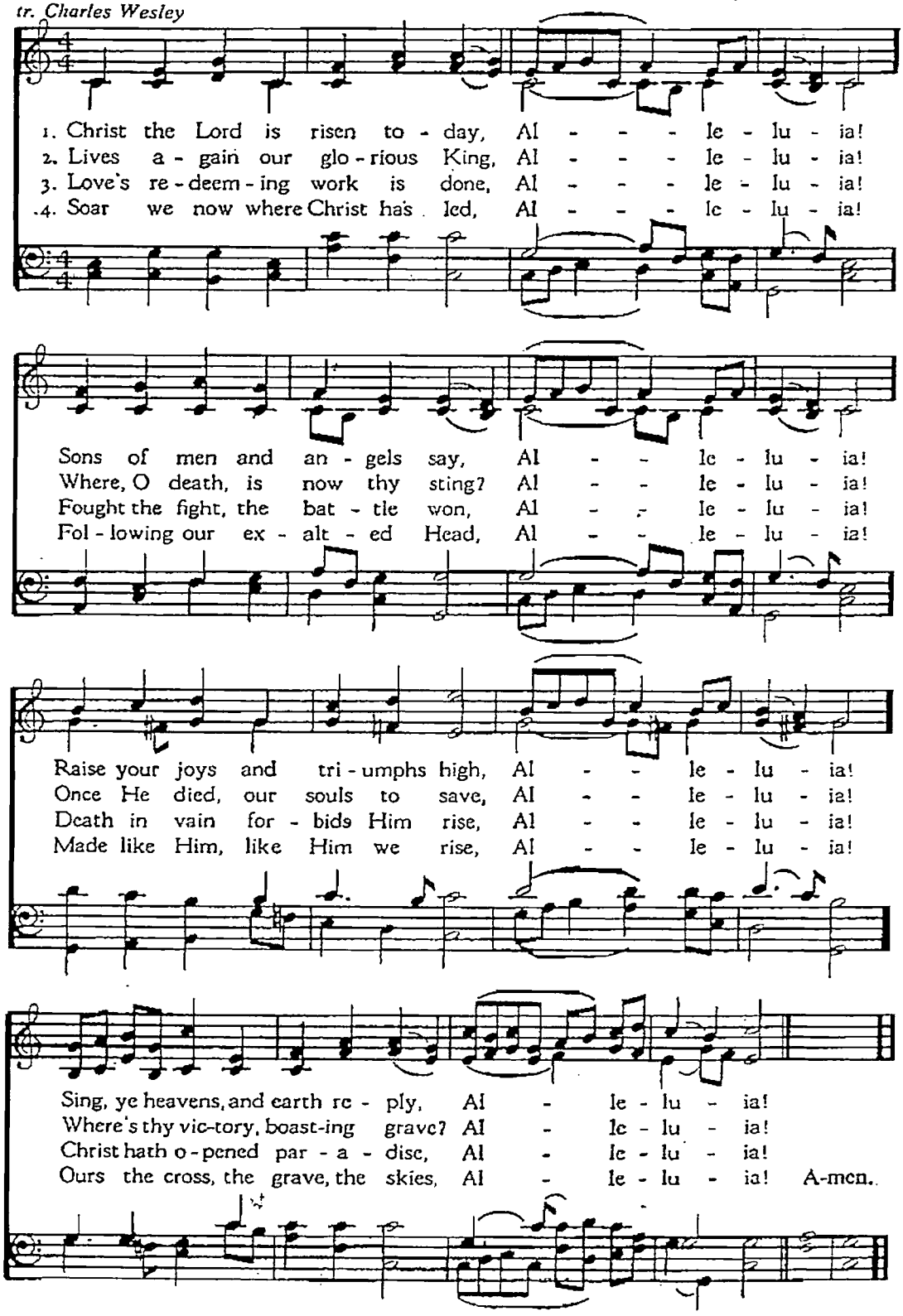
Isaac Watts *Isaac B. Woodbury, 1819-1858*



Christ The Lord Is Risen Today

14th century Latin
tr. Charles Wesley

From Lyra Davidica, 1708



Joy to the World!

Isaac Watts — *George F. Handel, arr. Lowell Mason*