

**STUCK IN THE MIDDLE:
THE ROLE OF SUNDAY SCHOOL HYMNALS IN THE HYMNODY
OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

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For the historical development of hymnody, nineteenth-century America is a particularly fruitful period for research. Building upon the foundations of European tradition, Christians in the United States began developing a hymnic corpus unique to their own experience. American hymn writers began composing their own texts; the folk shape-note expression of the era furnished hymnody with many enduring hymn tunes (i.e., “Amazing Grace”/“New Britain,” “Foundation,” “Beach Spring,” “Holy Manna”); the African American spirituals were forged in the crucible of slavery and continued legal forms of oppression (i.e. Jim Crow segregation); finally, from these many sources, the uniquely American genre of gospel music was born, developing and strengthening at camp-meetings and revivals that swept across the American landscape. With Methodism’s close ties to the frontier religion of the camp-meeting and revivals, the story of U.S. Methodist hymnody is intertwined with that of gospel music, as many proponents of revival and camp-meeting hymnody pushed the compilers of denominational hymnals of the various Methodist movements to a greater inclusion of gospel hymnody. It is no wonder that camp-meeting and revival hymnody has been a rich source of study for Methodist scholars.¹ However, up to this point, Methodist Episcopal Sunday school hymnals published in the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have been largely unexplored.²

Perhaps these hymnals have been ignored because the term “Sunday school” has attracted some pejorative connotations, linked to a simplistic misrepresentation of children’s part in what was in reality a multi-generational Christian education movement. In fact, some of the classic hymns in the larger interdenominational hymnal corpus were first written for children, e.g., to explain parts of the Apostles’ Creed (“All Things Bright and Beautiful,” and “Once in Royal David’s City”). Sunday school may have been created for the edification and benefit of children, but it matured into

¹ For a brief overview of the influence of the camp meeting on Methodist hymnody, see the relevant portion and footnoted sources in John R. Tyson, “The Methodist National Anthem: ‘O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing’ and the Development of American Methodism,” in *Sing Them Over Again to Me: Hymns and Hymnbooks in America*, ed. Mark A. Knoll and Edith L. Blumhofer (Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2006), 25-28.

² “Unofficial” simply means that the General Conference or governing body of the Methodist denomination did not officially approve the hymnal.

an all-inclusive educational endeavor. Often beginning with an inter-generational time of worship, Sunday school evolved into an age-specific, age-appropriate time of biblical study.³ By ignoring Sunday school hymnals we miss the unique vantage point they offer from which we can view the evolution of Sunday schools, Methodist hymnody, U.S. hymnody, and the “democratization of American Christianity” throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴ Because the Sunday school hymnals were often theologically and temporally closer to the ecclesial life of Methodist churches, they served as a buffer between many of the gospel/revival hymnals and the denominational hymnals.⁵ Most of the Sunday school hymnals can thus be charted somewhere on the spectrum between these two poles. This paper will broadly trace the evolution of the Sunday school hymnals, first by giving context to the purpose and content of the hymnals in their specific era, and then by examining the interplay of hymns between Sunday school hymnals and the sanctioned denominational hymnals.⁶ In doing so, we will discover that in different eras the composite of Methodist Sunday school hymnals served both as a sail and anchor for traditional Methodist hymnody,⁷ pushing for the inclusion of popular gospel hymnody in earlier generations and later pulling back to reclaim hymns that had fallen out of denominational usage. Throughout our analysis, we will also note the battle for power and hymnic control between the “official” denominational hierarchy and the “unofficial” swell of the popular voice.

1821-1849

During the period between the official 1821 and 1849 Methodist Episcopal hymnals,⁸ the burgeoning corpus of Sunday school hymnals focused exclusively on songs for children and young people. As Joseph Benson remarked

³ For an article on the evolution of Methodist Sunday schools in the U.S., see Jennifer Lynn Woodruff’s “Purposeful Living: Images of the Kingdom of God in Methodist Sunday School Worship,” <http://divinity.duke.edu/oxford/docs/2002papers/2002-3Woodruff.pdf>. However, based on my study of the Sunday school hymnals, I would argue for an earlier inclusion of adults than the early-twentieth century as stated by Woodruff. See further discussion on page 12. For more general reading on the history of the Sunday school movement in the (mainly) nineteenth century, see Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1988).

⁴ The term “Democratization of American Christianity” comes from Nathan Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989).

⁵ This is similar to the argument made by James Sallee about the social hymnals of the nineteenth century, when he asserted that they served as a “compromise between the churchly hymn book and the camp meeting song book,” in *A History of Evangelistic Hymnody* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 46.

⁶ The study will focus on eighteen Methodist Sunday school hymnals and five denominational hymnals. The Sunday school hymnals were taken from the Methodist Episcopal tradition and chosen for variety and based mostly on accessibility.

⁷ I borrow the terms anchor and sail from David Nyvall, *The Swedish Covenanters: A History* (Chicago: Covenant Book Concern, 1930), 10.

⁸ The 1849 hymnal was published by the Methodist Episcopal Church five years after the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, which emerged in 1844 as a separate denomination splitting over the issue of slavery.

in the preface to his collection, *Hymns for Young Persons and Children on the Principal Truths and Duty of Religion and Morality*:

It has been found by experience, and long deplored by many engaged in the instruction of Youth, as a great inconvenience, that, of all the Hymn-Books, hitherto published for the benefit of Children and Young Persons, not one affords a sufficient variety of hymns even for the regular worship usually performed in Sunday Schools on the Lord's days, much less for that used in other Schools which are wont to be opened and concluded with singing a hymn with prayer, morning and evening, every day; not to mention the daily worship which children attend in pious families, or in stated or occasional meetings.⁹

What is important to note in Benson's preface is the motivation for the compilation of the hymnal: it was not simply a collection of songs suitable for children, but it was to serve children in the larger context of "regular worship usually performed in Sunday School." The hymns of these collections bore out two unique purposes of early nineteenth century Sunday schools: that is, converting children,¹⁰ and exhorting children to moral living.

Conversion became a central focus in Sunday school hymnals, as the view evolved that children were sinful people in need of evangelization, with the goal of a post-baptismal (assuming infant baptism) profession of faith.¹¹ Hymnals achieved this goal both in structure and content. Benson structured his *Hymns for Young Persons and Children* to move children's focus from the general theism of natural theology to the specific revelatory theology of the Christian faith.¹² Similarly, Waugh and Mason's *Selection of Hymns for the Sunday School Union of the Methodist Episcopal Church* included several hymns focusing on the judgment of God,¹³ the dangers of delaying conversion,¹⁴ and death.¹⁵ The subject of the death of children was used in

⁹ Joseph Benson, ed., *Hymns for Young Persons and Children on the Principal Truths and Duty of Religion and Morality* (New York: N. Bangs and T. Mason for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1822), iii. First published in London: Printed by George Story, sold by R. Lomas at the Book-Room, New-Chapel, City Road; and the Methodist Preaching Houses in Town and Country, 1806. Note that this is an adaptation of a British Methodist text and not an original American Methodist compilation.

¹⁰ Woodruff, "Purposeful Living," 4.

¹¹ This post-baptismal profession of faith was part of Methodists' grappling with how to handle post-baptismal sin. It led to the need for a profession of faith at an appropriate "age of accountability."

¹² "If the Reader will examine the contents of the different Sections, into which the book is divided, he will find that the principal branches of natural and revealed religion are brought forward in regular order; and that the mind of the intelligent youth, who attends to the important subjects here presented to his view is gradually led on from the first principle of all religion and morality, The Existence of God, through a regular chain of Christian doctrine and practice, to the final fruition of him in glory," Benson, iii.

¹³ E.g., "That Solemn Day Will Soon Arrive," *Selection of Hymns for the Sunday School Union of the Methodist Church*, ed. B. Waugh and T. Mason (New York: Waugh and Mason, 1832), #159.

¹⁴ "The Season of Youth Is Soon Past," #65, "Hasten Sinner, to Be Wise," #67; Isaac Watts, "Why Should I Say, 'Tis Yet Too Soon," #68, all in *Selection of Hymns*.

¹⁵ E.g., "'Tis But a Short, Uncertain Space," *Selection of Hymns*, #153. See also the relevant section in Joseph Rusling, *Hymns Composed for the Use of Sunday School and Youthful Christians* (Philadelphia: J. Van Court, 1837), 131-136. Both Rusling and those signing their names in recommendation of the hymnal were ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

early Sunday school hymnals in part as a tool for evangelization. For example, noted hymn writer Anne Steele beseeched:

When blooming youth is snatch'd away
By death's restless hand,
Our hearts the mournful tribute pay,
Which pity must demand.

Let this vain world engage no more:
Behold the gaping tomb;
It bids us seize the present hour;
To morrow [sic] death may come.¹⁶

Just as the spirit of revival pushed U.S. Methodism towards conversion of the masses at camp meetings, so too the spirit of revival helped to push the Sunday school into becoming a platform for the conversion of children's souls to Christ.

Once children were successfully converted, many hymnals exhorted children to lead moral, Christian lives, pointing negatively to common youthful vices: e.g., stealing,¹⁷ lying,¹⁸ swearing,¹⁹ and idleness,²⁰ and emphasizing positively the virtues of obedience to parents²¹ and the proper use of wealth.²² Youthful biblical characters such as Samuel, David, Timothy, Moses, and a young Jesus were often lifted up as moral exemplars for pious living.²³ Thus, Sunday school hymnals of the period 1821 to 1849 sought both to evangelize children and to socialize them into moral Christians of upright conduct.

As the focus of Sunday school shifted away from evangelism and morality, many of the more strident and didactic hymns became (thankfully!) obsolete, due, in part, to the editors of the Sunday school hymnals choosing hymns that spoke both to the experience of children at their level and just above their level, in the hope that the more mature hymns of great theological depth would serve to stretch children's theological development. Benson's preface explained this approach:

The Editor is aware that a great many of the Hymns inserted in this Collection, are

¹⁶ Anne Steele, "When Blooming Youth Is Snatch'd Away," *Selection of Hymns*, #154.

¹⁷ Benjamin Rhodes, "Thou Shalt Not Steal Thy Neighbour's Right," *Selection of Hymns*, #128.

¹⁸ Benjamin Rhodes, "The Liar who the Truth Denies," *Selection of Hymns*, #129; Charles Wesley, "Happy the Well Instructed Youth," *Selection of Hymns*, #130.

¹⁹ Isaac Watts, "Angels That High in Glory Dwell," *Selection of Hymns*, #131.

²⁰ Charles Wesley, "Idle Boys and Men Are Found," *Selection of Hymns*, #132.

²¹ Charles Wesley, "What Child of Heavenly Birth," *Selection of Hymns*, #117; Isaac Watts, "Let Children that Would Fear the Lord," *Selection of Hymns*, #118. In warning children of the dangers of disobedience, Watts' hymn included perhaps the most macabre of all hymn stanzas in the study: "What heavy guilt upon him lies! (the disobedient child) / How cursed is his name! / The ravens shall pick out his eyes, / And eagles eat the same."

²² "My Gracious God! Accept My Prayer," *Selection of Hymns*, #116.

²³ "Moses Did Fear the Lord," *Hymns Composed for the Use of Sunday Schools*, 113; "Young Timothy Was Early Taught," *Hymns Composed for the Use of Sunday Schools*, 114; Charles Wesley, "Oh That I, Like Timothy," *Selection of Hymns*, #44; "What Blessed Examples Do I Find," *Selection of Hymns*, #69; and Charles Wesley, "Happy Samuel! to God," *Selection of Hymns*, #70.

as proper for persons of mature age as for Children or Youths. But instead of apologizing for this as a fault or error in his compilation, he is rather disposed to view it as an excellence, being of opinion with a late pious and learned Divine, that of the two ways of writing or speaking to Children, the more excellent is, not that “whereby we let ourselves down to them,” but that “whereby we endeavour to lift them up to us.”²⁴

The distinction between hymns for children and hymns for adults was not always clear. When the 1849 *Hymns for the Use of the Methodist Episcopal Church* came out, several hymns within this era of Sunday school hymnody entered the mainstream of Methodist (and Christian) hymnody.

The 1849 hymnal was a hymnal of addition rather than subtraction. While over 100 hymns were dropped between the 1821 and 1849 hymnals,²⁵ over 640 were added bringing the total to a staggering 1148 hymns.²⁶ Because of this great increase in hymns, the 1849 collection was also the only hymnal up to the present that increased the number of Wesleyan hymns when compared to its predecessor. The 1849 hymnal boasted 558 Wesley texts, compared to the already substantial 429 of its 1836 (the 1821 original plus the supplement) forebear.²⁷ It was also the first U.S. Methodist hymnal to include hymn texts (50) authored in the United States.²⁸

With such a great number of hymns added, to report that twenty-one of the new hymns were first published in the 1822 and 1832 Sunday school hymnals may seem of little import.²⁹ Yet, it is not so much the quantity of the hymns but the quality of hymns that make them worthy of mention. Of those twenty-one hymns, several became classics of Methodist and U.S. hymnody: Edward Perronet’s “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name;” Philip Doddridge’s “Awake, My Soul, Stretch Every Nerve” and “Hark! the Glad Sound! the Saviour Comes!;” John Griggs’ “Jesus, and It Shall Ever Be;” Thomas Ken’s “Awake, My Soul, and With the Sun;” Watts’ “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross;” William Cowper’s “What Glory Gilds the Sacred Page;” and Wesley’s “Christ the Lord Is Risen To-day” (without the refrains of “Alleluia” at the end of each line as contemporary congregations now sing it). Interestingly, none of the songs added from the Sunday school hymnals was added to the “Sunday School” section of the 1849 hymnal, showing at this time the fluidity of hymns not only between children and adults but also between those employed for Sunday school and for the regular Sunday wor-

²⁴ Benson, iii-iv.

²⁵ While there was an 1836 hymnal put out between the two hymnals, it was identical to the 1821 with the addition of ninety songs, mostly for special occasions such as the dedication of a church, anniversaries, and, most interestingly in our current endeavor, a four hymn section entitled “Anniversary-Sunday Schools” that includes two songs—“Come Let Our Voices Join,” #646; and “Thou, Who Didst with Love and Blessing,” #647—that were published previously in Waugh and Mason’s *Selection of Hymns*, respectively #17 and #27. “Come Let Our Voices Join” was formatted to be sung antiphonally between adults and children.

²⁶ If not cited otherwise, all counting of shared hymns between the various hymnals is done by the author.

²⁷ Tyson, “Methodist National Anthem,” 29-30.

²⁸ Tyson, 30.

²⁹ Interestingly, the 1837 *Hymns Composed for Use of Sunday Schools* provided no new songs to the hymnal.

ship of the local congregation.³⁰ Thus, in United States Methodism during the first half of the nineteenth century, Sunday school hymnals were largely produced for the conversion and continued moral living of children. Yet because of the lack of sharp distinction between children's hymns and adult hymns, many of the classic British hymns of the Methodist and U.S. canon first appeared in Methodist Sunday school hymnals before they became standard fare in denominational hymnals.

1849-1878

Following the production of the 1849 hymnal, the publishing of smaller unauthorized hymnals exploded in the United States; Sunday school hymnals were no exception. Yet, Sunday school hymnals were transformed as the aims of Sunday schools evolved. Under the influence of liberal Congregational pastor and theologian Horace Bushnell, Sunday schools—and later, hymns³¹—became less focused upon conversion, judgment, and death, and more focused upon nurturing children in the Christian faith.³² As Bushnell noted:

[T]he aim, effort, and expectation should be, not, as is commonly assumed, that the child is to grow up in sin, to be converted after he [sic] comes to a mature age; but that he is to open on the world as one that is spiritually renewed, not remembering the time when he went through a technical experience, but seeming rather to have loved what is good from his earliest years.³³

Concurrent with this development, the intended audience of Sunday schools expanded from children to the entire congregation, causing Sunday school hymnals to expand beyond their initial paedo-centric focus. As Ellen Jane Porter noted in her article, "The Sunday School Movement," "As classes for adults infiltrate the Sunday schools, the books become more adult-oriented and songs for children are segregated into special sections."³⁴

In reaction to the continued effort to preserve what was of follow in previous editions of denominationally approved hymnals, Sunday school hymnals of this period were also marked by an increased incorporation of gospel and revival hymnody. Many editors used the hymnals' prefaces as an apology for this greater inclusion of gospel and revival hymns. For instance, Eben Tourjee, in his 1873 *A Tribute of Praise*, first attempted to appease the critics by asserting that in his hymnal, "Trashy and sentimental compositions have

³⁰ To the extent that churches were indeed using the sanctioned hymnals.

³¹ This was a process that developed over time. So, in Daniel Kidder's *Sunday Schools, Youth and Children*, the focus was still primarily (but not solely) on children, and topics include "The Sinner," "The Penitent," "The Convert," and "Christian Experience" (New York: Carlton and Phillips, 1854), 5.

³² For further reading on this evolution, see chapter five of Boylan, "Conversion & Christian Nurture: Children and Childhood in Sunday Schools," *Sunday School*, 133-165.

³³ Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (New York: Scribner, 1861), 10.

³⁴ Ellen Jane Porter, "The Sunday School Movement," *The Hymn* 35.4 (October, 1984): 212. She based this generalization on the study of her (approximately) 175 Sunday school hymnal collection from this period.

been discarded.”³⁵ Yet, he also pushed back at the critics, noting:

While some of its hymns and tunes may not fulfil [sic] the requirements of the most fastidious taste, their inherent usefulness, and the devotional spirit they breathe, have secured their introduction. No hymn or tune should be discarded on account of defects in its structure, if upon trial it is found to enkindle, or give utterance to, the devotional fervor of the church of Christ.³⁶

Paradigmatic of the camp meeting and revival movement as a whole, experience, not taste (or even theology, explicitly) became the key criterion for distinguishing good hymns.

Yet before the official 1878 *Methodist Hymnal* was published, the Methodist Episcopal Church attempted to exert control over the flurry of Sunday school and Social hymnals being produced by publishing *The Lesser Hymnal: A Collection of Hymns, Selected Chiefly from the Standard Hymn-Book* in 1875. The chief aim of the book was made clear at the outset. Under the “Official Sanction” heading, the Book Committee asserted: “Resolved, That we recommend the Book Agents to publish a small collection of hymns mostly from our Hymn book, for use in Sunday-schools and in Social Worship.”³⁷ Similarly, the introduction made clear its motivations for the publishing of *The Lesser Hymnal*:

It is of the very first importance that the children in our Sunday-schools should know the Hymns in common use in our public worship. This will prepare them to join in the singing in our social meetings, and to take part in the devotional services of the sanctuary. It will be incentive to them to attend public worship, because they will be prepared to share in its exercises. These Hymns will furnish them with sentiments and spiritual songs that will be useful to them in hours of penitence, of temptation, of adversity, of religious joy, of closet devotion, and when dying. O! how different from those flippant, sentimental, semi-religious songs used in so many of our Sunday-schools! The importance of having the same hymns generally used at our family altars, in our Sunday schools, and in our public congregations, cannot well be over-estimated.³⁸

Interestingly, of the ninety new hymns presented in the 1875 *Lesser Hymnal*, only six of them had not appeared in a prior Sunday school hymnal. Indeed, *The Lesser Hymnal* is almost assuredly heavily influenced by the 1873 *Tribute of Praise*, as all eighty-four of the new hymns that had appeared in previous Sunday school hymnals appeared in *Tribute of Praise* with the identical six songs excluded. Of these ninety new songs, thirty-two went on to be included in the 1878 *Methodist Hymnal*.

When the 1878 *Methodist Hymnal* came out, its editors also made an implicit plea against the unauthorized use of Sunday school and social hymnals, stating in its preface:

³⁵ Eben Tourjee, ed., *A Tribute of Praise: A Collection of Hymns and Tunes for Public and Social Worship, and for Use in the Family Circle and Sabbath School* (New York: Nelson & Phillips; Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walden, 1873), iii.

³⁶ Tourjee, *Tribute of Praise*, iii.

³⁷ *The Lesser Hymnal: A Collection of Hymns, Selected Chiefly from the Standard Hymn-Book* (New York: Nelson & Phillips; Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walden, 1875), 3.

³⁸ E. S. Janes, ed. “Introductory,” in *The Lesser Hymnal*, 3.

Frequent gatherings of the congregation in praise-meetings, and for instruction and practice in learning new tunes, are very desirable. For the sake of variety and freshness, the pastor and chorister should make persistent efforts to encourage the congregation to learn new tunes. The book should be the standard book of the Sunday-school, and should be constantly used in the social meeting as well as in the congregation.³⁹

The need for such exhortation indicates two possible problems in Methodist congregational singing. First, it may imply poor singing on the part of the congregation, brought on by a lack of hymnic literacy. Without a common canon, learning more than a few songs well is difficult. Further, it could indicate that the proliferation of Sunday school hymnals was sufficiently widespread to elicit a response on the part of Methodist leaders hoping to direct Methodist Sunday schools and social gatherings to the singing of more traditional Methodist hymns. If this were indeed the case, the call for a common hymnal can be seen as the denomination's attempt to reassert its control and rein in what they saw as the excesses of the unauthorized hymnals.

When we explore which hymns first published in Sunday school hymnals went on to be included in the official 1878 hymnal, we notice three major influences: British hymnody, American shape note tradition, and American gospel hymnody. From British hymnody came not only the strong background of hymns by the Wesleys, Isaac Watts, and James Montgomery, but also hymns influenced by the Oxford Movement of the mid-nineteenth century. Of the latter, most notable were Scottish Anglican Henry Francis Lyte's "Abide with Me," "Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken," and "Praise My Soul the King of Heaven," which all appeared first as Sunday school hymns before the 1878 hymnal.⁴⁰ American shape note tunes were also wed to English texts, becoming part of the American gospel vernacular and making them almost instant classics. Among the more obvious were the settings in prior Sunday school hymnals of Robert Robinson's "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing" to Nettleton, and English poet William Cowper's "There Is a Fountain" to *Cleansing Fountain*.⁴¹ Most prominently, the American gospel tradition became central to the Methodist Sunday school hymnals. Through those hymnals (as well as the broader Social hymnals), gospel hymns began to make their first mark on the authorized Methodist hymnals. J. H. Gilmore's "He Leadeth Me! O Blessed Thought," Annie S. Hawks' "I Need

³⁹ "Preface," *Hymnal of the Methodist Episcopal Church, with Tunes* (New York: Hunt & Eaton; Cincinnati: Cranston & Stowe, 1878), vii.

⁴⁰ One seeming influence on the 1878 hymnal and its Sunday school predecessors is *Hymns Ancient and Modern*. Of the new hymns in the 1878 hymnal, over 40 of them come from this influential British hymnal. Both "Abide with Me" and "Praise My Soul the King of Heaven" were included in *Hymns Ancient and Modern*. While not influenced by the Oxford Movement, Unitarian Sarah Adams' "Nearer, My God, to Thee" also moved up through the ranks of the Sunday school hymnals into the 1878 collection.

⁴¹ Interestingly, John Newton's ubiquitous "Amazing Grace" was not set to the now-famous "New Britain/Amazing Grace" in the denominational hymnal until the 1935 hymnal. The 1878 hymnal combines the six stanzas of common meter (C.M.) into three stanzas of common meter double (C.M.D.) and sets it to the obscure Truman. The 1905 hymnal returns the stanzas to common meter and is wed to the tune Spohr (then named Simpson).

Thee Every Hour,” and William Walford’s “Sweet Hour of Prayer” (which, by appearing in five of the six Sunday school hymnals, is the most popular song during this period) all transitioned from the Sunday school hymnals into the 1878 hymnal. Musically, these gospel hymns were characterized by simple melodic structures with easily-remembered refrains.⁴² These singable hymns centering on the faith experience of the individual became so immensely popular with the average Methodist that they finally broke in to the sanctioned denominational hymnody with the 1878 hymnal.

This period of Methodist hymnody continued to be marked by British, U.S. institutional, and U.S. popular influences. British revivalism influenced the movement (i.e., Charlotte Elliott’s “Just As I Am”), but so too did the British Oxford Movement that reclaimed many ancient hymns and chants. The U.S. leaders of Methodism represented a more conservative trend, reacting against the excesses of revival and gospel hymnody while promoting the historic Wesleyan tradition. The voice of the U.S. populous clamored for the uniquely American gospel and shaped-note traditions that both spoke to the American experience of revivalism and individualism and were enjoyable to sing. While all three influences can be traced through the Sunday school hymnals into the denominational hymnals, the Sunday school hymnals of this period most fully represent the U.S. popular movement that sought to sing songs of personal experience unique to the U.S. brand of Christianity developing throughout the nineteenth century. Generally, this was the era where the Methodist Sunday school hymnals served as a sail for Methodist hymnody, pushing the denominational hymnals to a greater inclusion of gospel and revival hymns.

1878-1905

The general proliferation of Sunday school hymnals continued unabated after the 1878 *Methodist Hymnal*. Yet, the concerns presented in the introduction of the 1875 and 1878 hymnals seem not to have fallen completely on deaf ears. In attempting to make the case for a balance between intellect and experience, the preface of *Imperial Songs for Sunday Schools, Social Meetings, Epworth Leagues, Revival Services* noted:

[T]he songs of the Sunday school should be thoughtfully chosen. They should be more than popular melodies and simple rhymes. They should utter noble thoughts in right words; they should possess gospel truth and spiritual power. The singing of the Sunday school should be a part of its educational work, while it imparts an atmosphere of gladness to its services. It should inspire an intelligent as well as an ardent piety. It should refine and now lower the taste of those who join in the singing.⁴³

⁴² Tyson, 26. Since many of these hymns started at revival meetings, they needed simple refrains that could be sung without printed lyrics or music, which would not have been easily available at campgrounds or revival meetings. Many were composed spontaneously at the camp-meetings and then preserved.

⁴³ Jesse L. Hurlbut and Stephen V.R. Ford, eds., *Imperial Songs for Sunday Schools, Social Meetings, Epworth Leagues, Revival Meetings* (New York: Hunt & Eaton; Cincinnati: Cranston & Curtis, 1894), 3. Emphasis mine.

Yet, while the hymnal attempted to bridge the gap between denominational theology and popular demands, most of the hymnals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Sunday school movement were still firmly entrenched within the popular revival and gospel movement. Of the six hymnals studied during this period, all were integrally connected to the gospel and revival movements. Five of the hymnals made their connection to gospel and/or revival hymnody explicit in their titles.⁴⁴ The sixth, Lowry and Doane's *Our Glad Hosanna!*, derived its commitment to gospel hymnody from Doane's extensive work within the field, particularly as the composer of hundreds of tunes for Fanny J. Crosby's texts.⁴⁵

The 1905 *Methodist Hymnal* in many ways changed the course of Methodism and Methodist hymnody. It was a joint venture between the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South—prefiguring their union three decades later.⁴⁶ It also was the first of the Methodist hymnals to reduce drastically the number of hymns, specifically Wesleyan hymns. The total hymns were reduced from 1,117 in the 1878 hymnal (excluding doxologies and “occasional pieces and chants”) to 748 hymns (including “occasional pieces and chants”). Corresponding with this drop, the number of Wesleyan hymns (authored by John or Charles) dropped from 338 in the 1878 hymnal to 140 in 1905 as hymns from other denominational sources and new particularly American hymns were added to the canon.

When compared with the Sunday school hymnals that preceded the 1905 hymnal, there seems to be a reduction in the influence of the Sunday school hymnals on the denominational hymnals. Whereas the 1878 hymnal saw over 100 of its new hymns first appear in the Sunday school hymnals included within this specific study, only twenty of the hymnal's new selections were first published in one of the six hymnals analyzed. This can be partially—but not completely—explained by the drop in the overall number of hymns included in the hymnals between the 1878 and 1905. It also seems the Sunday

⁴⁴ Hurlbut and Ford, *Imperial Songs for Sunday Schools, Social Meetings, Epworth Leagues, Revival Services*; George D. Elderkin, ed., *The Finest of the Wheat: Hymns New and Old for Missionary and Revival Meetings and Sabbath-Schools* (Chicago: R.R. McCabe & Co., 1890); E. O. Excell, ed., *The Gospel Hymnal for Sunday School and Church Work* (Cincinnati: Jennings & Pye; New York: Easton & Mains, 1899); James M. Black, *Songs of the Soul No. 2, for Use in Sunday Evening Congregations, Revivals, Camp-meetings, Social Services and Young People's Gathering* (Cincinnati: Curtis & Jennings; New York: Eaton & Mains, 1896); James M. Black, *The Epworth Hymnal No. 3, for Use in Young People's Meetings, Sunday Schools, Prayer Meetings and Revivals* (New York: Eaton & Mains; Cincinnati: Jennings & Pye, 1900). What Philip Phillips was to the previous generation of Sunday school hymnals, Black was to the next generation. *The Methodist Union Catalog: Pre-1976 Imprints*, vol 2, ed. Kenneth E. Rowe, (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1976), 2-3, shows eleven Sunday school hymnals edited (or co-edited) by Black. He also wrote many hymns, the most popular being, “When the Roll is Called Up Yonder.”

⁴⁵ He was also Fanny J. Crosby's manager of sorts, which perhaps helps explain the many Crosby/Doane hymns within *Our Glad Hosanna!*

⁴⁶ The 1935 *Methodist Hymnal* was also a joint venture but included the Methodist Protestant Church as well. The three denominations would merge in 1939 into the Methodist Church.

school hymnal's influence was waning as the British Oxford Movement's was waxing. In the 1878 hymnal, forty-three of the new hymns were printed previously in the immensely influential 1861 *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, a British hymnal—heavily influenced by the burgeoning Oxford Movement—that continues to be updated and printed to this day. In the 1905 *Methodist Hymnal*, forty-five of the new hymns had already appeared in the 1904 edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*.⁴⁷ Further Anglican influence can be noted in the fifty-two responsive readings added to the hymnal for morning and evening prayer,⁴⁸ the traditional times for Matins and Evensong worship in the Anglican Church.

Of the twenty new hymns that made their way from the Sunday school hymnals into the 1905 *Methodist Hymnal*, those printed multiple times in different Sunday school hymnals were predominantly of the gospel stripe. Most famous is no doubt Fanny J. Crosby's "Blessed Assurance," which appeared in four of the six Sunday school hymnals in the study. Indeed, Hurlburt and Ford lauded it in the preface of *Imperial Songs* as a song "sung in all lands."⁴⁹ The only hymn to appear in more of the preceding Sunday school hymnals (five) was Methodist Episcopal pastor William McDonald's "I Am Coming to the Cross," which was written when McDonald was a pastor in Brooklyn and desired a song "to aid seekers of heart purity while at the altar."⁵⁰ Other popular additions included Edward Hopper's "Jesus, Saviour, Pilot Me" (four instances), Marcus M. Wells' "Holy Spirit, Faithful Guide" (three instances), Jeremiah Rankin's "God Be with You Till We Meet Again" (three instances), and Frances R. Havergal's "Take My Life, and Let It Be" (two instances).⁵¹ While their influence waned during this period, the Sunday school hymnals continued to serve as a sail for Methodist hymnody, influencing the inclusion of the most well-loved gospel songs of the era into the 1905 denominational hymnal.

1905-1935

The beginning of the twentieth century marked another turning point for Sunday school hymnals. The Sunday school hymnals of the two previous generations were generally marked by three characteristics: 1) a broadening of the intended audience of the hymnals from an exclusive focus on children and youth to the inclusion of adults; 2) a widening of the scope of the hymnals from Sunday schools only, to other social gatherings of the

⁴⁷ While the closeness in date of the two hymnals' publications makes a one-to-one direct influence unlikely, it shows the influence the Oxford Movement's hymns were having on their U.S. Methodist counterparts.

⁴⁸ Young, *Companion to the United Methodist Hymnal*, 112.

⁴⁹ Hurlburt and Ford, 3. "Blessed Assurance" actually appeared in the 1873 *Tribute of Praise* and the 1875 *Lesser Hymnal* but was passed over by the 1878 hymnal.

⁵⁰ Edward Summerfield Ninde, *The Story of the American Hymn* (New York: Abingdon, 1921), 408.

⁵¹ None of the remaining twenty hymns was published in more than one of the six Sunday school hymnals.

church (e.g., revivals, social meetings, etc.); 3) and a largely, but not exclusively, progressive influence on the denominational hymnals that pushed for the inclusion of popular gospel hymns. Yet after the 1905 hymnal, Sunday school hymnals reversed many of these trends. First, the hymnals generally reverted to their focus on youth and children within the Sunday school. Also, while still introducing gospel hymns that would become standards in denominational hymnals, the Sunday school hymnals also influenced the inclusion of children's hymns, social gospel hymns, and hymns specific to the different liturgical seasons of the Church into the denominational hymnal. Finally, where the previous Sunday school hymnals generally concentrated on introducing new music to the masses, this generation of hymnals also played a role in preserving many hymns that had been dropped from the denominational hymnal in 1905.

The hinge upon which many of these changes turned was the publication of the 1911 *Methodist Sunday School Hymnal*.⁵² As the prefatory note explained:

As part of the new Sunday school legislation enacted at Baltimore, the General Conference of 1908 authorized the newly created Board of Sunday Schools to prepare a Sunday School Hymnal It has been the aim of the Editor and the Committee to provide for our Sunday schools a hymnal really adapted to their needs. It is their conviction that our Sunday schools have suffered much from the very general use of books not especially designed or adapted to the needs and capacities of youth. It is their conviction, furthermore, that the Sunday schools will appreciate the best in hymns and tunes, if they have a fair chance really to know the best. But the best hymns and tunes, like the best friends, are not fully appreciated at once, but grow richer in meaning and become dearer to us as the years go by. In this book will be found a preponderance of hymns and carols long known and loved. This is doubtless as it should be. But it is hoped that what is new will prove itself worthy of its place in such a collection.⁵³

The prefatory note of *The Methodist Sunday School Hymnal* seems foundational to the aforementioned changes made to Sunday school hymnals of the era. First, the editors noted that the larger scope of the previous Sunday school hymns caused the youth of the Sunday school to “suffer” with “books not especially designed or adapted to the needs and capacities of youth.” Thus, this hymnal would focus specifically on “[t]he young folk from the Junior age up through youthhood and into early manhood and womanhood.” Josephine Baldwin made a similar point in the preface (and title!) of her 1923 *Services and Songs for Use in the Junior Department of Sunday School*, stating: “The purpose in the preparation of this book has been to furnish through instrumental music, hymns, songs, and Scripture passages, material which will both arouse and fittingly express the religious feelings normal to junior boys and girls.”⁵⁴ Of the thirteen Sunday school hymnals listed in the

⁵² John R. Van Pelt and Peter C. Lutkin, *The Methodist Sunday School Hymnal* (New York: Eaton & Mains; Cincinnati: Jennings & Graham, 1911).

⁵³ Van Pelt and Lutkin, *Methodist Sunday School Hymnal*, ii.

⁵⁴ Josephine L. Baldwin, ed., *Services and Songs for Use in the Junior Department of Sunday School* (New York: Abingdon, 1923), iii.

Methodist Union Catalog during this period, ten were specifically aimed at youth or young adults.⁵⁵

Further, while not openly denigrating the hymns selected for previous books, by stating, “Sunday schools will appreciate the best in hymns and tunes, if they have a fair chance really to know the best,” the editors of the 1911 *Methodist Sunday School Hymnal* implied that many previous Sunday school hymnals had not supplied Sunday schools with “the best” hymns available. To remedy this problem, the editors asserted, “In this will be found a preponderance of hymns and carols long known and loved. This is doubtless as it should be.” The preface of *The Abingdon Hymnal: A Book of Worship for Youth* similarly committed itself to the inclusion of “a body of classic and standard hymns mellowed and proven by long use.” These hymns are described as “[h]ymns of the ages, hymns that never grow old,” hymns that “express the Christian experience which . . . flows down through the centuries.”⁵⁶ These hymns and hymnals were constructed to stand the test of time.

The 1935 *Methodist Hymnal*—produced jointly by the Methodist Episcopal Church; Methodist Episcopal Church, South; and the Methodist Protestant Church—would presage the unification of the three denominations into the Methodist Church four years later. The 1935 hymnal further exemplified the conservative streak that had begun earlier in the Sunday school hymnals of this period. Its preface, for example, asserted, “Some hymns from former editions have been restored. The hymns of the ages have been re-examined and many of surpassing merit, which hitherto have not appeared in Methodist hymn and tune books, have been introduced.”⁵⁷ Benjamin Franklin Crawford, in his 1939 *Theological Trends of Methodist Worship*, argued that the 1935 hymnal was a movement to a more “stately worship.”⁵⁸ One sign of this stateliness was the displacement of “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing” from its historic and honorary position as the first hymn of the hymnal, and its replacement by the more “stately” “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty.”⁵⁹ Gospel hymns were also gathered into one section under the heading “Songs of Salvation.” Some saw this segregation as the hymnal’s way of marking the gospel hymns as “second-class” within the hymnal.⁶⁰ Thus, the conservative trend that began in the Sunday

⁵⁵ Kenneth E. Rowe, ed., *The Methodist Union Catalog*, vol. 6 (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1985), 291-297. The other three hymnals were all compiled by James M. Black, whose ethos was more characteristic of the previous era of Sunday school hymnals.

⁵⁶ Earl Enyeart Harper, *The Abingdon Hymnal: A Book of Worship for Youth* (New York, Abingdon, 1928), 3-4.

⁵⁷ Robert G. McCutchan, ed., *The Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The Methodist Publishing House, 1935). By my count, 18 hymns that were dropped from the 1905 hymnal reappear in 1935.

⁵⁸ Benjamin Franklin Crawford, *Theological Trends in Methodist Hymnody* (Carnegie, PA: Carnegie Church Press, 1939), 165.

⁵⁹ Tyson, 36. This trend reversed in 1964, and “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing” was again the first hymn in the hymnal.

⁶⁰ Young, *Companion to the United Methodist Hymnal*, 114. Granted, others felt that any inclusion of gospel hymns was a capitulation to popular demands.

school hymnals continued into the denominational hymnal of 1935.

This conservative trend was also evident in the great number of hymns that were retained in Sunday school hymnals even after they were dropped from denominational hymnals. Sixteen hymns that were dropped from the 1905 hymnal were recovered in the five Sunday school hymnals examined for this study. For comparison's sake, only two hymns were recovered in the sample of Sunday school hymnals after being dropped from the 1878 hymnal, and only three after 1849. Moreover, of these sixteen hymns, five were reintroduced in the 1935 hymnal: Dix's "As with Gladness Men of Old"; Whiting's "Eternal Father! Strong to Save"; Longfellow's "Holy Spirit, Truth Divine"; Lyte's "Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven"; and King's "When, His Salvation Bringing."⁶¹ Thus, Sunday school hymnals did not simply conserve favorite old hymns people still wanted to sing; they also assisted in re-introducing hymns into the denominational hymnal.

Sunday school hymnals continued to introduce many of the hymns that made their way into denominational hymnals. This was particularly true of gospel hymns. Crosby's "I Am Thine, O Lord"; Samuel O'Malley Cluff's "I Have a Saviour, He's Pleading in Heaven" (set to music by Ira Sankey); Will Thompson's "Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling"; and Philip Phillips' "I Will Sing You a Song of that Beautiful Land" were all introduced in Sunday school hymnals before their inclusion into the 1935 *Methodist Hymnal*. Yet, by 1935, gospel hymns made up only a portion (not even a majority) of the crossover hymns. Social gospel hymns (or those claimed by the social gospel movement) were also introduced to many Methodists through the Sunday school hymnals, including William Merrill's "Rise Up, O Men of God"; Henry Van Dyke's "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee"; Longfellow's "God's Trumpet Wakes The Slumbering World"; and John Addington Symond's "These Things Shall Be: A Loftier Race." Two hymns originally written for children—"Once in Royal David's City" and "All Things Bright and Beautiful"—by Cecil Frances Alexander and first published in her 1848 collection, *Hymns for Little Children*, are examples of hymns that appeared first in Sunday school hymnals before becoming hymns for people of any age. Gospel hymns continued to be introduced into denominational hymnody through the Sunday school hymnals in this period, even as the variety of genres within those hymnals widened significantly. If the prior two periods of Sunday school hymnody acted as a sail for denominational hymnody, this period acted as an anchor, rooting Methodist hymnody in its historic hymns and the broader traditional hymnody of the Church.

What is to account for the change witnessed in Sunday school hymnals of the early twentieth century? Perhaps the best explanation can be found in the first sentence of the prefatory note of *The Methodist Sunday School Hymnal* (1911): "As part of the new Sunday school legislation enacted at Baltimore, the General Conference of 1908 authorized the newly created Board of

⁶¹ Two of the five—"Holy Spirit, Truth Divine" and "Praise My Soul, the King of Heaven"—are still found in *The United Methodist Hymnal* [1989].

Sunday Schools to prepare a Sunday School Hymnal.”⁶² Sunday schools were increasingly coming under denominational control, and Sunday school hymnals would no longer be published willy-nilly by Methodist publishers under little supervision. This also marks the beginning of what may be termed the “age of respectability” for Methodism. Long thought of as a revival religion on the frontier, more Methodists were becoming “respectable” middle-upper class citizens that desired a more “stately” worship to fit their new lifestyle. Combined with the influence of the Anglo-Catholic Oxford Movement, this led to both Sunday school and denominational hymnals moving in a more formal liturgical direction during the early twentieth century.

Conclusion

Having completed our study, we can now broadly trace the trajectory of Sunday school hymnals within the Methodist Episcopal Church. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Methodist Sunday school hymnals focused their attention on the conversion and socialization of children. The hymns of lasting influence within the Sunday school hymnals were largely the classic British hymns of Montgomery, Wesley, and Watts that avoided the overt themes of conversion and moral exhortation and could be sung by children and adults alike. The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a proliferation of Sunday school hymnals that attempted both to broaden the focus of Sunday schools from children to persons of all ages and to combine Sunday school hymns with hymns for other social church functions like revivals, camp meetings, and prayer meetings. As such, these hymnals’ impact was largely felt in their introduction of popular gospel hymns into the mainstream of denominational hymnody.⁶³ Early twentieth-century Sunday school hymnals came full circle and narrowed their focus back to children and youth. Now, instead of simply introducing hymns to denominational hymnals, they also preserved hymns that were previously dropped from the denominational hymnals. The genre of hymns they introduced also greatly expanded beyond the gospel hymns of the previous century. Thus, the Sunday school hymnals served different functions throughout their history.

When summing up the impact of Sunday school hymnals on the denominational hymnals, perhaps the best way to characterize such hymnals is as an intermediary. To use a baseball metaphor, the Sunday school hymnals might be the “minor leagues” to the denominational hymnals’ “major leagues.” Many hymns that would go on to become major-leaguers first started in the minors, working their way up. Many major-leaguers on their way to retirement stopped off in the minors for their last hurrah before passing into obscurity. Finally, there were those rare hymns that dropped into the minors, maintained popularity, and worked their way back into the majors of

⁶² Van Pelt and Lutkin, *Methodist Sunday School Hymnal*, ii.

⁶³ While this statement is generally true, we should not forget the more conservative innovation of Anglican chant that Sunday school hymnals also helped introduce.

denominational hymnody. The Sunday school hymnals thus served to test the quality and longevity of hymns before they were included in the regular denominational corpus and to provide a place where beloved hymns no longer deemed appropriate for Sunday worship could be sung. Further, as a fluid intermediary they were both able to accelerate the pace of change when denominational hymnody grew too rigid in its conservatism and later, under a more firm denominational control, to decelerate the pace of change and reclaim hymns that had been left behind in the rush forward.

Thus, unlike the hymnals that either ignored the gospel movement entirely or gave themselves totally to the evangelistic fervor of gospel and revival hymnody, Methodist hymnody was able to mediate between these two extremes. By serving as a fluid intermediary, the Sunday school hymnals helped the U.S. Methodist church develop a corpus of hymnody that gave weight to both the popular hymns that spoke to individual Christian experience and the traditional hymns that carried the historic faith and theology of the Church tested through the ages.