

Rise, O Church: Reflections on the Church, Its Music, and Empire

by Paul Westermeyer. Fenton, MO: MorningStar Music Publishers, 2008. 56 pp.
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This little book grew out of the Mississippi Conference on Church Music and Liturgy, August 2007. It also grew out of Susan Cherwien's hymn text, "Rise, O Church, like Christ Arisen," which is included with two tunes written for it ten years apart. Westermeyer draws implications from this fine text in the light of scripture and current circumstances. The six chapters are also drawn from sermons our author preached in various states and a lecture he gave at Luther Seminary, where he teaches full time.

The chapters lead the reader from the song of the church, including praise and lament, through service, new song, life before God, church and empire, and God's unfailing love. Westermeyer's use of the term *empire* is complex. It may mean "the world, the flesh and the devil," global consumerism, or a nation run amok. We voice opposition to this empire as we sing a new song. In this book we hear a scholar speaking to us of shared joys and concerns—the joy of authentic worship, the concern of an empire that attempts to buy our ancient song and our memories with the coin of the cheaply constructed and the over-produced ditty. Our writer knows that away from the band and the organ, the average person needs to be able to sing a hymn. In the car on the way to visit a dying friend we all need a text we can remember and a tune we can sing without instrumental support.

In chapter three, Westermeyer describes the "new" currents in song: "Texts as Trinitarian story around Word, font, and table are neither nursery rhymes nor sonnets. Tunes are neither simplistic ditties nor overly complex art music. Congregational texts and tunes must be fashioned so that people who are neither poets nor musicians can sing them without rehearsal. As long as they fit the above criteria, texts and tunes from any period or any place can be used" (25).

Reading the book is like having a visit with one of the deans of church music, not the stuffy kind, but one with a pastor's heart and a scholar's mind. Westermeyer expresses openness to the new as well as commitment to the best of our shared traditions. He does not think all the good music was written three hundred years ago. Neither does he assume that newer is better.

In this book we hear the voice of a student, pastor, and church musician speaking to us with the wisdom born of a lifetime of service. Westermeyer's passion for the church sings out on every page. So let us, with our author, share words and music in worship, and then, for a lifetime, consider the meaning and the mystery.

DAN C. DAMON

Dan C. Damon is pastor of First United Methodist Church in Richmond, CA. He is an internationally published writer of hymn texts and tunes. Dan's latest hymn collection is Fields of Mercy (Hope Publishing Co., 2007).