

*Woven
Into
Harmony
50 Hymn Texts
by
Adam M. L. Tice*



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Publisher's Note

The publication of this edition is intended to make available some of the collected hymn texts of Adam Tice. It is our hope that this volume will be useful to worship leaders and church musicians, and of special interest to hymnal editors and tune writers.

Each text is first presented in poetic form, and then interlined with either an existing or newly composed tune. It is not our intent, however, that the singing of these texts be limited to the tunes with which they appear in this collection. Composers are invited to fashion new melodies to carry these words.

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Woven into Harmony

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Foreword

For the past several years I have had the pleasure of occasionally discovering among my incoming e-mails new hymn texts from Adam Tice. I always read them with much anticipation because I have learned to expect good things from him, and readers of the fifty hymns collected here will soon find out why.

While a collection of hymns does not attempt to sustain a plot line like that of a mystery novel, I feel something akin to such a reviewer's obligation not to give away too much in these introductory remarks. A significant part of the pleasure of discovering new hymns is finding how they give voice to a concern, an insight, a juxtaposition, a hope, a memory, a tension, or some other feature that has somehow been omitted in other hymns. Many such discoveries lie ahead in this volume.

One way of appreciating Adam's gifts as a hymnwriter is to keep in mind that he comes to the craft of text writing from his experience as a songleader in a tradition that primarily sings unaccompanied and in parts. Sensitivity to the pacing and pitching of singers carries over to a keen sense of the sonic aspects of his texts, especially in alliteration, assonance, and rhyme. Because these devices are used gracefully and unobtrusively, they add conviction and assurance to the texts rather than interrupting the flow of ideas. Similarly, to be an effective songleader, one needs a clear awareness of one's own voice, and Adam has developed a comparable consciousness of the language that comes naturally to him. On more than one occasion when he has sent me a first draft of a new text, he has declined to use my hints for alternative words or phrases when they were not "something I would say." But then he would recast the line or stanza in his own idiom and produce something more coherent than my piecemeal suggestion.

There are numerous words and phrases in these hymns that definitely move beyond traditional hymnic vocabulary, but they are not inserted irresponsibly or for sheer shock value. On the contrary, they often evoke a response such as "Why have I never seen this word in a hymn before?" Admittedly, there are a few instances—such as a text involving both "gecko" and "sea slug"—that are intentionally lighthearted in the expansion of hymnic diction, but there are others that are breathtaking in their unflinching immediacy: "Christ is for losers," "When anyone can buy a gun," "we slash and burn and pave." Yet whether amusing or challenging or meditative or narrative or anything else, the very variety and range of the language ultimately contributes to a sense that these hymns merit careful attention.

Comparable to this breadth of vocabulary is the diversity of the metrical forms in which these hymns are cast. The fifty hymns in this collection employ no less than thirty-five distinct meters, several of which are not found in most hymnals. Yet the technical challenge never becomes the central concern of the text. Instead, it operates as a means of enhancing the intent of the hymn and gives life to lines that could well have become pedestrian in more familiar meters.

Because some of the tunes selected to carry these texts are well known from other hymns, the associations with previous texts often intensify the experience of singing the new pairings that appear in this volume. The incarnational connotations of CRANHAM,

for example, add poignancy to a text about enlarging our sense of the range of human differences. In other cases, the incorporation of tunes usually regarded as secular serves as a reminder that the whole of life is within God’s keeping and deserves attention in our sung prayer. Operating in a slightly different way, the retrieval of unfamiliar tunes, such as the sturdy, Welsh LLEDROD, gives depth and energy to new words. And the constant unfolding and growing of congregational song is evident in the tunes by living composers that either inspired or were inspired by the texts appearing here.

As I hope these introductory comments will indicate, Adam Tice has brought together here a remarkable first collection of hymns deserving attention and use. They leave one both grateful and eager for more.

—Carl P. Daw, Jr.
Executive Director

The Hymn Society in the United States and Canada

Biographical Sketch

Adam M. L. Tice was born on October 11, 1979, in the mountains of western Pennsylvania, and grew up in Alabama, Oregon, and Indiana. After graduating from high school in Elkhart, Indiana, Adam went to nearby Goshen College, a Mennonite liberal arts school. He majored in music with an emphasis on composition and completed a minor in Bible and religion, graduating in 2002. He began working as a church musician and choir director while still in college.

Adam took his first course at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in the fall of 2003, which led to the writing of his initial hymn text. Four years later (including a year-long interlude as a full time marionette puppeteer), Adam graduated with a Master of the Arts in Christian Formation with an emphasis on worship. He completed a thesis on the life of Jesus as presented in Mennonite hymnals of the twentieth century. *The Conrad Grebel Review* published his research into ways that hymnody shaped the Mennonite practices of communion.

He has led singing at numerous Mennonite and ecumenical events, including the 2008 Hymn Sing for Peace on the steps of the United States Capitol reflecting pool.

Adam was the winner of the tenth annual Macalester Plymouth United Church (St. Paul, Minnesota) hymn competition. *More Voices*, a hymn supplement for the United Church of Canada, was the first major collection to include one of his texts (“Breath of God, Breath of Peace”). Adam is a member of the Executive Committee of The Hymn Society in the United States and Canada.

In November of 2007, Adam and his wife María moved to the Washington, DC, suburbs, where Adam was installed as Associate Pastor of Hyattsville Mennonite Church in Hyattsville, Maryland.

Preface

There is something disconcerting about writing this preface. As a student in seminary and as a beginning hymn writer, I have read paragraphs like these in order to glean wisdom about process and inspiration. The insecure part of me would suggest that the reader stop here and pick up a collection by a more seasoned writer. Read their forewords and find words of wisdom. Learn from Daw, Dufner, Bringle, Bell, Troeger, and Kaan, as I did. They will tell you how a hymn is written. Their prefaces introduce this work as well because their craft informed and inspired mine. But I will set aside my insecurity and tell my story. After all, each of the writers whom I admire once put together a first collection and wrote a first preface.

It seems that every hymn writer has a moment of revelation, where for some reason or another they fit words together in this form for the first time. My epiphany came as an assignment in my first seminary course, “Congregational Song: Practices Past and Present.” Professor Rebecca Slough asked us to pick a favorite psalm and write a metrical version. We were to spend a maximum of thirty minutes on our text, lest we found it so challenging that it absorb an inordinate amount of time. My experience was surprisingly satisfying. The components of meter and rhyme provided a framework for poetic expressions of spirituality. Refining sentences and images into short poetic lines and stanzas becomes a sort of theological crossword puzzle. For most people, that combination of elements is horribly constraining. But for hymn writers the combination is strangely liberating. I tried my hand at several more texts, retelling the stories of Jesus as hymns. One of those early efforts, “When Jesus Learned His Friend Had Died,” appears in this collection.

As Prof. Slough describes it, a floodgate was opened. I found my voice in the intricacies of the hymn form. I wrote at a fierce pace and within a year had produced some thirty-six hymns. Trained as a musician and immersed in the Mennonite singing tradition, I already saw my vocation as enabling the voice of congregations. Now I found myself giving words to those voices. The Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, Indiana) and Bethel Missionary Church (Goshen, Indiana) were willing proving grounds for the new hymns. Many of the texts I wrote were for specific worship services at those two communities, while others were responses to lectures or sermons.

Finding the right word, the appropriate register of language, and just the right rhythm for a particular theme inspires me to test and refine my spirituality and theology. A rhyming dictionary will suggest a connection that I might not find in a theological textbook. A melodic arch will require me to identify the core of the idea I am processing. The constraints of the form actually free me to discover subtle nuances that I would miss in writing a sermon on the same topic.

In the summer of 2004, less than a year after writing my first text, I experienced my first conference of The Hymn Society in the United States and Canada. I attended as a Lovelace Scholar and was star-struck from the start. I began meeting people whose hymns I had sung, studied, and loved, and found these luminaries to be remarkably down to earth, friendly, and generous. Since that time, many Hymn Society members

have provided helpful critique and advice. Executive Director Carl Daw, who was already my favorite living hymn writer, deserves particular mention for his invaluable feedback.

During that first conference I was paired with a roommate from Illinois named Chris Ángel. I gave him copies of my work the first day, and he began composing tunes for them by the second day. The parish he served, St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Urbana, was the first congregation to sing a number of the texts by this Mennonite writer. One of my great joys in the publication of this collection is the inclusion of five of Chris' tunes. These are his first published compositions.

Thanks to my Mennonite background, I am partial to tunes that can be sung *a cappella* and in parts; however, I enjoy and appreciate a wide variety of music, from chant, to folk, to rock. While I believe that the tunes provided in this collection will prove useful, they should not be considered the final word. Church musicians and editors should feel free to experiment with different pairings according to the needs of their communities. I especially hope that this publication will inspire the work of additional composers.

Further pieces of this story will emerge as part of the commentary on individual hymns throughout the collection. I have been amazed and humbled that my words have served their purpose in communities of faith across the United States and Canada. I began writing in an attempt to fill a perceived void in Mennonite hymnals. We have traditionally sung very few hymns by Mennonite writers, and as a result we are shaped primarily by borrowed theology. I wanted to give voice to the unique contributions of our theology and to offer those gifts to the wider church. I hope that these hymns can express our shared longing for peace and justice, reconciliation, and the unfolding of the new creation.

I acknowledge and thank:

- the teachers who have shaped me musically and in other ways: Carol Nelson, Dennis Phipps, Doyle Preheim, Lee Dengler, Mary K. Oyer, and Rebecca Slough;
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- the communities of faith that have nurtured my writing and tested the results: Bethel Missionary Church, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, and Hyattsville Mennonite Church;
- my parents, Ezra and Joan Tice;
- my most honest critic and beloved companion in life, María Celesta Longoria Tice.

—Adam M. L. Tice