

HYMNS OF REPENTANCE IN THE WORSHIP PRACTICE OF THE REFORMED CHURCH OF TRANSYLVANIA

ÉVA PÉTER¹

SUMMARY. Since the end of the 18th century so called hymns of repentance formed an outstanding category of hymns. These are sung during the weeks of preparation before the great religious holidays. The past and present of the hymns of repentance in the worship of the Reformed Church of Transylvania has two main sources: the hymnbooks of various churches and the repertory of hymns passed over as an oral tradition. The paper hereby deals primarily with the tunes of the hymns, it analyzes them, it reveals their sources, their versions represented in the hymnbooks of various centuries and how they were altered while passed over in oral tradition.

Keywords: hymns of repentance, tune versions, exchanging lyrics and tunes, ballads, original function

The past and present of the hymns of repentance in the worship of the Reformed Church of Transylvania has two main sources: the hymnbooks of various churches officially published through the centuries and the repertory of hymns passed over as an oral tradition. As printed scored hymnbooks attest Transylvanian congregations had a vast repertory of hymns already at the beginning of the 18th century. As far as lyrics are concerned these were dealing with various topics. Since the end of the 18th century so called hymns of repentance formed an outstanding category of hymns. There were relatively few hymns of repentance, but they were widely known in the congregation.

Some hymns of repentance had their own tune; some were sung using the tunes of popular psalm or worship tunes. Therefore the writers of the hymns of repentance mainly attempted to increase the number of appropriate stanzas; it was not their aim to widen the musical repertory. Despite of this fact it is worth analysing which was the tunes considered appropriate to be applied to the lyrics of repentance. In the collection of psalms of Geneva there were 7 items which can be considered hymns of repentance. Among these Psalm 38 is outstanding, the most popular psalm of repentance in Transylvania. As part of the ad notam practice also other stanzas were attached to it.

¹ Babes-Bolyai University, Faculty of Reformed Theology, Musical Pedagogy Department, RO-400535, Cluj-Napoca, Horea str. 7. E-mail: evapeter@hotmail.com.

Hymns of repentance represent an important research topic both regarding the lyrics and the tune. There were hymns of repentance used for several centuries, but also some that were considered appropriate only by the editors of a certain hymnbook. Research on hymns has not yet been able to determine the author and composer of the lyrics and tune of every hymn of repentance. In the 17th and 18th centuries editors of the hymnbooks did not consider important to clarify and indicate the authors and composers in the collections of hymns. In most cases the author and composer of a hymn has been determined only later.

The paper hereby deals primarily with the tunes of the hymns, it analyzes them, it reveals their sources, their versions represented in the hymnbooks of various centuries and how they were altered while passed over in oral tradition.

The scored Reformed hymnbooks of the 18th century already contain the hymn of repentance beginning ***Ne szállj perbe énvelem Ex. 1. (Do not quarrel with me oh Lord)***. It was probably sung earlier as well, since it has been included in the hymnbook of 1744. It is also one of the most popular hymns of repentance of the Lutheran and Catholic Church. Its lyrics are a free adaptation of Psalm 51. There were several theories regarding the author, but specialists decided it was Pastor János Kanizsai Pálfi (? – 1641).

The tune was published for the first time in the Gradual of Eperjes (1635 – 1650)² and it was sung with the lyrics of hymn *Tekints reánk Úr Isten (Look at Us oh Lord and Have Mercy)*. Later, in the Catholic collection of István Illyés (1693) this version of the tune is sung with the lyrics of *Ne szállj perbe énvelem*. In the hymnbook of Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca) of 1744 both lyrics have been included and the tune of the two lyrics is the same, but has different transpositions: number 79 with signature 1b, finalison *d* and number 284 with signature 1b, finalison *g*, probably erroneous: the signature should have been 2b. Version A published in the edition of Kolozsvár is almost similar to the one found in the Gradual of Eperjes, only the third note differs. The hymn is sung to our days.³ In the newer editions of the hymnbooks other lyrics are sung to this tune as well, ad notam: *O, Mélységes irgalom (Oh Great Mercy)* (lyrics of repentance), *Idivességünk, váltságunk (Our Salvation)* (lyrics of communion).

² Csomasz Tóth, Kálmán, *A XVI. század magyar dallamai (The Hungarian melodies of the 16th century), Régi Magyar Dallamok Tára I (Anthology of Old Hungarian Songs I)*, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1958, 232. It will be further referred to as RMDT I.

³ Abbreviated hymnbook references: reformed hymnbooks printed in Kolozsvár (Klausenburg): Kv1744, Kv1778, Kv1837, Kv1907, Kv1923; Reformed Hymnbook from Hungary: R1948, The Hungarian Reformed Hymnbook: MRÉ1996; Funeral Hymnbook from Nagyenyed (Strassburg am Mieresch): NH1769.

Kv 1744/79, 284; Kv 1778/134; Kv 1837/63; Kv 1907/3; Kv 1923/84, Kv 1996/307.

Ex. 1

Kv 1744/79 és Kv 1744/284.

79. Ne szállj per - be én - ve - lem
284. Te - kinis re - ank Úr Is - ten

* var.
Eperjesi Gradual

Another well known Transylvanian hymn of repentance is the one beginning ***Én Istenem, sok, s nagy bűnöm Ex.2. (Oh Lord My Many Great Sins)***. Its tune was published for the first time in the *Funerary Hymnbook of Nagyenyed* in 1769 accompanying funerary lyrics, but it was used also with many other lyrics. The tune appears in the hymnbooks of Kolozsvár in 1778 and it is one of the hymns sung in popular practice at wakes often even today.⁴ Based on several identical sequences of tunes researchers consider that it has been formed from a tune to be found in the German and Polish sources of the 17th century.⁵ The transformation took place in two steps. Initially the tune had a wide register in Dorian mode and its second and fourth lines contained a repetition in lower fifth. As a first step the repetition in fifth disappeared, the fourth line took over the pitch of the second line, thus the mode turned into a plagal one (Ex.2b.).⁶ Information contained in the specialized books have us conclude that the second phase of alteration can be traced only in the Reformed hymnbooks of Transylvania (*Funerary Hymnbook of Nagyenyed* and *Hymnbook of Kolozsvár*) and it implies the simplification of the structure: the first note of the first line was altered, but the repetition of the motif was maintained; insignificant alterations have been made also at the beginning of the second and fourth lines; the third line was replaced by a motivic version of the first line. Thus the plagal tune having an architectonic structure (aaBCB) and endings at the degree of 21V1 (Ex.2.b.) was turned into a hexachord tune (having a structure of aaBcaB) and a cadence at the degree of 2121 (Ex.2.a.). It is to be mentioned that surprisingly in the volume *Régi Magyar Dallamok Tára II (Collection of Old Hungarian Tunes II)* edited by Géza Papp, in the case of example no. 62 data regarding the Transylvanian books can be found only in the notes despite of the fact that the tune has well defined, special features. The Hungarian Reformed Hymnbook published in 1996 contained both tunes.⁷ In popular practice, as well as in the hymnbooks several lyrics were sung with this tune: *Terhes bajra és sok jajra (For Burdens and Many Lamentations)*; *Örülj szívem, vigadj lelkem (My Heart*

⁴ Kv 1778/135, Kv 1837/64, Kv 1907/64, Kv 1923/79.

⁵ With hungarian words in Papp, Géza, *A XVII. század énekelt magyar dallamai (Sung Melodies of the 17th century), Régi Magyar Dallamok Tára II, (Anthology of Old Hungarian Songs II.)* Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1970, 62a. It will be further referred to as RMDT II.

⁶ Example no 2.b: source: RMDT II/62a/III, see hymnbook printed in 1778 in Debrecen, Hungary.

⁷ No.303 and 267.

Rejoice, My Soul Be Merry)⁸, *Én nem perlek (I Shall Not Quarrel)*, *Szörnyű halál ím közöttünk áll (Awful Death Keeps Us Apart)*.

Ex. 2

The author of the lyrics of the hymn of repentance entitled **Seregeknek hatalmas nagy királya Ex. 3. (Great King of Hosts)** is Sinka György as it is revealed in the initials of the stanzas. It was published in the Unitarian hymnbook of Kolozsvár in 1700 without any tune. It was published with a tune for the first time in 1778 in the printed, scored hymnbook of Kolozsvár.⁹ Since then it has been consistently part of the Reformed worship and it has been published in the various hymnbook editions with minor alterations.¹⁰

Features of the tune suggest it belongs to the traditional tunes of the 17th century. It is a well-known piece of the Cycle of „Rákóczi” Melodies.¹¹ The modal structure of the tune has been altered since the publication of the hymnbook of Kolozsvár of 1837: it turned from a hexachord in major key into one in minor key and a leading note is used. Since in the case of both modal structures the ending is at the second degree, the tune ends in a Phrygian mode.

In the 1837 edition of the hymnbook of Kolozsvár the notation of the tune has a G clef, rhythm is noted by halves and quarters and it is forced into the four quarters measure, thus altering the quite obvious metrical rhythm of the lines having the following syllabic structure: 4+4+3, 4+4, 4+4+2. In Ex.3, under the version in the hymnbook of Kolozsvár of 1778 the rhythmic version published in the hymnbook of 1837 and maintained also in the following editions of the hymnbook is presented for the purposes of comparison. In the Reformed Hymnbook of Hungary (1948/207) this hymn of repentance has a different tune.

⁸ Other versions: audio recording: Magyarlapád, Fehér County; Körösfő, Kolozs County; Magyarvita, Kolozs County.

⁹ Kv 1778/138, RMDT II/358.

¹⁰ Kv 1837/66, Kv 1907/66, Kv 1923/86.

¹¹ See: Dobszay, László, *A magyar népének (The hungarian people hymn)*, Veszprémi Egyetem Kiadása (publisher), 1995. Note 431.

The Hungarian Reformed Hymnbook edited in 1996 publishes both versions (309/a,b). In the hymnbook of 1923 also the lyrics of another hymn of repentance was attached to this tune: *Szemeimből bánat könnyűi hullnak (I Cry Tears of Repentance)*.

Ex. 3

Kv 1788/138

Se-re-geknek hatalmas nagy ki-rá-lya

ritmus-metrum
Kv 1837/66

In the 16th-17th centuries one of the most popular metrical structures was the smaller Balassi style stanza, its metric structure containing 6 7, 6 7, 6 6 7 syllables. Religious poems of Hungarian poet Bálint Balassi have long been neglected by the editors of the hymnbooks. Kálmán Csomasz Tóth considers that the reason is that although the poet was a Protestant while young, at the end of his life was converted to Catholicism.¹²

Today one of the most popular hymns of repentance written by Bálint Balassi (1551 – 1594) is the one beginning ***Bocsásd meg Úristen Ex.4. (Lord, Forgive the Sins of My Youth)*** introduced into the Transylvanian worship practice in the 20th century. The hymnbook contains only seven out of the 15 stanzas of the original poem. The lyrics follow the structure of the smaller Balassi style stanza. The tune of this poem has been preserved in the collection of tunes of János Kájoni (1650). An earlier version was published in the collection of scored hymns printed at Kolozsvár in 1553 called the Cantional of Hoffgreff along with the text of the Biblical story of unknown origin relating on the main character, i.e. *Az istenfélő Eleazár papról (On the Godfearing Eleazar Priest)*. Since the end of the 16th century many hymnbooks make reference ad notam to this tune. A distant version of the tune using *Csak tereád, Uram (Only to You, Lord)* as lyrics has been published in the hymnbook of 1744 under no. 89.

Ex.4. contains the three above-mentioned tune versions. Although several tune sequences differ, the unfolding of the profile of the tune is the same in each melodic line, maintaining the pitch of the cadences and also the pitch of the ending notes at the divisions to stanzas.¹³ In the Hungarian Reformed Hymnbook the Kájoni version with the Balassi stanza is represented from among the three versions. (4.b.)

¹² Csomasz Tóth, Kálmán, *Huszár Gál énekeskönyvének úrvacsorai liturgiája*, in: *Református Egyház*, Budapest, 1955. 122.

¹³ The ritm of 4.b.: RMDT I/18 II.

a) Ré-gen a tör-vény-ben Hoffgreff (1553)

b) Bocsásd meg Úr Is - ten Kájoni-Kódex/7b-8a

c) Csakte - re - át U - ram Kv 1744/89

From among the German chorals of the 17th century first we mention a choral sung already when written and widely popular also today. It is one of the most popular chorals in the world, its spreading was stimulated also by adaptations made by Bach.¹⁴ Its versions can be found both in the passion after Matthew and that after John.

The tune was composed for secular lyrics in 1601 by Hans Leo Hassler (1564–1612). Later ecclesiastical lyrics were also attached to it. The first version of the tune Ex.5.a. with the lyrics of a Hungarian hymn of repentance, ***Gyötrődik az én lelkem nagy sok bűneimért Ex.5. (My Soul Is in Pain Because of My Many Great Sins)*** and the adaptation for five voices of Calvisius is found in the Gradual of Eperjes, later in the printed hymnbooks of the 18th century other, mainly funerary lyrics are attached to it (Ex. 5b). The latter lyrics, *Szívem szerint kívánom (I Wish with All My Heart)* is a translation of the original German lyrics *Herzlich tut mich verlangen*, which in fact is the lyrics of the adaptations made by J.S. Bach. The Hungarian version was published in 1690 in the hymnbook of Lőcse. A proof of the popularity of the tune is that several lyrics have been attached to it.

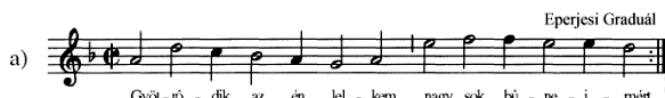
In the adaptations of J.S. Bach the tune starts with an upbeat and it has a diverse rhythm. The Ex.5b version below drops the last line of the tune and repeats the third line on the second degree of the Dorian key, since its ending is similar. In the two examples the melodic drawing also resembles, only a few sequences differ. Until the 20th century this version was in use.

¹⁴ J. S. Bach, *Vierstimmige Choralgesänge*, Editio Musica, Budapest, 1982, Nr. 154–163. It will be further referred to as Bach.

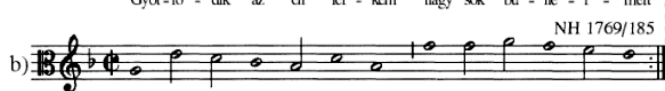
As a result of a significant reform when also the results of the musicological research have been applied the tune was transformed back to its initial form with the lyrics of the hymn for Black Friday *Ó Krisztusfő, te zúzott (Oh Hurt Head of Christ)*.¹⁵ The original German lyrics *O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden* was written by Paul Gerhardt (1607–1676) and it is also represented in the adaptations made by Bach.¹⁶ Reformed hymnbooks attach to this tune also the poem of repentance written by József Lengyel in the 18th century, the first line of the poem: ***Uram a töredelmes szívet te szereted (Lord You Like the Repenting Heart)***.

Ex. 5

Eperjesi Gradual


a) 


Gyű - ró - dik az én lel - kem nagy sok bü - ne - i - mért

b) 

Szi - vem sze - rént kí - vá - nom u - tol - só ó - rá - mat

NH 1769/185

a) 

b) 

The hymn of repentance beginning ***Istenem, én, nagy bűnös ember*** **Ex.6. (Lord, Me, the Man, the Great Sinner)**, hymn no. 305 in the Hungarian Reformed Hymnbook is also related to the tune of a German choral composed by G. Neumark (1621–1681). The original German title of the choral beginning *Ki csak Istenre dolgát hagyja (Those Who Leave Their Destiny to God)* is: *Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten*. The Hungarian version had seven stanzas and was published in the Lutheran collection of hymns Zöngedező Mennyei Kar (Heavenly Singing Choir). The new hymnbook kept only four of the seven stanzas and it was translated by Mrs. Margit Révész Váró with a slightly varied text *Ki Istenének átad mindent (Those Who Leave Everything in the Hands of God)*. The German and Hungarian version of the choral (ex. 6a,b) has features specific to the minor key with a lifted seventh degree and measures of three quarters. Due to the fact that the first sentence is repeated, its structure is AAB. Following up the musical history of the tune a version with measures of four quarters was found in the hymnbooks of Kolozsvár published at the beginning of the 20th century with an almost similar tune as the above mentioned Ex. 6c, but with a

¹⁵ Kv 1923/283, MRÉ/221.

¹⁶ Bach nr. 159.

funerary lyrics¹⁷ (*Én Istenem, tudom meghalok (Lord, I Know I Shall Die)*). Its structure is AABB due to the repeated second sentence. If the tune is searched in the collection of Bach chorals two versions are found: one in h minor and one in a minor. Both have measures of four quarters, with an upbeat of a quarter note, while the tune is ornamented in some places (Ex 6d).¹⁸

Ex. 6

Zahn RMDT II.p.177.

a) Wer nur den lie - ben Gott lasst wal - ten

Kv 1996/399

b) Ki Is - te - né - nek át - ad min - dent

Kv 1907/68

c) Én Is - te - nem, tu - dom, meg - ha - lok

(a) (b) (c)

Bach: 367.

d)

In the written documents of the 16th century several lyrics of biblical or religious theme are referred to a certain tune with unknown origin, but composed in the chronicler and ecclesiastic style of the century. In the Régi Magyar Dallamok Tára I (Collection of Old Hungarian Tunes I) it has been published under no. 23 with the lyrics beginning *Irgalmazz Úristen Ex.7. (Lord Have Mercy)*. Its topic is repentance. The tune was not published by the Catholics after the 17th century and by the Reformed since the 18th century. But the Hungarian Reformed Hymnbook includes it in its repertory again. The complete version of the tune has been preserved only in the Catholic folk tradition in the Christmas lyrics rendering the good news: *Mikor Máriához az Isten angyala (When the Angel of God Went to See Mary)*.¹⁹ Specialists state that the hymn sung with the same lyrics by the Reformed of Kalotaszeg region is an extract

¹⁷ Kv 1907/68, 1923/207.

¹⁸ Kv 1907/68, 1923/207.

¹⁹ Szendrei, Janka – Dobszay, László – Rajeczky, Benjámín, *XVI-XVII. századi dallamaink a népi emlékezetben I-II. (Our melodies from the XVI-XVIIth century in people's memory)*. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest 1979, II/23c–f. It will further be referred to as SZDR.

from the middle of the hymn.²⁰ So the partial tune of the hymn of repentance is sung with Christmas lyrics.

In its complete form (Ex. 7a.) the tune has four lines and 6+6 syllables. It is in Eolian mode, its beginning and ending lines contain the ambitus of the 1-5 degrees and conclude with the first degree, while the intermittent tunes develop the ambitus at a higher level and conclude with the fifth, respectively the third degree. These pitch relations create a general arched tune profile with architectonic structure ABCD/A. In the partial tune (Ex. 7b.) the beginning and ending lines have been dropped and only lines BC have been maintained, thus seemingly the tune is for four lines of 6 syllables each, which is in fact two lines of 6+6 syllables. It varies between the third to the eighth of the mode and thus gains the features of a tune in major key.

Ex. 7

Kv 1744/84-RMDT I/23 II.

a) Ir - gal-mazz Úr Is - ten im-má-ron én-né-kem

Poco rubato ♩=90 Méra.

b) Mi-ker Má-ri - á-hoz az Is -ten Angyala

a) Ná - zá-ret vá-ros-ban

b) az ég-ből le-szá-l-la

b) PÉ I A/9; r.z: g; Méra (Kolozs m); Tötszegi Károlyné Kozma Anna 69:gy. Péter É., 2000.

The tune preserved by Catholics in their oral tradition has been only slightly altered and thus only several sequences of the tune are different. Comparing the versions in the folk tradition to the version published at Kolozsvár in 1744 it is to be noted that the partial tune resembles more the version preserved in the oral tradition than the published one, therefore it is probable that it originates from oral tradition, not the published version.

In the hymnbooks published in Transylvania and Hungary there are several lyrics referring to the tune of one of the most popular psalms of repentance, Psalm 38, beginning *Haragodnak nagy voltában Ex.8.(In Your Great Anger)*. The lyrics of repentance *Uram bűneink soksága (Lord the Multitude of Our Sins)* included in the hymnbooks since 1837 are sung also to this tune. Besides this, the tune has been applied in the 1837, 1907 and 1923 editions also to funerary lyrics, entitled *Útas vagyok e világban címmel (I Am a Traveller in this World)*. In the paper hereby it is presented with these latter lyrics in Ex.8, sung by a singer of Sárovasár with a particular style and richly ornamented.

²⁰ SzDR II/23 g.

Quasi giusto ♩ = 36 Sárvásár

U - tas va - gyok ez vi - lág - ban, Menny - or - szág - ban
vár ő - rök ha - zám ké - szen.
A tes - tem csak lel - ke - sült por, És ha a sor
re - ám jön, s por - rá lé - szen.

BMA IV A-21; r.z. g. Sárvásár (Kolozs m.); Ambrus Sándorné Márton Katalin 68; gy. Kiss L., 1969.

It is a well-known fact that exchanging lyrics and tunes is a frequent phenomenon. The above mentioned lyrics are attached to the tune of a praise hymn of 19th century in the hymnbook published in Hungary.²¹ The data published inform us that the author is János Kiss (1770–1846). Due to the similarity of the data and especially due to the sophisticated rhythmic formula (8, 4+7, 8, 4+7) of the lines it can be assumed that the lyrics were written originally for the tune of the psalm and its publication in the hymnbook of Kolozsvár of 1837 with that tune indicates the initial relation.

Among the hymns of repentance the one beginning *Hatalmas Isten könyörgünk* **Ex.9.(Almighty Lord We Pray)** (Ex. 9a) was published in Transylvania only in the hymnbook of 1744. The second stanza is a beautiful request for forgiveness. „Merciful God, hear our prayer, forgive us our sins. Edify your faith in us and comfort us with your Holy Spirit.” Editors of later hymnbooks dropped this hymn. In the hymnbook of Debrecen of 1778²² and then after a long pause in the hymnbook of Budapest of 1948 the hymn was published again, but it could not have had any effect on the Transylvanian folk tradition. Since there are no other pieces of information on the preservation of the tune in any written documents in Transylvania it can be concluded that the tune has been preserved up to this day by oral tradition.

The origin of the tune and lyrics is unknown, the tune is probably of Bohemian origin, its style dates it back to the hymns of the 16th-17th century. Kálmán Csomasz Tóth, in the chapter entitled *The Beginnings of the New Hungarian Folk Song Style in the Tunes of the 16th Century* enumerates several examples of foreign origin, stating that these might have been the sources influencing the formation of the new style after the instinct of learning formed

²¹ Text: R1948/409, melody R1948/366.

²² RMDT I/206.

them according to its own pattern. He analyses – among others – also the tune of Ex.9., stating that the principle of repeating the tune one fifth higher, the principle of the arched tune profile and the principle of variation are found here as emerging principles, since the tune of the first line is used somewhat varied as the ending line.

Ex. 9

a) Kv 1744/245 = RMDT I/206
Ha - tal - mas Is - ten, kö - nyör-günk

b) Quasi giusto ♩=168
Gye - tek, lá - nyok, a kony - há - ra, Bo - rul - junk egy - más vál - lá - ra. Sepsiköröspataka

c) Poco rubato ♩=144
Az i - ri - nyi te - me - tő - be, Há - rom ár - va sé - tál ben - ne. Érinyi.

(a) Si - rat - juk mű az a - pán - kot, A fel - ne - ve - lő daj - kán - kot.

(b) A - zér sé - tál az ott ben - ne, É - des - any - jok nyug - szik ben - ne.

(c) A - zér sé - tál az ott ben - ne, É - des - any - jok nyug - szik ben - ne.

b) Sepsiköröspataka (Kovácsna m.); Hamar L. 28; gy. Albert E., 1971; átírta: Szenik I.
c) Érinyi (Szatmár m.); Hajnal J. 64, Bakó I. 63; gy. Visnyai Cs., 1980.

The existence of folk versions is revealed in the folklore course of Dr. Ilona Szenik. In folk tradition the tunes have the lyrics of ballads attached to them. Both versions (Ex. 9b,c.) suffered the same changes: the archaic structure became more like the folk songs of new style. Apart from the slight changes, the tune has an architectonic structure of AA⁵A⁵A. The example of version Ex. 9b. preserved the specific features of lines 1 and 2; as far as rhythmic structure is concerned both have preserved the rhythmic pattern at the beginning having a giusto feature.

Thus it can be concluded that the hymns of repentance are one of the most popular categories of the hymns of Transylvanian Reformed worship. These are sung during the weeks of preparation before the great religious holidays, which are also weeks of repentance and during the week before the ceremony of the profession of faith. These are also the lyrics read by the members of the congregation as prayers in their personal devotional time.

In the Hungarian culture editions of scored hymnbooks for the congregation have been published relatively late. Comparing the various versions it can be observed that the tunes suffered slight and occasionally significant

