

Preface | Sofija Lazić Pedersen

Contemporary hymns in the 21st century: Traditions and processes

Dear readers and friends of *Hymnologi – Nordisk tidsskrift*,

I recently saw the documentary *Hillsong Church: God goes viral* about the now worldwide church that is famous for its pop music in services. One of the pastors said at the beginning of the programme:

If you come to our church, you will just see a lot of people, young people, and I guess the question would be like: 'Why do they come to Hillsong and maybe not another church where it's hymns?'

And I don't want to disrespect any church that sings hymns, but you might as well sing in Spanish because they don't understand hymns.

Lego is a great company. My grandparents had Lego, my parents had Lego, I had Lego. Now the kids of today watch Lego the movie, they go to Legoland and got Star Wars Lego.

So, Lego had been able to innovate from generation to generation. Imagine if the church had been able to do the same?

I was perhaps a little offended. But I truly believe that this quote shows a few misunderstandings, that perhaps this volume can clarify. If we start at the end of the quote, it is simply not true that churches are not innovative in the hymn field. In recent years, the writing of new hymns has been a notable part of the Nordic hymnody. But also, I do not agree that young people do not understand hymns. This is even more obvious to me when I search for the Hillsong song *Broken vessels (Amazing grace)*, that uses some of *Amazing grace's* lyrics, and I also find a video with Lauren Daigle, perhaps best known for the song *You say* which is the longest running no. 1 song on any Billboard chart, that has earned her Grammys and currently has over 550 million listenings in Spotify. When she attends the Hillsong conference in Houston, Texas in 2016 and sings *How great thou art* with Hillsong UNITED, the arena sings with her. This hymn, originally written in Sweden in 1885 (although the YouTube video only claims origins to the translator into English from Russian

[!], Stuart Hine), has travelled both to the east and the west. I often use it as an extreme example of hymn's migration, which is my personal interest of research. But it is obviously known and loved also by these attendants that are typically of a younger age. They prove the pastor wrong. The church needs both old hymns and new ones.

Now we really can say that *Hymnologi – Nordisk tidsskrift* is back on track as we publish the second digital volume of the journal in one year. As it contains two double-blind peer-reviewed articles, several reviews, essays, and miscellaneous reports, we have proven both that there is a need for publishing hymnological material and enough of it to publish two issues per year. The editorial board has overcome the first issue's hurdles, found our structure of work and understanding our platform here on journal.fi better. Our editorial meetings are both very productive and invigorating. We are therefore proud to be presenting our second volume this year.

This volume is a thematic volume, that follows after the Nordhymn meeting in Vartov, Copenhagen in October 2023, with the theme 'Contemporary hymns in the 21st century: traditions and processes'.

We wish to thank our host, Ingrid Ank, for her generous welcome to the historic Grundtvigian buildings at Vartov, and her presentation 'Hints of Grundtvig in present day hymns'. The evening was spent at the congregation of Sankt Jakob, generously hosted by Rasmus Nøjgaard, one of the editors of Danish amendment to the official hymnbook, *Kirkesangbogen*, which he presented during the day. That evening, we sang contemporary Nordic hymns in the congregational hall of Sankt Jakob. The following morning, we started early in Copenhagen's Cathedral with *Morgenandagten*, broadcasted six days a week on Danish radio and TV, where we were welcomed by minister Steffen Ringgaard Andresen and organist Hanne Kuhlmann. We were introduced to the Sámi chorale book *Sálbmagirji II*, that was presented there by its editors, Kristian Paulsen and Johan Máhtte Skum. We would also like to thank Nordhymn board members, Mattias Lundberg and David Scott Hamnes for presenting the current work with contemporary hymns in Sweden and Norway.

Afterwards, some of us continued on from our meeting to Leitourgia's conference that also started in Vartov.

All new things have a beginning, and although the reformation is more of new paragraph in church history, the printing of all books, but songbooks in particular, were a grand possibility for the reformation's success. As it is the 500th jubilee year of the first Lutheran songbook in 1524, we present Kristoffer Garne's article on the birth of the first Lutheran

services and books in Denmark. It has now been five centuries of old, reformed, and new hymns. The reformation of hymns is as ongoing as the expansion of Lego. Some aspects of this *semper reformanda* is shown in an article by Leander Franke on the writing process by contemporary Swedish hymn writer and church musician Maria Löfgren. Other aspects of hymn production can be found among the three essays. One is by Gaute Grimeland on his own hymns, another by Marta Holgerson about translating hypermodern hymns and lastly one by Helen Rossil on two contemporary Danish pairs of hymn writers.

As we use double-blind peer-reviewers I cannot write their names, but dear reviewers, a warm thank you for professional and generous comments to improve and clarify the articles!

Among reviews, you will find a review on the webpage psalmerochsanger.se which is an online commentary for the hymnbook *Psalmer och sånger* by Andreas Nordanstig. We also have a review on *Ethics and Christian Musicking* by Susanne Wigorts Yngvesson, a book which also has a chapter on Hillsong. Altogether six reviews cover a range of fields, languages, and cultures.

Among the reports, you will find a report by Ida Fahl from the Nordic church musicians' conference in Copenhagen, that took place in October, and a report from Leitourgia in Trondheim, as well as a report from Cantus Planus' conference in Gödöllő, Hungary. In the report from Vestervig, there is an invitation for a summer meeting on hymn history in June 2025, with a Call for Papers.

This year it was the aim of the Lutheran World Federation to publish a *Global Songbook*, as it convened in Wittenberg. There is not yet a printed volume, but 80 of the songs presented can be accessed after registration [at the website](#).

As a final word, I would like to address our Norwegian and Icelandic colleagues in the hymnological field: We miss you and urge you to contribute to upcoming volumes of the journal.

This autumn's planned Nordhymn Seminar in Helsinki was postponed to the spring. We hope it will contribute to our upcoming next thematic number, due to be published in December 2025, on the theme of hymns and marginalisation, please notice the Call for Papers. Our next issue, due to be published in June, is an open volume, and we are looking forward to your contributions, in form of articles, reviews and reports. Please, feel free to contact the editors with your ideas!