

Book review | Samuli Korkalainen

**A musical bridge over the Atlantic Ocean:
Traditional and modern hymns and songs of the Finnish heritage
of North America and Finland**

Finnish heritage hymnbook: Hymns and worship songs of Finnish North America in Finnish and English (2023). Champlin, Minnesota: FinnFest USA.

Exactly a year ago, in December 2023, a hymnological project that had lasted for almost 30 years finally came to an end when the *Finnish Heritage Hymnbook* was printed in the United States of America by FinnFest USA, a non-profit organisation, and part of the annual festival of Finnish America and Finnish culture. This collection contains old and new hymns and worship songs in Finnish and English, as well as several in Swedish and one in North Sámi and Inari Sámi ('Thanks for paths of pain and pleasure / Kiitän Herran antamista'). The hymnbook also includes the 1935 bilingual (Finnish and English) order of the liturgical service that has been concordantly transcribed from the original source.

Finnish Lutheran hymn traditions, together with a broad variety of spiritual songbooks, were transmitted by immigrants from Finland to North America. The hymnals of the Lutheran Church of Finland (1701, 1886, and 1938) were in common use in Finnish congregations in the first half of the 20th century until they were cast aside in favour of new English language versions. The joint *Lutheran service book and hymnal* was published in 1958. A decision was made to include mainly common Reformation chorales and hymns which were well-known by Christian English-language users all over the world. This decision led to a situation where American Lutherans received a common hymnic tradition, but at the same time lost the opportunity to sing many hymns of their youth, and to know the pearls of other immigrant groups. Efforts to highlight and reintroduce these traditions were carried out between 1992–2015 at the Reformation festivals which took place at

Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. A festival of Finnish hymnody was organised in 1996. This was the starting point for the formation of the *Finnish Heritage Hymnbook*.

Between the mid-1860s and up until the end of the 1920s, more than 350,000 Finns migrated to the US and Canada. This great wave of immigration created a wonderful musical legacy. There was much singing and music making in churches, and in temperance halls and workers' halls, led by choirs, brass bands, folk music groups and so on. The *Finnish heritage hymnbook* preserves a portion of this history, and at the same time it attempts to keep this history alive. Only a few American congregations retain an active Finnish hymn tradition. Every now and then, there is a need to add 'something Finnish' to, for instance, weddings and funerals. This hymnbook is a resource to aid such purposes.

In 19th-century Finland, it was mandatory to be a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church – with only few exceptions – whereas in the US and Canada, there was an atmosphere of religious freedom. Consequently, Finnish Lutheranism became divided into many church bodies, the largest of which was the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, known as the Suomi Synod. The Laestadians established their own congregations, and several strict and less stringent central organisations that were called Apostolic Lutherans. Additionally, some members of the Evangelical movement founded the Finnish National Church. In addition, Finnish immigrants were active in other churches, for example, in the Pentecostal, Methodist, and Congregationalist denominations. All of these denominations and groups edited their own songbooks, and gradually began to include a section of songs in English. Based on my own research, a list of hymnals and spiritual songbooks edited by Finnish immigrants and published in the US, is also published in the *Finnish heritage hymnbook*. The oldest one was printed in 1876 and the newest, still containing some hymns in Finnish, in 2005. However, the vast majority of these songbooks were published between 1910 and 1950.

In my opinion, the greatest shortcoming of the *Finnish heritage hymnbook* is that it records the singing tradition of only one Finnish church organisation, the Suomi Synod. The rich Apostolic-Lutheran tradition and the variety of songbooks of the other denominations are missing from this collection. The Finnish-language spiritual songs made by Finnish Americans, now presented for the first time for Finns living on this side of the Atlantic Ocean, are almost all from the Suomi Synod's songbook *Siionin Lauluja*, published in 1919–1960. Nevertheless, the list of Finnish hymn poets and composers is now supplemented by the names of those who were active in North America: Samuel V. Autere, Aino Lilja Halkola, Otto Kaarto, Alfred Laakso, Svante Luoma, J. K. Nikander, Martti Nisonen, Jooseppi Riippa,

Pieter Sigmundt, Kalevi Turunen, John Wargelin, Raymond Wargelin, and Esko Wiik. Based on my archival work, one hymn by Paul Karvonen ('O Lord, our little ones to Thee') and one by Arvi Henry Saarisuu ('The stream of tears / Kyynelten vuo') are published in this collection for the first time.

The *Finnish heritage hymnbook* is not only a historical collection; it also includes a selection of modern Finnish hymns and spiritual songs for the edification of English-speaking Lutherans in North America. In addition to the most popular new hymns of the 1986 Finnish hymnal, the collection includes new translations of many songs written by Anna-Mari Kaskinen, Petri Laaksonen, Jaakko Löytty, and Pekka Simojoki. The collection is dedicated to the memory of composer and conductor Kari Tikka, who passed away in 2022, and it also contains two popular songs composed by him ('Grace song / Armolaulu' and 'Lord, You welcome me / Sinun luoksesi, Herra'). This hymnbook would also be of use in Finland due to these English translations of much loved Finnish songs, especially where there is a need for English translations of popular songs at multicultural congregational events. A publisher is thus being sought for the collection in Finland, as so far, the hymnbook can only be purchased in the USA.

The *Finnish heritage hymnbook* contains not only music but also a comprehensive essay on the history of the Lutheran hymn in Finland, and on Finnish hymnody in North America. This essay is written by Marianne Wargelin, who also fronts this history as the heritage of her family; decades ago, her parents (Kaarina and Raymond Wargelin) and grandparents (Thyra and Alvar Rautalahti, Marie and John Wargelin) were closely involved in working on Finnish-American hymnody. In addition, the book starts with a foreword, preface, and introduction, which epiphanise the background, goals, and the methods of editing the collection to the reader – and the singer. There are also several appendices and indices for helping to understand the content and make the best use of the hymnal.