

Editorial

CELEBRATING THE NAMES ON COWDEN HALL, 100 YEARS LATER

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One hundred years ago, Cowden Hall opened as the new home of the School of Sacred Music on the campus of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. In 1925, Mrs. George E. Cowden had given \$150,000 to help construct the building.² In December 1926, Cowden Hall was finished, and students and faculty, under the leadership of director I. E. Reynolds (1879–1949), soon filled the three-story building with music, including performances of solos and choral numbers from Handel’s *Messiah* and gospel hymns newly written by B. B. McKinney (1886–1952).³

As one approaches Cowden Hall (from any direction), he or she may notice names chiseled in stone around the top of the building. These names begin just to the right of the grand front entrance of the building on the north side and wrap around the building beginning in a westward direction. In total, there are thirty-one names representing biblical figures (from Jubal to Simeon), early church fathers (Clement, Basil, and Ambrose), significant people who influenced church music in the middle ages and early modern periods (from Pope Gregory the Great to Martin Luther),

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²See Hannah Williams, “Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary School of Church Music,” Handbook of Texas Online, accessed January 17, 2026, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/southwestern-baptist-theological-seminary-school-of-church-music>. Before 1926, the school was known as the School of Gospel Music. In 1926, along with the building of Cowden Hall, it was renamed the School of Sacred Music. In 1957, its name was changed again to the School of Church Music, and in 2019 to the School of Church Music and Worship.

³For a recent account of the impact of I. E. Reynolds and B. B. McKinney, along with William J. Reynolds (1920–2009), see Joseph R. Crider, “Isham Emmanuel Reynolds, Baylus Benjamin McKinney, and William J. Reynolds: A Theology of Church Music,” in David S. Dockery, W. Madison Grace II, and Malcolm B. Yarnell III, eds., *Shapers of the Southwestern Theological Tradition* (Fort Worth: Seminary Hill Press, 2025), 65–77.

famous composers (including Palestrina, Bach, and Handel), and numerous hymnists and composers from the seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries (e.g., Keach, Watts, Wesley, Mason, and Sankey).

Who came up with this list of noteworthy names that was etched in stone on Cowden Hall? According to William J. Reynolds, Albert Venting (1883–1965), a professor in the School of Theology at Southwestern, should be credited. Reynolds writes that “Venting worked out the succession of musicians’ names from Jubal to Sankey that were placed in stone at the top of the exterior walls of Cowden Hall in 1926.”⁴ Venting had studied in England and thereby developed an appreciation for the significant people who had impacted church music in the western Christian tradition.

This issue of the *Artistic Theologian* continues to commemorate the figures whose names are encountered when one walks by Cowden Hall.⁵ We begin by giving attention to Clement of Alexandria (ca. AD 150–ca. 215), one of the few church fathers whose writings repeatedly mention music. Based on an extensive study of Clement’s extant Greek works—along with an original translation of Clement’s “Hymn to Christ”—Daniel Webster identifies five lessons on church music worth consideration for today. Although Clement may be known as one who dismissed music-making at Greco-Roman banquets as “disorderly frivolities” (*Paedagogus* 2.4), Webster explains that Clement encourages the *ekklesia* in Alexandria, Egypt, to “sing on every occasion” this “most excellent doctrine” of Christ as a way to identify with Christ and become a holy church.

Next, Joanna Pepple explores the life and work of American hymn-tune composer William B. Bradbury (1816–1868), highlighting his important contributions to the gospel song repertoire and his musical ministry to children. She argues that Bradbury’s contributions to church music began with his attention to children as he wed biblical lyrics to his winsome and easily singable tunes. The inclusion of Bradbury’s name on the music building at a Baptist seminary should come as no surprise to anyone

⁴William Jensen Reynolds, *The Cross & the Lyre: The Story of the School of Church Music, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas* (Fort Worth, TX: School of Church Music, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994), 18. Although Venting primarily taught in the School of Theology, he “also taught Hymnology for more than two decades, beginning in 1920” and was a significant influence on I. E. Reynolds’s developing appreciation for the history of church music. For more on the fascinating life of Albert Venting, see Michael Pullin, “Venting, Albert Sobieski,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed January 17, 2026, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/venting-albert-sobieski>.

⁵Readers are encouraged to peruse articles on Jubal, Asaph and Heman, Guido d’Arezzo, J. S. Bach, and Isaac Watts in *Artistic Theologian* 12 (2025), available online at <https://equipthecalled.com/artistic-theologian/>.

familiar with Baptist hymn books from the last 150 years. Pepple's article tabulates the number of his tunes found in prominent Baptist collections and identifies eight hymns sung to his tunes that have remained popular into the twenty-first century. Whether singing "Jesus loves me" in Sunday School or "Just as I am" during the invitation time in an evangelical church service, Baptists owe a great debt to the tunesmith William Bradbury.

Our next article shines the light on a British composer famous not for his church music, but for comic operettas. Sir Arthur Seymour Sullivan (1842–1900) worked with W. S. Gilbert (1836–1911) to produce fourteen such works for the British stage in the late nineteenth century. However, Joel West reveals that before Sullivan wrote music for lighthearted operettas, he crafted tunes for the church. Although many today may be surprised to find the name of the composer of "I am the very model of a modern Major-General" (from *The Pirates of Penzance*) in between gospel hymn writers Philip P. Bliss (1838–1876) and Willaim H. Doane (1832–1915) on Cowden Hall, Sullivan's contributions to church music prove to be substantial. Most well known is his tune for "Onward, Christian soldiers," which was extremely popular when Cowden Hall opened in 1926. Perhaps some of Sullivan's other music identified by West—including hymn tunes and sacred choral music from the height of the Victorian era—may be recovered for singing today.

In addition to the three articles commemorating figures whose names appear on Cowden Hall, this issue includes two studies on Irish hymn writers, one featuring female hymnists from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and one focusing on the creative musical arrangements of modern hymnwriters. Elizabeth Nolan celebrates the contributions of Irish women to both hymn writing and missionary work, making clear that this was done amidst harsh conditions, especially for women and children. Three hymn writers receive extended attention: Cecil Frances Alexander (1818–1895), Anna Cusack (1829–1899), and Amy Carmichael (1867–1951). Like William Bradbury in the United States, Alexander wrote hymns and compiled hymnbooks for children and educational purposes. At least one of her hymns has become closely associated with an annual tradition: Each Christmas Eve a young voice begins the Lessons and Carols service at King's College Cambridge with the words "Once in royal David's city." The next hymnist, Cusack, also devoted her life to the welfare and education of children. She supported relief efforts during the Irish famine of 1845–1852 and contributed theologically rich hymns

such as “All for Jesus” (inspired in part by John 3:16) and “Jesus was once a little child.” Third, we learn of Carmichael’s time of missionary service in India, where she rescued young girls from exploitative service in Hindu temples and began the Dohnavur Fellowship, a Christian orphanage. Carmichael composed hymns to both comfort the children in her care and to voice her prayers over them. The article concludes with brief mention of a few other “sisters in worship”—lesser-known Irish female hymnwriters.

In our last article, Samantha Inman brings us into the current era with a look at the “musical borrowings” of prominent modern hymnwriters Keith and Kristyn Getty. Inman identifies four recurrent strategies in eight of the Gettys’ musical arrangements that borrow from folk music, traditional hymns, and/or classical music. Beginning with a discussion of an added chorus to Frank Houghton’s missional text “Facing a task unfinished” and concluding with a detailed musical analysis of the inclusion of Beethoven’s “Moonlight” sonata in a recording of “His eye is on the sparrow,” Inman shows how the Gettys enrich their hymns with musical material both new and old. Inman’s attention to musical meaning also suggests that such borrowings are not just artistic but relate to theological ideas directly expressed in the Gettys’ lyrics.

As we celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of Cowden Hall at Southwestern Seminary in 2026, it seems fitting that this issue of the *Artistic Theologian* brings together composers, hymn writers, and missionaries of recent centuries with the wisdom of an ancient church father and the creativity of contemporary artists. While the School of Church Music and Worship commemorates the contributions of those whose names are etched on the building’s outer walls, we continue to foster a community of students and faculty inside Cowden Hall that creates new music and lyrics for the expanding Kingdom of God.