

Kevin Twit

RETUNING HYMNS

I. Why Do It?

- **A pastoral motivation – we must attend to the songs our people sing because worship is always formative.**
- **We need songs that don't just allude to the gospel, but songs that delve into the gospel in depth.**
- **We need songs that cover the full emotional range of the Christian life – songs that deal with suffering and death.**
- **We need songs that expand our metaphors and scriptural knowledge**
- **For more on this look for my talk on Belmont RUF podcast “Why We Still Need Hymns In A Postmodern World”**

II. How To Approach Retuning

1. Find A Text Worth Retuning

- Does it have a great first line?
- Is it doctrinally and experientially true?
- Does it say things in a fresh, non-cliché, evocative way?
- Does it contribute to an area where there are gaps in our songs?
- Is it still under copyright?

2. Some Ideas For Coming Up With Sing-able Tunes

- Try writing tunes without using an instrument because most people will only ever sing it, not play it.
- Try reading the text out loud over and over, with a voice recorder capturing your ideas. Seek to find the right tempo and mood for the text, reading with natural stresses that fit the rhythm of the text.
- Then try singing melodies to fit the way you are speaking it.
- Try to vary your method – new instruments, co-writing, finding texts with unusual rhythms to bring new creative energy.
- Analyze and perfect what you've written. Check for range and rhythm difficulties.
- Deal with awkward words/phrases. Use www.hymnary.org to see other variations of the text.

III. How To Find Texts

1. Ebay for old hymnals

2. Look for Collected Works of various hymnwriters

3. Google booksearch is a goldmine!

4. Many rare books are available now in “print on demand” on Amazon and Abebooks.com

5. Hymnary.org and The Cyberhymnal each have their use. Cyberhymnal has annoying midifile music but includes extra verses. Hymnary includes thousands of hymnals but has only published hymnal versions of the various hymns. But you can make a virtual version of your hymnal collection and search all your hymnals together etc.

IV. Some Of My Favorite Books To Help You Start:

Hymn History and Biography

- **Louis F. Benson.** Studies of Familiar Hymns (First and Second Series). These are 2 completely different books and are the best books on hymn backgrounds. They are available as a pdf to

download for free online too!

- **Douglas Bond.** Mr. Pipes and the British Hymn Makers. Written to introduce middle school and high school students to hymns.
- **David Music and Paul Richardson** I Will Sing The Wondrous Story: A History of Baptist Hymnody In North America Exhaustive.
- **Faith Cook.** Our Hymn Writers and Their Hymns. The best modern book for folks from the evangelical reformed world to learn backgrounds of many of the hymn-writers we use the most.
- **Presbyterian Board of Christian Education. Handbook to the Hymnal (1936)** For virtually every major denominational hymnal release, they also publish a hymn handbook which has info about every hymn and tune. They are handbooks for the Methodists, Baptist, and Lutherans and often you can find them cheap online.
- **Erik Routley. Hymns and Human Life & Hymns and the Faith.** Routley is probably the most important recent hymnologist and his works are worth having and consulting.
- **Warren Steel and Richard Hulan The Makers Of The Sacred Harp** Recent scholarly work. Also be sure to watch the film "Awake My Soul" for a great intro to Sacred Harp singing.
- **Jon Michael Spencer. Black Hymnody.** There is not much reading on this topic and this is a standard resource.
- **Cynthia Y. Aalders To Express the Ineffable: The Hymns and Spirituality of Anne Steele** Fabulous book about my favorite hymn writer!

Analysis of Hymns

- **Louis F. Benson. The English Hymn: Its Development and Use in Worship.** This is the definitive work to read if you want an exhaustive understanding of English hymns and the history of hymn singing. His approach is to trace the history of every official sanctioned hymnbook by every English speaking denomination. A benefit of this approach fro bibliophiles like me is that I can look up every old hymnbook I find on ebay and learn about to see if I should buy it! It usually sells for \$50 in the used bookstores.
- **Louis F. Benson. The Hymnody of the Christian Church.** A smaller work which are the Stone Lectures he gave at Princeton. He covers topics not covered in the English Hymn work.
- **Edith L. Blumhofer and Mark A. Noll, ed. Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land.** A few years ago there was a conference at Wheaton where church historians gathered to discuss how hymns can help us with church history and vice versa. Several books have now been published of papers from this conference and they are all excellent!
- **Edith L. Blumhofer and Mark A. Noll, ed. Sing Them Over Again to Me.**
- **Richard J. Mouw and Mark A. Noll, ed. Wonderful Words of Life.**
- **Harry Eskew and Hugh T. McElrath. Singing with Understanding.** Indispensible general work on hymnody.
- **E.E. Ryden. The Story of Christian Hymnody.** I love this book! It makes the history such a fun story to read. And he includes much about German hymnody that you will find glossed over in other books. It's out of print but track it down!
- **J.R. Watson. The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study.** Watson's book is unique because he looks at hymns as a literary critic and expounds on the art of each hymn---writer and how their styles differ from each other.

Hymnals and Sources of Hymn Texts

Look on Google book seach for free pdfs of so many of these great old books!

- **Horatius Bonar. Hymns of Faith and Hope (First, Second, and Third Series).** These are 3 different books!
- **R.H. Boyd, ed. The National Baptist Hymn Book.** An important black church resource.
- **Charlotte Elliott. Selections from the Poems.**

- **William Gadsby. Gadsby's Hymns.** This has been reprinted recently too. It is reformed Baptist and includes 1200 hymns (without music) and can be obtained (as can Nettleton's hymnal) from www.heritagebooks.org)
- **Gospel Hymns: Nos. 1 to 6 Complete.** The source for gospel songs good and bad.
- **Frances Ridley Havergal. The Poetical Works of Frances Ridley Havergal.**
- **William Walsham How. Poems.**
- **H.F. Lyte. The Poetical Works of the Rev. H.F. Lyte.**
- **Moravian Church. Hymnal and Liturgies of the Moravian Church (Unitas Fratrum).**
- **The Trinity Hymnal and The Trinity Psalter.** A good hymnal is invaluable. The Psalter puts all 150 Psalms in verse form and suggests tunes so that you can sing the Psalms in worship!
- **J.M. Neale, translator. Hymns of the Eastern Church.**
- **Asahel Nettleton, ed. Village Hymns for Social Worship.** This is a great 19th century reformed hymnal that has been reprinted recently. Nettleton was a famous reformed revival preacher (you should read his "Life and Labors" someday!)
- **John Newton. The Works of John Newton: Volume 3 contains the Olney Hymns.**
- **John Rippon's Collection.** An important early English Baptist collection.
- **J.C. Ryle. Hymns for the Church on Earth.**
- **The Sacred Harp.**
- **Philip Schaff, compiler. Christ in Song: Hymns of Immanuel From All Ages.** You must buy this. Period.
- **C.H. Spurgeon, compiler. Our Own Hymn--Book.**
- **Anne Steele. The Works of Anne Steele.** This contains her hymns, other poems, and psalms, as well as some letters and prose pieces. (But the only copy for sale online is \$250)
- **Charles Albert Tindley. Beams of Heaven: Hymns of Charles Albert Tindley.**
- **Augustus Toplady. The Complete Works of Augustus Toplady.**
- **William Walker, ed. The Southern Harmony and Musical Companion.**
- **Isaac Watts. The Psalms and Hymns of Isaac Watts.**
- **Charles Wesley. Sacred Poetry** www.kessinger.net is where you can buy this reprint from the 19th century. Duke has all the Wesley hymns online too.

IV. Other Resources For Nurturing The Movement

1. Liturgy Fellowship on Facebook

2. Hymnary.org

3. Indelible Grace site www.igracemusic.com - also contains the RUF Hymnbook soon to be redone as the Indelible Grace Hymnbook.