

The Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology

The Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology. Canterbury Press. ([http://www.hymnology.co.uk/.](http://www.hymnology.co.uk/)) Institutional pricing varies by size.

The Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology (CDH) is billed as “an impossible task” made possible through the use of the Internet. For years there has been a desire for an update to John Julian’s *Dictionary of Hymnology*, published in 1892 and supplemented in 1907. As a steady user of Julian, I was thrilled to see such an update. For ten years, several editors and over five hundred writers have been working on this project. The project is largely British, with additional editors from the United States, Canada, and Australia. The two general editors, J. R. Watson and Emma Hornby, are renowned in the world of hymnology. Since the death of Erik Routley, Watson has been considered the leading hymnologist in England, and he has a lengthy bibliography of books and articles on the study of hymns. Hornby, the second general editor, is a young scholar of early music. The U.S. editor is Carlton Young, a name I’ve known and respected from my teenage years as a young accompanist for church choirs. The website describes him as “among the foremost church musicians of his era in the United States. His accomplishments are evident as educator, composer (choral compositions, organ works, arrangements, and hymn tunes), practicing church musician, hymnal editor, and contributor to hymnological scholarship.”

The homepage of the *CDH* claims that it has over four thousand individual entries of two million words. Words are important because this is a full-text searchable database. Over three hundred authors from over thirty countries wrote for it. One accolade, found in the “News” section of the website, is from I-to Loh, a professor of church music in Taiwan: “Asia and many parts of the world have already produced many hymns with their respective contextual ethnic imageries, poetic forms, musical styles and accompaniment, but were mostly unknown to other parts of the world. The publication of the *Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology* has brought new insights into the understanding of Christian faith and theological issues through these ‘third world hymns.’”

In defining its scope, the *CDH* states, “The work covers a multitude of hymn traditions from all the world’s continents, regions, and denominations, it is ecumenical and international.” Its coverage extends from the earliest hymns of the Judeo-Christian tradition to contemporary hymns, and it includes articles on hymns, authors, composers, hymnals, hymnal companies, and organizations, as well as longer overviews of types of hymns, eras, denominations, and other topics. As with most Internet resources, the dictionary may be searched by full-text and can be browsed through an alphabetical list. (Unfortunately, the alphabetical list does not exclude initial articles, so one must remember to browse by initial article.)

Looking into the dictionary combines the enjoyment of opening Julian to read whatever is on the printed page with the ease of using the Internet to follow a path that meanders away from the topic one planned to research. In a few minutes, I covered a lot of territory. One hymn I had recently been researching was “*Urbs Sion aurea*” (“Jerusalem the Golden”). Browsing the “U”s brought me to “*Urbs Sion aurea*,” and I was then cross-linked to “*Hora novissima*,” the opening line of Bernard of Cluny’s poem from which “*Urbs Sion aurea*” comes. It contained the information I remembered from Julian, plus some other publishing and printing information. “Related Articles,” a list provided on the right side of the page, gave me eleven possibilities to follow up, including Bernard of Cluny and the Latin and English hymns taken from other parts of Bernard’s poem. I could follow up on Neale, the translator of the work, and on the hymn tune writer of “*Hora novissima*,” but not the hymn tune writer of “Jerusalem the Golden.” I was linked to another article on “Jerusalem the Golden.” Here I found information about Alexander Ewing, writer of the hymn tune EWING, which is usually associated with the hymn. I also found a quotation from Neale about the reception of the hymn that I had not seen before and that adds to my research.

While looking at the EWING article, I also discovered pop-ups for hymnals. When the cursor is hovering on the title's abbreviation in the article, a pop-up appears with a short blurb about the hymnal. Some of these pop-ups have links to the full article in the *CDH*. I discovered this by accident, and one wishes that the *CDH* would place information about its use on the homepage. I searched the FAQ and other parts of the website for a description of the unique features of the dictionary but to no avail. Some topics in articles have an asterisk, for instance, and I have written to the contact to discover what that signifies.

Looking for another hymn I had recently researched, "Come down, O Love Divine," I did not at first find it because the alphabetization of the browse also depends on punctuation. Once I noticed this I was able to find it, but this quirk of organization is an unnecessary distraction.

One can also browse by "Categories": General, Eras, Traditions, Hymns, People, Places, and Collections. The further subdivisions (tags) in the General category are so often poorly applied as to make them worthless. These categories also show up as tags for individual entries. "Collections," for example, seems to be the tag for hymnals. This list contains 140 items; checking it against my own small but broad collection of hymnals, I found fewer than half the hymnals I own. When one goes to the "Collections" list, one finds a left-hand facet list (a very helpful tool), which includes Anglican (5), Baptist (6), Charismatic/Gospel (1), Congregational (4), Ecumenical (1), Lutheran (1), Methodist (10), Monastic/Medieval (8), Presbyterian (1), Roman Catholic (4), Unitarian (2), and United Reformed (1). One must assume that the rest are not related to any denomination; however, while some of these are indeed non-denominational, this list also includes some thematic articles such as Cistercian hymns and hymnals, Estonian Methodist hymnody, and Chartist hymnody. Again, one wishes the tags were more consistent to enhance this kind of faceted use.

The *CDH* is available only by subscription as an online resource for both individuals and institutions. At the institutional level it is accessible using three options: IP authentication, referring URL, and guest user account (providing a username and password to the institution's user base). The FAQ suggests that the editorial board is looking at the possibility of a print version, but the resource is also said to be "published online to allow for additions, amendments, and corrections." I can find no more about possible additions, so one does not know if these might be regular or not. Pricing for institutions is by size. Small institutions (defined as those with fewer than approximately 15,000 full-time equivalent students) pay almost \$200 per year for the resource, which is not a subscription model that most genuinely small institutions (e.g., most theological schools) can afford. For comparison's sake, our subscription to the online *Oxford English Dictionary* costs \$200 per year, and it is many times larger than the *CDH*. Individual subscriptions in the United States are \$88.

Comparison with Hymnary.org, which is open access, suggests itself to the hymn lover immediately, and one wishes mightily that the two resources had pitched camp together. While Hymnary.org is planned primarily as an index (see David Mayo's review in *Theological Librarianship* 5, no. 2 [2012]) and now includes over five thousand hymnals (more hymnal entries than total entries in Canterbury), it nevertheless provides a great amount of dictionary information. In fact, for people (and for tunes and texts), articles from Julian are provided, as well as articles from other hymnal handbooks. Much of the biographical information in the *CDH* seems to be updated Julian articles. I researched "Jerusalem the Golden" in Hymnary.org and discovered that much of the material can be found in both. The *CDH*'s articles on hymnals would be a great enhancement to Hymnary.org, as most hymnal entries only have publication information, and possibly a very brief historical summary. (On the day I submitted this, an article by Tina M. Schneider from *The Hymn* 65, no. 3 (Summer 2014) was posted on the website of the *CDH*. I highly recommend it as a supplement to my review, as Schneider is involved in the work of Hymnary.org.)

Summarizing: The content available is superb. The editors state, in Schneider's article, that no articles are just a reprint of Julian; all have had at least some updating. The index materials (tags, mode of access) are mediocre at best, and experts (a cataloger or indexer and a computer geek) should be called in immediately to fix various problems. At the subscription price of \$200 per year, I cannot recommend it for seminaries or theological schools that do not have a sacred music department. At \$200 as a purchase price, it would be a bargain.

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