

## **The Poteats: Baptists, Liberals, and Church Musicians**

by Paul A. Richardson

In 1905, William Louis Poteat was inaugurated as president of Wake Forest College. The invocation on that occasion was given by his younger brother, Edwin McNeill Poteat, who had begun the same role at Furman University two years earlier. This dual accomplishment was remarkable—and was made even more so by the persons and the times.

The institutions they served were proud, but not strong. Wake Forest and Furman were survivors of the devastation of the Civil War and the deprivation of Reconstruction. These upheavals had brought about the demise of many private educational establishments, particularly those with inadequate support from sponsoring denominations. Furman and Wake Forest existed in the conservative upper south and were intermittently the focus of Southern Baptists' love/hate relationship with education.

### **The President Brothers**

William Louis Poteat was a Wake Forest graduate who had taught biology at the college since 1889 (his first appointment to the faculty, two years earlier, was as tutor of languages). By his personal example and articulate expression of his faith, he had won staunch admirers and supporters. By his teaching of evolution, he had become a favorite target of fundamentalists. "Dr. Billy," as he was fondly known to generations of students, appears to have been the first to teach this understanding of science in a private institution in the South and to retain his job. Randal Hall, who has done the most thorough study of Dr. Billy's life and work, concluded that:

In addition to his skilled oratory, Poteat survived the criticism of the twenties—unlike Baptist liberals at Baylor, Mercer, and other southern colleges—due to his extreme visibility within the state, unimpeachable personal faith and reputation, the strength of the loyal network of college alumni, and the moderate nature of his liberalism.

Hall found Poteat to be not a radical, but a progressive who sought change through traditional channels, grounded in Christian faith and manners.

In 1900, Poteat delivered the Julius Brown Gay Lectures at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The impact of Poteat's addresses, published as *Laboratory and Pulpit*, was such that one Louisville Baptist contributed \$1000 (a considerable sum in that time) to purchase scientific books for the seminary library, so that ministers might be better informed about advances in thought. A vituperative attack from the right ensued after he delivered the McNair Lectures on Science and Religion at the University of North Carolina in 1925, which were published as *Can a Man Be Christian To-Day?* Poteat's answer was "yes." He advised that, to keep peace in the world of ideas, moderns should "Consider Jesus." He concluded that:

you will find peace if you discriminate between Christ and some of His interpreters, if you discriminate between personal attachment to Christ, and men's explanations of it, if you discriminate between the field and apparatus of science and the immediate apprehension of moral and spiritual realities in the vision of faith.

Edwin McNeill Poteat, also a graduate of Wake Forest, was a biblical scholar who had done graduate study at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary before serving briefly as pastor in Chapel Hill and as teacher of ancient languages at Wake Forest. Following additional study at

Johns Hopkins University and the University of Berlin, he held pulpits in New Haven and Philadelphia. His longest employ was as president of Furman from 1903 until 1918. He then worked with the Layman's Missionary Movement and the Interchurch World Movement, and as the departmental executive secretary for the General Board of Promotion of the Northern Baptist Convention. In 1921, he went to China, where his two older sons, Gordon and Edwin, were serving as missionaries, to be professor of philosophy and ethics at the University of Shanghai, a Baptist institution. After his return to the states, he served churches in Richmond and Atlanta, then was professor of ethics and comparative religion at Mercer University from 1931 until 1934. He returned to Furman as professor of New Testament and Christian ethics for the last three years of his life. Though not so much of a controversialist as his elder brother, he did not avoid the word "liberal" in describing his approach to education or faith.

The Poteats were descendants of a Huguenot family that had moved from Charleston, South Carolina, to Caldwell County, North Carolina. James Poteat, the father of the educators, was a well-to-do plantation owner prior to the Civil War and a hotel operator thereafter. Following the death of his first wife, he married Julia McNeill, and they had four children. William Louis was the eldest, followed by Ida Isabella, who taught art at Meredith College from 1899 until her death in 1940. Edwin McNeill was third in line, and the youngest, Emma Lindsey, died at age 22. The contributions of this family to the histories of three Baptist colleges are recalled to this day through names on buildings and scholarships, and in institutional lore.

Woven through the several generations is activity in the church's music, and it is these threads that I'll trace today. Without straining for evidence or speculating on motive, we can observe that the commitment of the Poteats to education and church life extended quite naturally to music in worship.

### **Hymnological Heritage**

Both of the president brothers married into families with hymnological history. William Louis married Emma James Purefoy in 1881. Emma was the great-granddaughter of John Purify (the family used both spellings over at least three generations), who compiled *A Selection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs* in 1823. The title page of that collection identifies him as "Pastor of the Baptist Church, at the Cross Roads Meeting House, Wake County, N.C." He was a founding trustee of Wake Forest Institute and an evangelist in this area for a half century. His hymnal was sufficiently successful that a second edition was issued in 1831.

In 1889, early in his ten-year pastorate at Calvary Baptist Church in New Haven, Edwin wed Harriet Hale Gordon. Harriet was the daughter of Adoniram Judson Gordon. Named for the most famous Baptist missionary from America, Gordon was pastor of the Clarendon Street Baptist Church in Boston and founder of the Boston Missionary Training School, forerunner of Gordon College. He had been co-editor of *The Service of Song for Baptist Churches*, one of the 1871 hymnals that sparked a "hymnbook war" among Baptists. He also edited *The Vestry Hymn and Tune Book* and published *Congregational Worship*, a collection of five addresses about the participatory nature of worship. A. J. Gordon composed the tune to which many still sing "My Jesus, I love thee, I know thou art mine."

Baptists, educators, churchmen, forthright liberals, married to descendants of hymnal compilers: We could end the account here with a certain degree of satisfaction, knowing that the heritage of congregational song had by marriage become intertwined with higher education. The more interesting part of the story, however, comes from the progeny of the president brothers. Each had a son who would make a distinctive contribution to the music of the church, though in neither case was this his vocation.

### **Hubert McNeill Poteat**

Hubert McNeill Poteat was the eldest child and only son of William Louis and Emma Purefoy Poteat. As a student at Wake Forest, he distinguished himself not only as a scholar, but also as an athlete, winning southern intercollegiate tennis titles in both singles and doubles. He began teaching at Wake Forest immediately upon earning his M.A. from that institution in 1908. Following completion of the Ph.D. degree at Columbia University, he taught Latin and chaired the department of Classical Languages for 44 years, retiring in 1956 when the college moved to its new campus in Winston-Salem. In addition to his long tenure at Wake Forest, he taught in summer sessions at Columbia from 1924 until 1942. His editions of Cicero, Pliny, Martial, and Livy were used in colleges across the country. Lehigh University (1954) and the University of North Carolina (1955) awarded him honorary doctorates.

Hubert McNeill Poteat was not a man to be taken lightly. Something of his demeanor can be inferred from the appellation given him by students: "Old Thunder." Beyond languages, college, and family, he had two passions: the organ and the shriners. In 1950-51 he was granted a leave from teaching to travel about the country as Imperial Potentate of the North American Shrine, the top position among the 600,000 shriners in the US.

Hubert achieved distinction as an organist. An obituary reported that he performed more than 250 recitals. While a doctoral student at Columbia, he was assistant university organist. He sang during this same period, first as member of the choir at Brick Presbyterian Church and then as a paid soloist at the Church of the Intercession.

Hubert served the Wake Forest Baptist Church as organist for more than forty years, playing there and in college chapel services from the age of ten. He directed the church choir from the console and led the college glee club for many years. He also composed a small number of pieces.

[When my father, Robert L. Richardson, Sr., was a student at Wake Forest in the 1930s, he was a member of the college's student quartet. One Sunday he sang a solo in church, accompanied by Hubert at the organ. Hubert improvised, and my father got lost—and then more lost. He confessed that as a college student—and not a young one, his education having been interrupted by the depression—he went back to his room after church and cried. (We singers are very sensitive folk!)]

### ***Practical Hymnology***

A book outside one's field by a classics professor at a small southern college might be dismissed as obscure, and, in some sense, *Practical Hymnology* was. But this 1921 volume was judged significant enough to be reprinted in 1975 by the American Musicological Society. Hear the conclusion of the preface:

I am neither a professional musician nor a teacher of music. The convictions set forth in this little volume have been formed during a long term of service as director of a volunteer choir. Further, I am not in the pay of any publisher of hymn books, nor do I ever expect to be. I shall be sorry if certain opinions expressed in the following pages appear to any reader to be harsh; but I shall comfort myself with the reflection that every word was written in an earnest endeavor to check what I believe to be a real evil and to promote a deeper interest in the true worship of God.

Hubert was still a young man when he published this volume in his thirty-fifth year. His “long term of service” did, however, extend over three-fifths of his life to that point, for he had been organist of the Wake Forest Baptist Church since the age of fourteen and had played the piano for chapel services at the college even earlier. Those worshiping communities, and the involvement in them of his parents, strongly shaped his understanding. When William Louis and Emma Purefoy Poteat retired from the church’s choir, it was noted that he had been a member of it for fifty-two years, much of that time, as its leader. (Poteat’s friend, Baxter Durham, wrote in response to this recognition: “Fifty-two years a member of the choir! How on earth did you keep your religion?”)

Hubert’s aim was to contest the intrusion into worship of those songs that he judged to be unworthy and ephemeral. To this literature he applied the label “The Cheap Hymn,” using that epithet as the title of his second chapter. His writing is variously logical, theological, insightful, abrasive, and humorous. The humor ranges from the subtle to the hilariously hyperbolic. To imagined representative song books, he gave such titles as *The Tinkling Cymbal*, *The Sounding Brass* (with its successor, *The Sounding Brass, No. 2*), and *Sanctified Jazz No. 19*.

He wrote of “the collections of dance music and doggerel which desecrate so many of our churches and Sunday schools today—collections whose standards can be improved only by consuming fire.” While his humor is clearly calculated to be provocative, the musical and textual analyses that he provided are perceptive, particularly in describing various types of commercial music and their adaptation for sale to the churches. Consider this analysis:

It is a waltz, thinly disguised by twelve-eight time, and a fairly good waltz, too. I have not discovered the source of the music employed for the verses, but the chorus is an adaptation of the same portion of that once popular ballad, “I wisht I wuz single again,”—an adaptation, it may be said,—which departs very slightly from the original fount of inspiration. Play it over, and be convinced, if you doubt. The author of the song liked its music so well that about five years later he repeated it in another waltz, called “Wonderful Name.” A more proper title would be “Wonderful Similarity.” No. 2 is written in a different key, but laying that alteration aside, it is No. 1, almost note for note, even down to a sliding stunt for the alto in the chorus.

Poteat had a keen eye for context and irony. Consider his description of a promotional singing: The whole performance would not last one night at any cheap vaudeville show in the land. The singer marches up on the platform, cracks a few venerable jokes, unlimbers his muscles and his larynx and announces a “hymn.” Then, while the audience turn over the pages in the search for the gem with which they are about to approach the throne of God, the singer gets a few more hand-picked classics out of his system. Everybody being at

last ready, the pianist reels off a few measures (keeping time with as much of his anatomy as he can without precipitating himself from his seat), the people get their feet into action, and the worship of God begins.

While he admits that such music does inject “pep” into the singing, he finds the result lacking: “The ‘pep’ thus engendered is a poor, specious counterfeit of that deep religious enthusiasm aroused by the hearty singing of a real hymn.” He also rejected the use of such music to engage young people, arguing instead for their edification:

The children can be trained to love the good hymns; and we are exceedingly remiss in our duty to them when we expend all our energies in superintending their mental development during the week, only to expose them on Sunday morning to reverence-killing and soul-dwarfing trash in the shape of unworshipful songs.

Though he did not name names, neither did he refrain from citing specific cases, even in his own denominational house: “When the Seventy-five Million Campaign was set on foot by Southern Baptists, a certain gentleman wrote a ‘Campaign Hymn’ which was shipped all over the South by the bale. It was called ‘When Millions come pouring in,’ and it was of a cheapness and sorriness indescribable.”

The last of Poteat’s three chapters is entitled “Music in the Church and Sunday School.” He began by reporting the work of advocates for better music in secular venues, suggesting that this objective should be at least as important to the church. He warned against letting the “cheap hymn” infiltrate the church through the Sunday school. He urged the regular offering of hymn services to present the best in hymnody. Throughout, he was an advocate of vital congregational singing, noting the importance of the active leadership of the pastor in this cause. It is particularly significant that Poteat, himself a concert organist, should state so strongly the principal role of the church organist:

It makes no difference how gifted he may be at improvisation, how fine an ear he may have for combinations of stops, how brilliantly he may execute preludes and postludes. If he is unable to play hymns correctly, vigorously, and inspiringly, he is *not* a church organist, and the sooner he resigns, the better.

He placed the same level of responsibility on the choir for making hymn leadership a priority. Finally, he touched briefly on hymn selection, hymnological study, and the context of worship in which hymn singing takes place.

Poteat practiced what he preached. College historian George Washington Paschal, after describing Hubert’s work as organist, wrote:

It is, however, in his work of [*sic*] director of the choir and the congregational singing that he has made his greatest contribution. . . . The service he has rendered in improving the congregational singing is also worthy of praise. He has tolerated nothing tawdry in words or music, but has taught many generations of students to love what is chaste and noble in the service of song.

### **Edwin McNeill Poteat, Jr.**

Edwin McNeill Poteat, Jr., was the second child and second son of Edwin, Sr., and Harriet Gordon Poteat. He earned bachelor's and master's degrees from Furman during his father's presidency. Like his cousin, Hubert, he was an athlete, competing in tennis, handball, baseball, and football. One of his accomplishments was defeating Walter Lippman in a tennis match. He was also an organist, serving in this role for two summers at the Northfield Conference. McNeill, who went by his middle name, and his older brother, Gordon, were ordained in the same service in 1914, W. O. Carver having chaired the ordaining council. He completed a second master's degree at Southern Seminary in 1916.

Whereas Hubert spent his whole career in one place, McNeill was peripatetic. He spent a year as a traveling secretary for the Student Volunteer Movement, then was appointed by the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention to serve in China. After a decade in typical missionary work, he joined the faculty of the University of Shanghai, teaching philosophy and ethics. Constrained both by Chinese politics and those of the mission board, he resigned in 1929 to accept the pastorate of this church. Here and everywhere he served, McNeill was a proponent of missions and missions education.

In 1937, he heeded the call of the Euclid Avenue Baptist Church, Cleveland, Ohio. This was the church of John D. Rockefeller, and Poteat recognized that he faced both an opportunity and a struggle to persuade conservative, monied parishioners to advocacy and activity in behalf of the urban poor. Seven years later, he accepted the presidency of Colgate-Rochester Divinity School. The pressures of travel and fund raising—together with his apparent inability to decline any offer to write or speak—led to a break in his health in 1948. On the advice of physicians, he resigned the seminary presidency. The pulpit at Pullen was open, and he and the congregation agreed on his return here under conditions intended to protect his health. He died of a heart attack while preparing to perform a wedding in this church in December 1955.

McNeill Poteat was known ecumenically through his commentary on the Psalms in the *Interpreter's Bible*, through poetry that appeared frequently in *Christian Century*, through his Beecher Lectures in Preaching at Yale, and through his advocacy of the separation of church and state. He was one of the founders in 1947 of Protestants and Other Americans United for Separation of Church and State and its first president. The first of his seventeen books was *Coming to Terms with the Universe: A Study in the Philosophy of Religion for the Semi-sophisticated*. The second was entitled *Jesus and the Liberal Mind*. Subsequent volumes ranged from devotional essays to sermons to a book-length narrative poem. Many of his shorter poems appeared in a 1945 anthology, *Over the Sea the Sky*. He was not an inconsiderable poet: eight of his texts were included in Harper and Brothers' *Masterpieces of Religious Verse*.

His psalm commentaries are interesting for their occasional quotations of hymns, comments about them, and sophisticated allusions to music. In contrasting psalm 66 with the hymnody of his time, he observed: "The banality of the words of modern songs—with reference to what is sung in most Protestant churches—cannot be redeemed by catchy tunes. The song we have been studying puts to shame the cheap ditties that satisfy too easily what we think is our impulse to praise." (He had, perhaps, been influenced by his cousin's book.)

An example of hymnic criticism is his quotation in connection with Psalm 47 of lines from “Onward, Christian Soldiers,” with this comment: “so deeply has the passion of this ancient song worked its way into the proud heart. But we are left with a troubled conscience, an uneasy spirit. We must find another song with an authentically Christian note.”

As brilliant and multi-talented as was McNeill, he was essentially modest and had a splendid sense of humor. In introductory comments to his Yale lectureship, Poteat recalled that he had been born in New Haven, while his father was pastor there. He reported that his mother, having encountered drunken Yale students following a football game, had declared that “I’d rather send my son to hell than to Yale.” He commented that those hearing his lecture might share her preference.

A certain puckishness once prompted him to wager that he could play popular music for the prelude and postlude of a service unnoticed. He won the bet. On another occasion, a soloist was singing Charles Gounod’s “Lovely appear,” and the organ ceased just after the words “Ye mountains, ye perpetual hills, bow ye down.” Poteat quipped to the congregation that the organ had bowed down and couldn’t get up.

### **McNeill Poteat as Liturgist**

In many ways beyond his wit, Poteat sought to enliven worship. His intent was not so much to imitate other traditions as to bring vitality and reality in such a way so as to engage those present. Writing about Jesus’ refusal of the drugged wine while on the cross, he observed:

What of worship? Do not many good folks come to church to have their senses soothed? A liturgy that acts as a soporific and a sermon that acts as a drug are far more common than an order of worship that keeps the worshipers on their spiritual toes and a sermon that stabs them wide awake with the issues of eternal destiny.

Given this view, he was highly critical not only of typical evangelical worship, but also of liturgy in the traditional sense. Writing in 1934, Poteat located Baptists on the spectrum of Reformation churches and identified three distinguishing characteristics of their worship:

Baptists, as a segment of Protestantism, arose out of the liberal movement, and the liberal movement gained no little impetus from Baptist participation. There are three matters that Baptists, at least traditionally, regard as hostile to religious liberalism. These three things are of the essence of formalism, and it is formalism that is the adversary of liberalism. The first is creed. Creed represents intellectual formalism; it is illiberalism in the field of ideas. Liturgy is devotional formalism; illiberalism in the field of the affections. The third is sacrament. Sacrament is volitional formalism; illiberalism in the matter of the will. Creed inescapably tends toward the establishment of the ideas of men in definite and inviolate categories; liturgy tends to canalize the religious emotions of men in regimented devotional routine; sacrament tends to substitute a vicarious and mediated act for an act of will.

Baptists . . . have certainly never lived by the drone of liturgy, however majestic and elevated, but rather by the voice of prophecy—sometimes mad, often confused, but always passionate.

His commentary on biblical psalms often touched on aspects of worship, typically with this same critique of ritual. For example, in his reflection on Psalm 50 he wrote:

[ritual] does him little good if he confuses, as he often does, the method with the motive of worship. God is offered the substance of sacrifice, which he does not need. For man sacrifice is wasteful; for God it is unnecessary. The alternative to the adjournment of worship therefore lies in the discovery of the need that it meets. . . . make thanksgiving your offering to God.

While avoiding formalism, Poteat wanted to engage the minds and wills of those he led in worship. Toward this end, he invested significant time and thought on a weekly basis in planning worship. Shortly after his return to the Pullen pulpit, he explained this approach in the church's worship folder:

You have observed changes in our order of worship. Since the experience of congregational worship is enriched in such measure as the congregation shares in it, we are planning for maximum fuller participation by all who enter the sanctuary. This requires that all of us follow the order of worship carefully so that the service shall suffer as little as possible due to inattention.

As Roger Crook's history recounts, "From that time on the worship services at Pullen involved the congregation actively in some way in almost every part of the service—in praise and prayer and offering."

The order of worship at Pullen was newly created nearly every week. Poteat wrote about this practice to a young pastor:

We Baptists have been so remiss in this matter that we have become rather slipshod. Being free, as liturgical churches are not, we ought to be very zealous in the effort to create new patterns which will evoke greater participation from the worshipper.

Poteat drew from a wide range of sources encountered in his voracious reading and wrote fresh material himself. The weekly worship guides from his time here, as well as notebooks of this material, demonstrate the importance to him of this work. His collaborator was Geraldine Cate, who became choir director at Pullen in 1944 and served in that role for forty-one years, matching (and, often, challenging!) the creativity of Poteat and his successors.

Poteat was also instrumental in shaping the worship space. When the new sanctuary was built in 1950, its chancel was divided, reflecting his preference. In a Nov. 19, 1952, letter Poteat wrote:

The divided chancel provided the symbolism of the Word as read from the Scriptures on one side, and the Word as preached on the other. This dual emphasis, to my mind, is still important. Indeed [*sic*; no comma] I prefer it over that which puts the pulpit, as the symbol of preaching, at the center. If I were asked for a quick, rather than a research [*sic*] opinion, I should say that the divided chancel is earlier in the Baptist tradition than the present usage. This also applies to the practice of having the preacher in a clerical gown. It is comparatively recent that the "rags of popery" have been so fiercely discarded by the Baptist puritists [*sic*] that they can appear in any sort of garb, so long as it covers the vessels of dishonor.



That letter was written to a young pastor in the state, a fellow by the name of Finlator. The dedication day featured a sermon by Harry Emerson Fosdick in the morning service; an organ recital in the afternoon that included the performance of Poteat's anthem, "Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts"; and a service of the Lord's Supper in the evening—all with substantial congregational reading of material chosen or written by Poteat.

Though he wrote about worship in connection with other purposes, Poteat never produced an extended treatment of the subject. His expertise in the area was widely respected. He served as a member of the Committee on Worship of the National Council of Churches of Christ in America for several years.

### **McNeill Poteat as Composer**

McNeill Poteat's energy and creativity extended to musical composition. The largest work of which there is any mention is an opera, written in China but lost in transit to Raleigh. (Given the absence of any extant large works, I suspect this report might have been an example of Poteat's sense of humor.) His surviving works are in small forms: hymns, anthems, choral service music, and solos.

Your church has preserved in its archives a number of Poteat's compositions. Most of these are found in two spiral-bound notebooks of manuscript paper; there are also a few separate items. The first notebook includes twenty-three finished pieces and three sketches. Nine of the compositions were subsequently published. The items all appear to be intended as service music. The completed pieces are for mixed choir, but two of the three sketches are for male choir. Most of the texts are drawn from the Bible.

There are only three items in the second notebook. The first, from 1946, is for solo voice and organ, and is titled "A Day of Faith." The text is credited to Henry Burke Robins, professor of history and philosophy of religion at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School. The piece is dedicated "To G. A. Lehman." Gustav Adolf Lehman was professor of public speaking and church music and director of the choir at the seminary in Rochester.

The second piece is an unnamed hymn tune, which leads directly to the first phrase of George J. Elvey's *DIADEMATA*. The score is dated "2/14/51," but there is no indication of the text it was intended to set.

The third of these compositions is a single-page solo, with vocal line and keyboard accompaniment occupying six lines of closed score. With an unusual degree of specificity, it is inscribed "June 2 1951 1:45 p.m." Two items laid in the front of this notebook add to our understanding. The first is a clipping from an unidentified source with a poem titled "The Manger Is Not Far" by Franklin D. Elmer, Jr. There is also a letter from Elmer on letterhead from First Baptist Church, Flint, Michigan, which identifies him as one of the two ministers of that congregation. "Dear Mac," it begins, then relates his approval, gratitude, and intent to use it "come the new season of Christmas music."

A twelve-page booklet, *Responses: Prepared for the Choirs of Pullen Memorial Church*, includes five compositions by Poteat among its thirteen items. A composition found only in

*Responses* is “The Lord’s Prayer,” which sets an adaptation of Matthew 6:9-13 in unison with keyboard accompaniment. Its dedication “for Geraldine Cate” indicates that this was written during Poteat’s second tenure in Raleigh. The presence on the cover of the Christ the Eternal King window (which Poteat helped design), installed in Pullen’s sanctuary in 1952, is evidence that the booklet, which has no date, was printed after that time.

Pullen has two additional manuscripts. “Two Responses to be sung after the Scripture reading” is a single sheet containing two of the pieces from the first notebook that do not appear in *Christian Worship*: “Let thy mercies come, O Lord” and “Let the words of my mouth.” Both are twelve-measure SATB settings based on scripture—Psalm 119:44 and Psalm 19:14, respectively. This page is undated, though its presence at Pullen suggests that it is later than the notebook.

“Wherewith Shall I Come before the Lord” is a ten-page composition for SATB choir, baritone solo, and organ. I am aware that Micah 6:8 is an important guide for the life of this congregation. Poteat’s setting, composed in 1942, includes Micah 6:6, 8-9, 12 and 7:18a, slightly altered from the Authorized Version. It bears no dedication. Verses 6:6, 9, and 12 are given to the soloist, with the chorus responding to each of these in the singing of verse 6:8. This dialogue is followed by a homophonic setting, somewhat in the vein of Anglican chant, of verse 7:18a and, again, verse 6:8. Typical of Poteat’s style, the choral parts have some *divisi*; some of the phrases for choir are unaccompanied. The composer’s stylistic intent is conveyed by this direction over the soloist’s singing of verse 6:12: “anxiously as if still unanswered with a suggestion of defiance.”

Shortly after his first move to Raleigh, Poteat had been engaged to write a hymn for the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Baptist State Convention. “The North Carolina Baptist Centennial Hymn,” of which he was both author and composer, is in five stanzas. A copy was pasted inside of the front cover of the hymnal used at that time by Pullen, *The New Baptist Praise Book*. The tune is generally in four parts, but has added notes on two chords.

Inside the back cover of Pullen’s copies of *The New Baptist Praise Book* was added the “Horton Baraca Class Song.” Poteat composed the unnamed tune to set words by R. L. McMillan, the teacher of this group. McMillan’s poem, in five stanzas, begins “We want to learn of Jesus” and relates several stories about “the man of Galilee,” concluding “and if we love and serve all men, like Jesus we will be.” The score of this piece, which does not have a date, is hand-drawn, whereas that of the centennial hymn had been typeset or engraved.

An enduring selection of McNeill’s compositions is found in *Christian Worship*, the 1941 hymnal published jointly by the Northern Baptist Convention and the Disciples of Christ. Though Poteat was not a member of the hymnal committee, the Preface notes his contribution.

Ten compositions by Poteat are included in *Christian Worship*. Nine of these are pieces of service music, found under the heading “Doxologies, Responses and Amens.” All are found in the notebook compiled at Euclid Avenue Baptist Church, though some have been altered. The tenth contribution to *Christian Worship* by Poteat is “Light of the world, how long the quest,” a four-stanza hymn in Long Meter, for which he wrote both the text and the tune, QUEST.

McNeill's most widely published hymn, "Eternal God whose searching eye doth scan," was written a bit later. It was sung to open the 1948 meeting in Amsterdam of the World Council of Churches. In a letter from that year, the author recounted the story of this text and its tune:

Two things may interest you, since you ask for information about it. 1) It was written as a response to a challenge. Some years ago I wrote a piece at the request of Harmon of "Religion in Life" about modern hymnology. As its close I suggested that if good new hymns were to be written, some fair prospect of a respectable use of them should be extended. I even proposed that a responsible journal ought to agree to publish every so often, hymns by new poets and composers, which had been selected by a highly competent committee. Thus some encouragement would be offered to those who have musical and literary gifts, but who, discouraged by the indifference of hymnal compilers, give up trying to capture or to exercise their inspiration. The result has been the exploitation of musical rubbish set to doggerel by the tin pan alley rats who – well, now I'm getting off my story and abusing the brethren.

My longtime friend Henry Leiper of the World Council read the piece and dared me to write a hymn for the Ecumenical Movement, saying he'd get it published in Christendom.

....

2) It seems to have got about, however, and has been sung at some of the World Council worship services here and there. I was informed the other day that it is to be used at the opening worship service of the meeting of the World Council in Amsterdam in August, for which I have of course given my permission. I hope that it will not get the meetings off on a discordant note and that the delegates can sing the amsterdam [*sic*; with lowercase "a," apparently intended as a play on words] thing. Also I hope I don't have to supply translations of the words in Latvian, Tyrolese, and Hindustani.

The tune is the same as that to which the "North Carolina Baptist Centennial Hymn" had previously been set. It has been transposed a half-step higher, and some small changes have been made in the inner parts. Previously unnamed, it is here called OIKOUMENIKOS, for its connection with the newer words.

As recounted above, much of Poteat's music, service pieces written for local use, remained in manuscript. Some of these items were made available to his denomination in *Christian Worship*. One hymn—appropriately, about ecumenicity—achieved international use. The largest potential audience for his compositions, however, was made possible by the publication of two choral works by the Hall & McCreary Company of Chicago. Both are scored for a *cappella* SATB choir.

"Indifference" is a setting of G. A. Studdert Kennedy's poem of the same title, which begins "When Jesus came to Golgotha." Its first stanza describes the scourging and crucifixion of Jesus, observing, "For those were crude and cruel days, and human flesh was weak." The second stanza presents a twentieth-century contrast: "When Jesus came to Birmingham." The more genteel citizens of the British industrial city "would not hurt a hair of him; they only let him die"—ignoring his presence in the poor of that place. In the concluding stanza, "Jesus crouched against a wall and cried for Calvary." This text and its setting seem to express Poteat's mission for his pastorate in Cleveland. It is dedicated to "Mary E. Barnes, Minister of Music, The Euclid

Avenue Baptist Church.”

The publisher’s note at the head of the score states: “Dr. Poteat’s setting is a sermon in music as it humbly follows the poetic lines.” In fact, it repeats phrases of the text and at the end brings back the climactic line, “When Jesus came to Birmingham they simply let him die!” Its music also appears shaped for maximum emotional impact and is both romantic and dramatic. There is much chromaticism, and the key changes from D minor to D major to D minor to F minor before returning to D minor. There are tempo changes, varieties of texture, and a dynamic range from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo*. A successful performance would require a large, skilled choir.

Poteat’s other published anthem, also for significant choral forces, is “Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts.” The publisher’s note reads, in full:

This impressive setting of the well-known text of Bernard of Clairvaux individualizes the meaning of each verse. The composer, through careful doubling of the voice parts, has obtained an orchestral fullness. A constant sincerity is felt throughout the number as the gentle plea develops in a spectacular *fortissimo*. A firm tempo should be retained.

Poteat set four stanzas of Ray Palmer’s translation, though with several changed words. Numerous textual phrases are repeated, and, as in “Indifference,” words from earlier in the piece are reiterated for emphasis at the end. In this case, over the humming of the lower three parts, the sopranos sing “Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts,” then all voices, with altos and basses *divisi*, sing “Thou Light of men.” Whereas the other piece concluded bombastically, this one diminishes to *pianissimo*.

The piece is rich in texture, dynamic shaping, and drama. There are few measures without some interpretive direction. Constantly on the move harmonically, its key signatures can hardly keep up, changing from one flat to five flats to four sharps (for only one measure) to one flat to five sharps to one flat. Within its style, it is a powerful, persuasive piece. The setting is dedicated to George F. Strickling, conductor of the Singers’ Club of Cleveland.

[I originally researched and wrote a study of the Poteats as a contribution to a *Festschrift* for Donald P. Hustad. In searching high and low for sources, I came across a recording of “Jesus, thou joy of loving heart.” It had been made in early 1950s by the Moody Chorale—conducted by Donald P. Hustad! ]

### **The Poteat Legacy**

The contributions to church music of the Poteats were not in the forefront either of their family life or of the life of their denomination. Various members of the family, including Hubert and McNeill, were certainly more prominent in other areas of endeavor. They were, however, accomplished and influential in numerous venues, befitting their status as educated, well-rounded, creative, and committed persons. Faith was central to their lives, and the relation of all aspects of their abilities and training to the church and its worship was a logical consequence of their understanding of discipleship. It does not seem accidental, therefore, that public posed photographs of both Hubert and McNeill show them in their respective roles as organist and composer.

The Poteats' views about church music did not become dominant in Baptist life—any more than did their views on such matters as integration, missions, social service, church-state issues, and the relationship between faith and learning. In contrast to prevailing denominational norms in these areas, they demonstrated awareness of and openness to progressive attitudes. They articulated an educated and ecumenical understanding of Christian faith, nurtured from Baptist roots. (Baptist life has always been a rich tapestry—and one that has never lacked for fringes!) Their work gave renewed vitality to the part of Baptist witness that is sometimes assailed as “liberal,” as though that were an evil or unchristian characteristic. They proudly embraced the word and defended it on historical, philosophical, and theological principles. Their contributions to the life of the church, including its song, were suffused with unassailable piety, dedicated service, and remarkable energy.

*Soli Deo gloria!*

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