

other, but always a both/and. As Jane writes at the end of the title poem of *Acquiring Land*:

I need more and more addresses.  
On a cold day in Paradise I must have some place to go.

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*Voices Together*. Harrisonburg, VA: MennoMedia, 2020. Pp. 1156. Hardcover, \$32.99.

Denominational hymnals tend to be published every quarter century or so. The lineage of *Voices Together* of 2020, the most recent addition to the hymnals used by congregations in Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA, can be traced back to the *Mennonite Hymnary* of 1940, commissioned by what was then known as the General Conference Mennonite Church. It was followed by *The Mennonite Hymnal* of 1969, a joint project of the (Old) Mennonite Church and the General Conference. The development of *Hymnal: A Worship Book* of 1992 was complicated by the inclusion of a committee from the Church of the Brethren, whose hymnal of 1951 urgently needed renewal. By the time the need for a new twenty-first century hymnal had become apparent, the General Conference, joined by the Mennonite Church, had separated into Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA. In a departure from the previous practice of producing hymnals within the denominations themselves, MennoMedia of Harrisonburg, Virginia, was commissioned to undertake the project.

New hymnals straddle the border between past and future. On the one hand they have to preserve the musical heritage of the past, the core group of hymns that have been sung in Christian churches over the centuries, and on the other hand they have to present congregations with musical materials relevant to the present and try to peer into the future to provide musical and theological materials that will last until the next hymnal appears. How they do this will never be without controversy.

The people who have to navigate this tricky and occasionally treacherous terrain belong to the hymnal committees. The evolution of such committees reflects the larger society in some interesting ways. It is not surprising to learn that the 1940 committee consisted only of men, for example, or that the 1969 hymnal committee included just one woman, Mary Oyer of Goshen College. By the time

the 1992 hymnal was in the works the gender distribution had changed dramatically, with women comprising almost half of the General Conference, Church of the Brethren, and Mennonite Church committees. The *Voices Together* group was more compact, but was also equally divided between male and female members, with the stated goal of finding and incorporating the work of female composers and poets.

The evolving recognition of Mennonites as a global community can also be traced in the hymnals. The 1969 hymnal made some tentative steps in this direction by including six non-Western hymns. Thanks to Mary Oyer, whose 1972 sabbatical in Africa had opened her eyes to the world of African music and world music in general, and the 1978 Mennonite World Conference in Wichita, which introduced North American Mennonites to the hymns of the global Mennonite church, the 1992 hymnal included more than three dozen. The expansion of the Mennonite hymn universe in subsequent decades is demonstrated by the fact that there are more hymns in *Voices Together* in Spanish (59), German (24), and French (20) alone than there were non-English hymns in total in the previous Mennonite hymnal. Furthermore, the variety of languages and cultures is vastly greater. The committee reports that roughly fifty languages are represented in the latest hymnal, including Arabic, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Cheyenne, Urdu, Ute, and more.

Continuity with the past is managed reasonably well in *Voices Together*, although most users will undoubtedly find at least a few favourite hymns missing. The 1992 hymnal included a number of texts from the *Ausbund* and Anabaptist authors like Menno Simons, Felix Manz, and Christopher Dock. *Voices Together* increases that number significantly, with texts by Michael Sattler, Pilgram Marpeck, and various Anabaptist women, like Annelien of Freiburg, Anna Jansz, and Martha Baert, to accompany a substantial and laudable effort to include contemporary hymns by Mennonite composers and authors. One caveat that could be offered here is that the members of the committee might have been more discriminating in the number of their own creations that were included, not all of which stand out in any particular way.

Another aspect of note is the extent to which the new hymnal incorporates songs in the contemporary worship music style. Usually associated with a worship band and projections on a screen at the front of the sanctuary, this style of song has a surprisingly strong presence in *Voices Together*. The committee has even chosen to include a contemporary rendition of Menno Simon's "True Evangelical Faith." Songs in this style can be ephemeral in nature and do not translate easily into a hymnal format, since they are most often

learned orally, are usually displayed with text alone, and present notational complexities in print that disappear when led by a competent band and lead singer. Time will tell if the space allotted to them will be justified by congregations making use of them over a reasonably long period of time.

Theological language is another issue with which hymnal committees often struggle, and the *Voices Together* committee was no exception. They have gone to considerable lengths to explain their choices, both in an essay, "Expansive Language in *Voices Together*: Gendered Images of God," and elsewhere, understanding that their choices and revisions will be met with distress in some quarters and gratitude in others. The process of revising the theological language of our hymnals began in earnest in the 1992 hymnal, and will surely continue as our sensibilities and understanding of language and the human condition continue to change. The presence of young scholars on the committee trained in disciplines like ethnomusicology ensured that sensitivity to questions of race, gender, ethnicity, and intercultural matters would be attended to as carefully as possible. Occasionally, though, their efforts to be inclusive result in hymns that are virtually unsingable. Perhaps the most egregious example is No. 520, "When Aging Takes its Toll," a hymn that lists in excruciating detail the physical ailments brought on by old age. While one can appreciate the intent behind including such a hymn, it is hard to imagine anyone, old or young, wanting to celebrate these tribulations in song.

*Voices Together* is clearly intended to build on previous hymnals, and succeeds in doing so in many ways. At the same time, it reflects the personality of a committee assembled in a new way, not nestled in the bosom of conferences in which institutional memory was guaranteed and whose members had deep relationships within the individual congregations making up the conferences. Its introduction in the midst of a pandemic when churches are unable to meet in person has also made it difficult to gauge its reception, but one can hope that its obligations to both past and future will be met in a way that satisfies the needs of the next quarter century.

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