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If you browse through hymnals from small or young churches, for instance in China or Norway, from a generation or two ago, you will find relatively few hymns written by their own people. In Lutheran churches, you find many hymns of German heritage; in some other Protestant churches, you find hymns of English or American origin. With the tunes and composers, the situation is even more extreme. It seems that some countries do not regard their own tradition and culture as valuable at all. It is the foreign and the exotic that really counts!

Certain countries and cultures dominate and attract attention for reasons such as their economical status, natural resources or traditions, or cultural treasures. Some other countries, on the other hand, have a lower status in some or all of these respects.

Similar differences are evident in Christendom. Some countries and cultures have been pioneers, and have given positive impulses as well as concrete help and support to countries with fewer resources. This has often resulted in joy and great usefulness to the nations who have received the help or influence. Yet at other times, the influential countries have dominated and controlled others in ways that have to be characterized as suppression and cultural imperialism.

Norwegian experience

Norway is a small country. Even today we have only about 4.4 million inhabitants. Some aspects of our situation over the past 150 years can serve as a starting point for the following discussion. At that time only about one million people lived in Norway. Then, as now, our culture was influenced by the fact that we were ruled and dominated by other countries for more than 500 years—until 1905.

As a result, our identity as a nation was affected. We became victims of low self-esteem, culturally influenced to a large extent by feelings of inferiority. Many Norwegians considered our language, our nature, and our culture shameful; only our rulers had status and worthwhile values. The rest of us were simple peasants and uneducated people who had to import prestige-filled labor and cultural forms of expression from abroad. Most of our ministers and other academic groups had come from Denmark. The few Norwegians who had the opportunity for an education studied in Copenhagen where they were influenced by Danish language and culture.

Danish, a foreign language, dominated Norwegian churches, and our Norwegian written language disappeared. All the music styles that influenced singing in the churches, both of liturgy and of hymns, were imported. Some were of Gregorian origin, but most of the material, at least after the Reformation, came from Germany. This one-sided foreign dominance led to a feeling of alienation from local forms of expression, a feeling very destructive to our society and its feeling of identity.

When nationalism began to flourish as part of the nineteenth-century Romantic era, we, like many other Europeans, gradually began to recognize our own cultural values. We took an interest in Norwegian music that existed in parts of our country less influenced by the city culture because strong foreign influences came mainly through the cities. Musicologists, anthropologists and ethnologists went to the countryside, into the valleys, by the fjords, and up to the mountain farms where they documented fairy tales and legends, vocal and instrumental music, hymns and songs. In the countryside our first collectors of folk music met a rich treasure, which they recorded in writing.

Religious folk tunes

One of our foremost folk music collectors, Ludvig Mathias Lindeman (1812-1887), was also among our most notable church musicians. He began compiling folk tunes in the 1840s and later published many of these in different settings and arrangements. But in 1877, when he published his hymnal, the only authorized Norwegian hymnal for the next half century, he did not use even one of the beautiful religious folk tunes he had collected.

The church music elite at that time regarded folk hymn forms the ruin of congregational singing. They considered this song style to be too sprawling and

heterogeneous, too much dominated by ornaments and extremely personal performance practice to be used by congregations. The prevalent congregational performances in earlier centuries could, in spite of being both national and indigenous, sound so chaotic that the church music experts would rather work toward a more international and simplified choral style.

Finally when our next hymnal appeared, in 1926, some of our religious folk tunes were included. It took almost one hundred years after the Norwegian religious folk tunes had been collected before they were represented in the official hymnal and could be used by congregations all over the country. In the meantime, Edvard Grieg (1843-1907) and several of our other foremost composers had been using folk tunes in a variety of ways for many years. Religious folk tunes had been used as congregational songs earlier, but they were sung only in specific rural areas, not in those cities that set the tone.

Today we regard our Norwegian folk tunes as a treasure of great value. They have been incorporated into hymnals in forms that can be used by congregations. However, the original rhythmic and tonal irregularities have been smoothed over to some extent. The folk tunes are constantly being re-arranged and published on recordings and on sheet music, for choirs and for soloists. They seem to have a timeless appeal, not to mention the fact that Norwegians feel strongly and passionately that they are a significant national expression.

The other Northern countries have essentially the same history, although Sweden and Denmark have not experienced political and cultural depression as much as Iceland, Finland, and Norway, since Sweden and Denmark have not been under foreign rulers to the same extent as the three others.

Thus in the whole area of the Nordic countries, it was not until the twentieth century that we dared use the national, folk-like choral forms in our official hymn books. In the twentieth century, however, the number of folk hymn melodies increased with every new hymn book published. Most of these melodies were modifications of traditional Lutheran hymns, but some of them have an original character.

The tension was between national identity and the desire of internationalization. There was also the practical side to the isometric international choral style, because it was easier for a congregation to sing than were the folk styles. Underlying all these considerations is the fundamental issue of the connections between our indigenous culture and our identity.

None of these issues is unique to the practice of worship in the Nordic countries. In the whole history of the church, one can observe this oscillation between the authorized practice of the church on the one hand and the popular forms on the other. Whenever the popular forms became too dominating, the ecclesiastical authorities tightened their grip by either summoning a council, or in other ways identifying what was supposed to be the "correct" music for the Church. We have seen this, for example, at the time of Pope Gregory the Great in the seventh century, during the Counter-Reformation in the sixteenth century, and today when youth groups want their own musical culture in worship.

Today we feel that we have a much better balance in our worship between national and indigenous music on the one side and foreign material on the other. We feel a degree of closeness to our common ecumenical and Lutheran hymn traditions as well, since these songs have been used in our society for hundreds of years. This is especially true for the German heritage. The Reformation renewed German spiritual life, leading to a rich production of hymn texts and melodies. In addition, by changing attitudes, Luther inspired desires for a national language and culture, both in his country and others.

Experiences in China

The Chinese church has had a history of song and music that is fairly similar to that of the Nordic countries. In early Chinese hymnals, Western hymns dominated; there was almost no original Chinese material, at least when it came to the melodies.

Recent Chinese-language hymnals from Taiwan, Hong Kong and elsewhere in China have started to address this inequity rather notably by using both Chinese traditional musical material and newly composed Chinese hymns. The harmonizations, however, are in a more Western style, and the rich variety of Chinese folk instruments are rare. In this respect, the Lutheran World Federation's general assembly in Hong Kong in 1997 was a milestone, since a Chinese instrumental group was used during the services.

A Fire Is Burning

Some years ago, the biggest mission organization in Norway, the *Norwegian Lutheran Mission*, commissioned me to write a cantata for their centennial celebration. This organization started its work in China, then extended its activities to other countries, including some in Africa and Latin America. My assignment was to incorporate styles, instruments, and musicians from these mission countries.

The *Norwegian Lutheran Mission* is a rather conservative organization. When it comes to different modern popular musical styles — such as those using drums — it has been rather reserved. In spite of this, we realized that the 5000 people who were to attend the premier performance would find it valuable to realize how these musical elements were incorporated, even though the music would be strange to them. The African drums and the Latin American flutes and guitars would give them associations not linked to traditional church music. Our ideas were well received, and the project turned out successfully.

The cantata, *A Fire Is Burning*, was published on CD, and we took it to China shortly thereafter. I lectured at several Chinese theological seminaries on using indigenous culture in the churches with specific attention to the music.

It was moving to experience the Chinese Christians' positive attitudes toward us. This was true both in regard to the lectures, where I explained our experience with folk music in the churches in Norway, and to the Chinese-influenced music which we played from the CD. We demonstrated that we, in remote Norway, could use Chinese music styles in a church setting. In this way, we felt that we helped to further appreciation of their own tradition.

The Pilgrim

In 1997, the 75th anniversary of the *Nordic Christian Mission to Buddhists* was celebrated. Since the 1930s this organization has based most of its activity in Hong Kong. Since the anniversary occurred in the year Hong Kong was returned to China, I was commissioned to compose a mass, *The Pilgrim*, in which the meeting between East and West was the theme. The pilgrim himself was in the person of a soloist bringing his Western culture and music traditions to China. He comes not only to teach, but also to learn from Chinese traditions and spirituality.

The Pilgrim became a two-hour concert mass for folk musicians from both China and Norway, with full symphony orchestra, church organ, choir and vocal soloists. It was first performed in the Hong Kong Concert Hall. The text was partly in Norwegian, partly in Chinese, and partly in English. Musically, the mass was comprised of newly composed material with elements from Chinese and Western styles and folk music from the two aforementioned traditions.

Again we experienced excitement from the Chinese because we had used their traditions. They evidently felt that their culture was appreciated as well as useful in the church. It was not necessary to import everything from England and America, previously the foremost contributors to Chinese hymnals. The Chinese had traditions and music to be proud of themselves.

It is not unlikely that the Chinese church will attain a better climate vis-à-vis its political authorities when they connect less strongly with Western forms of expression and instead use their own Chinese music.

The Wholly Other

There is another important perspective to consider in reference to hymnology and identity.

The *Lutheran World Federation* has defined a program called *Worship and Culture*. In one of their publications it is said, "The Gospel has to be announced correctly in the different cultures in the world of today. Whether our worship forms are genuinely local and national, or global and international, or adapted from the dominating nations and churches, the forms of worship can never be the most important aspect. The primary purpose must be that the service is functioning, that it is meaningful, and that people become believers. We cannot assume automatically that only the accustomed, and not the indigenous cultural expressions, are functional.

The definition of the term "holy" is: "isolated from the profane," or "the Wholly Other." We have all experienced that that which is foreign or unusual can create enthusiasm and blessing. It is common, especially among people who have placed themselves on the periphery of the church, to feel that what is attractive and fascinating about the church is that it is different with respect to cultural forms of expression. This is especially true concerning music. For instance, some of the strongest resistance to the use of jazz and rock in church may come from jazz and rock musicians. One also meets the opposite views, but the desire that the church should be the house of The Wholly Other is very common.

USA and Jazz

There are many who think that it is natural that jazz is used in African American churches, since jazz is primarily an African American style of music. In a way, this may be correct in some places, but the picture is more complicated than this. For many African Americans, the ambience associated with the origins of jazz — bars and brothels in some of America's big cities — is so linked to this music that many of them will reject this form of music in their churches. They associate jazz with moods that are foreign to the message of the church.

Toward the end of his life, the jazz composer Duke Ellington expressed that it was his three "Sacred Concerts" which were the most important and meaningful pieces that he wrote in his last years. In spite of this, there were rather few American churches, which have performed these concerts, and he was never able to have them published in their original and complete form. Most Americans, even the so-called jazz buffs, do not even know of them.

Norway and Folk Music

In our country many people feel that some genres of the national music culture have such negative associations that they are not suitable for church purposes at all. For example the fiddle, including the Norwegian folk instrument "Hardanger fiddle" was not accepted in the churches for generations. Some fiddlers, after being converted, even destroyed their fiddles.

But we have to remember that this instrument was almost solely associated with a culture of social gatherings in which immorality flourished, and where drunkenness, often leading to fighting that could be life threatening, was not uncommon. Many people felt that the fiddle, a central element in these gatherings, could not be used after a person was converted, though the instrument and the tunes which were played really were part of the national heritage. The fiddlers and the other members of this culture who became converted wished to live a life which was wholly different.

Norwegian Christianity has been strongly influenced by this way of thinking. Pietism, as a spiritual movement, has held a considerable position until today. In addition, one of Norway's leading twentieth-century theologians, Ole Hallesby, advocated a conservative position regarding cultural expressions generally.

Negro Spirituals

Negro Spirituals have an obvious position in African American churches but not in white churches, even though this is a genuine American song form. Thus, although this song form is really quite typically American and in addition very old, it has no strong position in the majority of white churches. In fact, it actually has a considerably stronger foothold in Norway than in America. There are several Negro Spirituals that are rather well known in Norwegian church milieus, and they are used to a large extent as congregational songs. Most of the Christian youth choirs over the last thirty years have had American spirituals and gospel songs as a considerable part of their repertoire, although these are borrowed styles, strongly linked to the identity and history of a certain people.

In a television series, where different genres of Christian hymns and songs, which are central to the Norwegian Christian life are presented, American spirituals and gospel songs again have a very prominent position. I was on a tour to China some years ago with the Norwegian group *Freedom Quartet*. We performed in churches and our repertoire was exclusively Negro Spirituals. These songs were enthusiastically received and were highly appreciated. It seemed as though the songs communicated very well, even though they were barely known in China. This is an example of how unknown and foreign expressions can also function in a society.

World Music

During the last few years in Western culture, it has been very common to allow for new impulses from other cultures, especially in music. At several universities and conservatories in the Western world, this is a remarkable and prominent element of ethnomusicological studies today. Even composition departments in many places today concentrate on the music of foreign cultures, and in this way different music traditions are used as impulse factors. The term "World Music" has become its own label, both in the recording business as well as on awards like the "Grammy", in the United States.

Different Impulses

It is very destructive for a society to feel that it has no valuable cultural impulses of its own, that cultural expressions of value must be imported. After all, the standards used to distinguish important and less important music are imprecise. These standards have been established between the different countries and cultures—in the Christian world as well—and not always based on criteria of quality. The standards seem to be influenced more by which countries happened to be in positions of power.

Experiencing events such as those mentioned in this article and studying different cultures can

impress and enrich us. For instance, in Norway we have recently focused on the Celtic-Irish impact on our culture while celebrating a millenium of Christianity in our country. Our people are fascinated with this tradition, which is relevant because of our distant history when the roots of our two cultures were rather close. Even though that was long ago, the genre has gained appeal today.

At the end of the nineteenth century we experienced several profound revivals in our country, but the music which followed was primarily Anglo-American. It was to some extent Swedish, not genuinely Norwegian. Nonetheless, it has been the most beloved musical form for generations in the low churches and organizations in Norway.

Nationalism

While "nationalism" was a term of honor only a couple of generations ago, serious international conflicts in the past century grew out of excessive nationalism. As a result, parts of society, younger people especially, do not wish to stress their nationality as strongly. Instead, they wish to emphasize their citizenship in the "world society" and declare that we all are brothers and sisters who should not focus so heavily on national and cultural peculiarities and differences. Consequently, they feel no need for ties to national folk music.

The natural expressions of other cultures in an encounter with the Christian faith can be very enriching. But if foreign influences are to take root in our culture, the process must be voluntary, not a result of suppression or the underestimation of our own culture.

The Rhythmical Hymns

For several generations, until the middle of the twentieth century, Norwegians sang the classical Protestant hymns in the isometric form, as in every other country we are likely to be compared to. The restored melodic forms and the return to the rhythmic elasticity of the Reformation century found no place in the official hymnals before then. This took place, in other words, later than in countries such as Germany and Denmark.

Some leading Norwegian musicologists and composers advocated this restoration as early as the middle of the nineteenth century, and at the same time some arrangements of such hymn forms were published for choir. But it was not until the last fifteen years that the restored melodic forms have earned their place in authorized hymnals and consequently in Norwegian congregational singing. They are now sung with the greatest honesty and joy, though they are not really tied to our own tradition, neither in historical perspective nor through custom, since they have been sung isometrically since the seventeenth century.

Musical Identity

What is a human being's musical identity? Though difficult to define, we can begin by saying that it is not necessarily rooted in the country's folk music. The very term "folk music" is inaccurate and imprecise. "Folk music" as understood in American and British traditions is not identical with what we mean by this term in Norway. In some cultures, the term is somewhat derogatory. In China it is definitely so.

In some countries, one can encounter highly educated musicians and musicologists at conservatories or universities who have almost no knowledge of the folk music of their country. This is especially evident in Turkey, even though their music is very vital and interesting from a musicological point of view and folk music is held in high regard there. Some of these musicians have never attended an event where folk music is performed, and they are not otherwise familiar with the music. A barrier seems to exist between the different music milieus. In the Turkish city of Izmir there are two universities. The department of music at the one university concentrates exclusively on Western music, the other only on Turkish folk music, so that consequently many musicians know only one of these two genres.

For a Norwegian like me, raised in a provincial town in southern Norway in the 1950s, musical influence was limited to the radio, the marching band, my piano lessons, and church music. I was, in other words, exposed to the popular music, the American and German symphonic band traditions, seventeenth and eighteenth century German-Austrian piano music, and in church, German or German-influenced hymn tunes, Swedish and Anglo-Saxon revival songs, and choral music from the German Romantic area. This means that I heard almost nothing from the Norwegian folk music culture, and therefore not the religious folk tunes either.

The preceding generation in rural areas might have heard folk tunes, but many of them regarded such music as odd and primitive. The music they valued was foreign, including German music, even though this was immediately after the German occupation. An interesting example is that instead of using one of our most beautiful folk tunes to the Christmas song by Hans Adolph Brorson (1694-1764), *Mitt hjerte alltid vanker* ["My heart remains in wonder," tr. by Jens Christian Aaberg], the church choir of my childhood sang it to the Schubert melody "*Am Brunnen vor dem Tore*."

From my own experience, it is possible to say that musical identity does not have its origin in the folk tradition of our respective native countries at all, but rather in the music we are exposed to. In my case, that meant mainly music from the German and Anglo-Saxon traditions.

Two Worship Experiences

Some of my finest experiences with singing in worship have come during encounters with unfamiliar forms of expression. One such time was in Hungary during the toughest Communist period. I joined a Hungarian colleague to attend a Catholic worship service where a mass by Tomás Victoria (1548-1611) was performed. Both the music and the setting were very strange: Here we were in a Communist country, and yet we were listening to Renaissance music in a Catholic setting. But the worship experience was wonderful.

Another wonderful worship experience occurred when I attended for the first time a church service in a black ghetto in an American city. The African-Americans devoted themselves to the music in a way completely foreign to a North European. But how touching and moving it was!

Attitude towards one's own tradition

There are two opposite attitudes toward our own traditions:

In one case, our culture is regarded as uninteresting and inferior; it seems gray and commonplace, whereas the exotic and spectacular seems valuable. In such instances, we may define an earlier period of the tradition as "The Golden Era" or choose a prestigious culture from another tradition as superior.

Chauvinism and patriotism characterize the opposite point of view: Our own heritage is the best, our culture and traditions are superior, and other traditions have little to contribute by comparison.

Both of these extremes are negative: self-deprecation in the first case is as invidious as the egocentricity of the other is unpleasant. Humility can co-exist with pride in our traditions, while love for our heritage ought to be linked to curiosity and respect for other peoples' cultures. Many people cling to local views; they reject the strange and do not want to receive criticism. Others cannot get enough of strangeness and exotic effects.

The Golden Mean suggests that we be both attentive to the experiences of others and the treasures of their cultures, while remaining conscious of our own.

Meaningful Worship

How can worship be meaningful to people in a given culture? Only when people feel that it concerns them, so that they do not become spectators and feel alienated from it, can people be fascinated and blessed. The service is not automatically meaningful simply because it is built on expressions of the people's culture. On the other hand, if popular, local expressions are ignored and the service is based on borrowed expressions or forms, there is the danger of neglecting the local culture and only showing enthusiasm for that which is foreign and borrowed. Neither of these practices is healthy.

When I advocate the use of genuine folk music as church music, both from Norway and also other countries, it has to do primarily with the above-mentioned oppression mechanisms that have been so powerful in many countries. The forms of folk culture ought to be upgraded, not just for reasons of esthetic and individual identity. Rather, it has primarily to do with the invidious tendency, both in secular society and within Christendom, to create hierarchies with subordinate and superior orders, which are unworthy for us both as churches and as individuals.

We all need to feel integrity and pride, whether we come from small countries and/or young churches, or from cultures with a rich tradition. We all ought to be conscious of the distinctive character of our heritage and proud of that heritage. The boundless and bridge-building character of the Gospel teaches that we are all brothers and sisters and that no culture or individual has reason to oppress others.

Conclusion

Both the formulations of Christianity based in the Holy Scripture and the adjustment of the Gospel to different cultures must be emphasized. At the same time, we acknowledge that borrowing expressions from other cultures can give us a vital lift in our own traditions, a lift which might be necessary and revitalizing.

The Christian faith is in itself an imported good in almost any country. It is therefore not unnatural that we should also import some cultural forms of expression from abroad. The positive result of these influences is that they take on the color of the local culture to create a synthesis of the foreign and the familiar, the global and the local. All of Christendom is the homeland of the

Christians, and the many different cultural forms of the universal church are their respective national expressions.