

Topic Page: [Hymns](#)

Definition: **hymn** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

Song of praise or gratitude to a god or hero. The oldest forms are found in ancient Egyptian and Greek writings and in the Old Testament psalms of rejoicing. In strict Christian church usage, hymns are religious songs sung by the choir and congregation in a church, distinct from a psalm or a canticle. Hymns, both old and new, are now regular features of church services.

Summary Article: **hymn**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

song of praise, devotion, or thanksgiving, especially of a religious character (see also cantata).

Early Christian hymnody consisted mainly of the Psalms and the great canticles *Nunc dimittis*, *Magnificat*, and *Benedictus* from the Bible and of the Sanctus, Gloria in excelsis, and Te Deum. These were chanted in unison (see plainsong). Metrical Latin hymnody began with the hymns of St. Ambrose, bishop of Milan, and St. Hilary, bishop of Poitiers, in the 4th cent. This type of hymn, usually four-line stanzas in iambic tetrameter, was the basis of nearly all Christian hymnody until the 16th cent.

Notable Latin hymns are *Corde natus ex parentis* by Prudentius in the 4th cent., and Fortunatus' 6th-century processional, *Vexilla regis* and *Pange lingua* (whose meter was imitated in the *Pange lingua* of St. Thomas Aquinas). From the 11th cent. came Wipo's Easter sequence, *Victimae paschali laudes*. The *Dies irae*, probably by Thomas of Celano, and the *Stabat Mater dolorosa* by Jacopone da Todi are great hymns of the 13th cent.

With the Reformation came the development of Protestant hymnody. The first hymnbooks in the vernacular are probably those published by the followers of John Huss in Bohemia in 1501 and 1505. In 1524 the first Lutheran hymnal was published at Wittenberg. The early Lutheran hymns were translations of Latin hymns, folksongs with new texts, often paraphrases of biblical verses or passages, or sometimes original melodies. Calvinism contributed the Genevan Psalter (final version, 1562). It contained the Psalms, translated into French verse by Clément Marot and Theodore Beza and set to music, most of which was supplied by Louis Bourgeois, who used some original tunes and adapted others. The familiar doxology tune *Old Hundredth* is the tune of Psalm 134 in this psalter.

The first collection of English church tunes was Sternhold's Psalter (1556), published at Geneva and consisting of metrical versions of the Psalms by Thomas Sternhold (d. 1549) and others, which were set to unharmonized tunes. John Wesley's hymnal (1737) contained metrical psalms, translations from Greek and German, and original lyrics and melodies, and was thus the first hymnal in the modern sense. Other notable English hymnists of the 18th cent. were Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley, and William Cowper, poets whose hymns are still sung in nearly all Protestant churches. In the 19th cent. there was a revived interest in plainsong that resulted in many translations of ancient Latin hymns, such as those by John Mason Neale.

In America the Puritans used psalters brought with them from Europe until the *Bay Psalm Book* (1640), the earliest American hymnal, was published at Cambridge, Mass. William Billings wrote the first original American hymns as distinguished from paraphrases of psalms and psalm tunes; another important composer was Lowell Mason, whose song collections, such as *Spiritual Songs* (1831), compiled jointly

with Thomas Hastings, attained wide distribution.

In the latter half of the 19th cent. the gospel hymn was developed (see gospel music). It is marked by lively rhythm, constant alternation of the simplest harmonies, and sentimental text. Arthur Sullivan's "Onward Christian Soldiers" (1871) is a well-known example of the martial hymn of the period. In the 20th cent. radical variations in church music have emerged: folk-song and jazz elements have been integrated with older music and frequently replaced it. Troubadour-style "protest" songs with theological content were common in the 1960s alongside a newly vital, more conservative hymnody.

See Bailey, A. E. , *The Gospel in Hymns* (1950);.

Foote, H. W. , *Three Centuries of American Hymnody* (1940, repr. 1968);.

Benson, L. F. , *The English Hymn* (1915, repr. 1987);.

Bradley, I. , ed., *The Book of Hymns* (1989);.

Reynolds, W. J. , *Songs of Glory* (1989).

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