

Gude & Godlie Ballatis Noted

Edited by Ross W. Duffin



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Introduction

Much work has yet to be done before a valid judgment can be passed on “*The Gude and Godlie Ballatis*” as a book of versions intended for singing.

—Helena Mennie Shire¹

One of the monuments of mid-sixteenth-century Scottish letters is the *Compendious Buke of Godlye Psalmes and Spirituall Sangis*, also known simply as *Gude & Godlie Ballatis* (hereafter *GGB*; see the “Abbreviations and Sigla” above), first published in Edinburgh in 1565 and reprinted for decades afterward, including the corrected 1578 edition that is the primary source of this edition.² The collection is often attributed to the Wedderburn brothers, John, James, and Robert, though there is nothing definitive to make that connection.³ *GGB* was a strongly Protestant collection, assembled shortly after John Knox and his fellow reformers returned from exile on the continent, and it contained prayers, psalms, and “godlie ballatis” (that is, sacred poems meant for pious recreation). The prologue makes clear that these poems are to be sung, stating that “the word of God incessis plenteouslie in vs be singing of the psalmes and spiritual sangis,” and saying of young persons, “quhen thay heir it sung into their vulgar toung or singis it thame selfis with sweit melodie, then sal thay lufe their Lord God with hart and minde.”⁴ Indeed, aside from the articles of faith and other prayers at the beginning of the book (i.1–9), there is evidence throughout that the rest of the poems were intended to be sung, although not a single note of music is included in the volume. My title, *Gude & Godlie Ballatis Noted*, is a nod to John Merbecke’s *The Booke of Common Praier Noted* (1550), which furnished musical settings to the liturgical texts of the *Book of Common Prayer*.⁵

In 2015 Alasdair MacDonald published a critical edition of *GGB*, using the unique exemplar of the first edition as the principal source for the text.⁶ This is an outstanding edition, and the commentary and list of variants, in addition to the edited poems themselves, will be indispensable to anyone seriously interested in the repertoire. MacDonald did not, however, attempt to address the musical background to the collection. Scholars have occasionally discussed individual poems, especially in the rare instances where their tunes were recorded in *GGB* or when the lyrics survive

1. Helena Mennie Shire, *Song, Dance and Poetry of the Court of Scotland under King James VI* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 32.

2. The first edition (*GGB* 1565; see the “Abbreviations and Sigla” above) survives in a unique copy held at D-Gs, shelfmark H E Rit.040 (STC 2996.3). Two apparent later editions (*GGB* 1567 and *GGB* 1570) survive in only fragmentary form. The 1578 edition (*GGB* 1578), titled *Ane Compendious [buik] of Godlie Psalmes and Spirit[uall] Sangis* (the title page is damaged and missing text), likewise survives in a unique copy held at US-SM, shelfmark 88301 (STC 2996.7). For further details, and for details on the other editions and copies, see the “Abbreviations and Sigla.”

3. See Alasdair A. MacDonald, ed., *The Gude and Godlie Ballatis* (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 2015; hereafter MacDonald*GGB*), 31–36. MacDonald also disputes the long-held belief that the first printing of the *GGB* was in the 1540s or 1550s, and that a substantial portion of the collection was circulating at that time (*ibid.*, 8–12).

4. *GGB* 1578, sig. A1r.

5. *The Booke of Common Praier Noted* ([London]: Grafton, 1550; facs. ed., Oxford: Sutton Courteney, 1980).

6. See note 3 above.

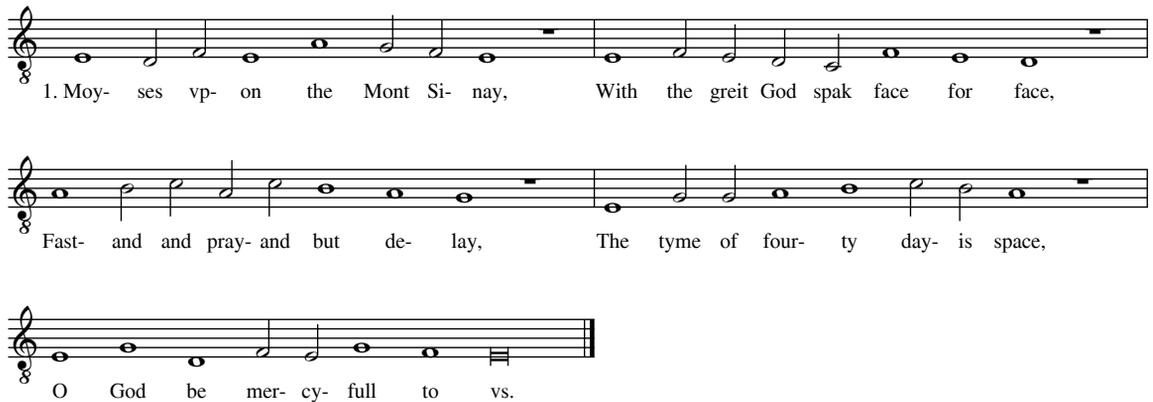
i. Prayers & Articles of Faith

Gude & Godlie Ballatis begins with nine prayers that are clearly intended to be spoken rather than sung.¹ The musical settings begin with no. 10 and are prefaced by this remark:

*Heir followis the Catechisme put in meter, to be sung
with the tune, and first the ten Commandementis.*

i.10 Moyses vpon the mont Sinay

This poem is a free translation of Martin Luther's paraphrase of the Ten Commandments, "Dis sind die heiligen Zeh gebot," which first appeared in the Erfurt *Enchiridion oder Handbüchlein* (1524).² It has five-line stanzas of tetrameters in an *ababC* rhyme scheme. Perhaps the most obvious match in the contemporary Anglo-Scottish hymn repertoire is "Of Daid, Lorde, in mynde recorde," a version of Psalm 132 written by the Scottish divine John Craig and first printed in the 1564 Scottish psalter but using the tune from Psalm 36 in *Forme of Prayers* 1560. The psalm uses a variant *ababa* rhyme scheme, but its tune works well.



1. Moy- ses vp- on the Mont Si- nay, With the greit God spak face for face,
Fast- and and pray- and but de- lay, The tyme of four- ty day- is space,
O God be mer- cy- full to vs.

There was more than one early melody for that text, however, and one that first appeared in the Strasbourg *Enchiridion* (1525) seems the best match for "Moyes vpon the mont Synay."³ Its "Kyri-oleis" refrain is longer and better able to accommodate the eight syllables of the final refrain line of the GGB text.

1. MacDonaldGGB, 86–93.

2. *Eyn Enchiridion oder Handbüchlein, eynem ytzlichen Christen fast nutzlich bey sich* (Erfurt: Johann Loersfeld, 1524; RISM B/VIII/1 1524⁰³), sig. A2v.

3. *Enchiridion geistlicher gesenge so man yetzt (Gott zu lob) yn der kirchen sÿngt* ([Strasbourg]: [Matthias Schürer], 1525; RISM B/VIII/1 1525¹⁰), sigs. A3r–v. The title page gives the place of publication as Wittenberg (a mark of authority for early Lutheran prints), but the hymnal was actually printed in Strasbourg. See Daniel

iv.6 3e Richteous reioyce and loue the Lord

This poem is identified in *GGB* as a version of Psalm 33. It is printed as fifty-four pentameter lines of rhyming couplets unbroken by spaces but divides conveniently into nine six-line *aabbcc* pentameter stanzas. An excellent match for that versification is William Whittingham's "The mightie God th'Eternal hath thus spoke," Psalm 50 from the 1564 Scottish psalter. The tune was originally to set Clément Marot's Psalm 50 and was introduced into the English psalter in *Forme of Prayers* 1558, after which it was included in most editions of *The Whole Booke of Psalmes* after the first.



1. 3e Richt- e- ous re- ioyce and loue the Lord, Just men to thank thair God dois weil ac- cord.



Play on 3our Lute, & sweit- ly to it sing, Tak Harpe in hand with mon- y lus- tie string.



Tyrlē on the ten string-it In- stru- ment, And prais 3our God with hart and hail in- tent.

3E Richteous reioyce and loue the Lord,
Just men to thank thair God dois weil
accord.

Play on 3our Lute, & sweitly to it sing,
Tak Harpe in hand with mony lustie
string.

Tyrlē on the ten stringit Instrument,
And prais 3our God with hart and hail
intent.

Sing na auld thing the quhilk is abrogate
Bot sing sum new plesand perfite ballat,
Blaw vp Organis with glaid and heuinly
sound
Joyfull in hart, quhilk all the skyis resound
For Goddis word is treuth and veritie,
And dois all his deidis faithfullie

The Lord lufis iustice and richteousnes,
And all the eird is full of his gudnes,
The heuinis hie wer creat be the Lord,
Thair ornamentis wer dressit be his word
He heipis vp the water is lyke ane hill,
Syne turnis them in deip quhen that he
will.

Dreid 3e the Lord, all dwelleris on the
ground,
And wirschip him all haue ye warld sa
round,
Quhat God decretis is done incontinent.
All Creature obeyis his commandement.
The Counsellis of the wickit and deuyse
He perturbis, appeirand euer sa wyse,

He scornis all thair Consolatioun,
And wickit pepillis Imaginatioun,
Bot his counsell sall left perpetuall,
And sall indure till generations all.
Full happy is the pepill maist and leist.
Quhilk in þair God, & Lord hes all yair
traist.

And quhome that God do cheis before all
aige,
Thame to posseid in proper heritage.
The Lord lukis furth of his heuinlie sait,
And persauis all men of euerilk stait,
From his tryumphant throne he dois beholde
All Natiounis, and dwellaris on the molde,

O Father Imperiall,
I pray the in speciall
My deith mannis Saull forgiue,
In heuin with me to liue,
Thocht vnkyndely scho killit me
I wald scho had na paine
For I had rather die,
For hir saik anis againe.

Ane gentill admonitioun of Christ.
All pepill leirne of me,
Gentilnes and pietie,
Remember my sober bodie,
Sa woundit and bludie
Kill na man vnkyndelie
With sclander nor with paine:
Amend 3our faultis daylie
And from all vice refraine.

iv.34 Johne cum kis me now

This is a surprising poem to find in a collection of godly songs. "John come kiss me now" became famous as a secular song and tune with keyboard settings by William Byrd and Thomas Tomkins. The GGB appearance is one of the first under that name.⁵⁷ The tune is based on the *passamezzo moderno* ground bass and one of its earliest British musical appearances is in the Lodge Lute Book (ca. 1559), where it is titled "The Antycke."⁵⁸ Melodies on a ground are based on a succession of harmonies, so many tune variations are possible (see iv.58 below), the setting below using the tune of the Lodge Book.

1. Johne cum kis me now, Johne cum kis me now,
5
Johne cum kis me by and by And make no more a- dow.

JOHNE cum kis me now,
Johne cum kis me now,
Johne cum kis me by and by
And mak no moir adow.

In Paradice I plantit the
And maid the Lord of all,
My creatures not forbidding the,
Nathing bot ane of all.

The Lord thy God I am
That Johne dois the call,
Johne representit man
Be grace Celestiall:

Thus wald thow not obey
Nor wit follow to my will
Bot did cast thy self away
And thy posteritie spill.

For Johne (Goddis grace it is)
(Quha list till expone the same)
Och Johne thow did amis
Quhen that thow ioist this name.

My iustice condempnit thee
To euerlasting paine
Man culd find na remedie
To by man fre againe.

Heuin and eirth of nocht
I maid them for thy saik
For euer moir I thocht
To my lykenes the mak.

O pure lyfe, and meir mercy,
Myne awin Sone downe I send,
God become man for the.
For thy sin his lyfe did spend.

57. For evidence of earlier existence, see below concerning "Preistis Christ beleue" (iv.58).

58. US-Ws, MS V.a.159, fols. 7r-v.