

NEVER ENOUGH SINGING:



ESSAYS IN HONOR OF SETH KASTEN

Edited by Melody Layton McMahon

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—Melody Layton McMahan

NEVER ENOUGH SINGING:
ESSAYS IN HONOR OF SETH KASTEN

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A holy pope, exalted and excellent, there was in Rome, whose name was Pope Clement. From him Jerome asked a description of the Psalms and Hymnody; and he took to beseeching the Creator aright, that night up till morning, when an angel of God came to him from heaven, with the description of Hymnody. And this is what he told him, “Whoever should recite the hymnody, would be making a song of praise dear to God, for it wipes out all sins, and cleanses the powers of the body and subdues involuntarily the lusts of the flesh; it lessens melancholy, and (banishes) all madness; it breaks down anger, it expels hell’s angels, and gets rid of the devils; it dispels the darkness of the understanding, and increases holiness; it preserves the health, and completes good works, and it lights up a spiritual fire in the heart, i.e. the love of God (in place of) the love of man, and it (promotes) peace between the body and the soul.

—*The Irish Liber Hymnorum. Vol II. Translations and Notes,*
ed. J. H. Bernard and R. Atkinson. London: Henry
Bradshaw Society, 1898.

This small volume is a labor of love on the part of current and past members of the ATLA choir, the rather ragtag group of sometime singers. Once a year we are cajoled and drilled during one and a half hours of rehearsal to learn and make musical one or two choral works which few may have ever sung.

It is Seth Kasten who has worked this magic year after year. I briefly met Seth at my first ATLA conference in Washington, DC in 1998. I was completely enchanted with the idea that a conference of theological librarians had a choir, and I wanted to join. At the time, the conference program included a hymn sing, a wonderful tradition whose passing is

still mourned by many of us. Seth instructed me to attend the hymn sing and sit next to Jim Dunkly who would vet me and decide whether or not I had made the grade as an ATLA chorister. Fortunately I did! Like many singers, I have not been able to sing every year, but I have enjoyed every piece we have learned, and singing the “Kontakion for the Dead” to honor those ATLA members who have died in the past year has been a particular honor.

What kind of person is needed to be able to forge this haphazard group into a choir that listeners rave about? For me, it is that Seth has utmost respect for the music and he believes that we can always do better for the music than we singers sometimes think we can. Can the altos get that E-flat in tune while moving against the male voices? Because the music demands it, the answer is “yes.” Can the choir make the Hallelujahs of the Kontakion crescendo in praise of the Christ who died so that we might share in the resurrection? We must—because that is what is meant by the composer who believed this! Seth demonstrates a belief that music can move and transform.

Seth has been playing with and conducting Christian (mostly Anglican) choirs since his student days and has a thorough knowledge of Christian sacred music, having completed an SMM in Sacred Music at Union Theological Seminary (obtaining his library service degree from Columbia University simultaneously). He went into the Army during Vietnam, and was spared going to fight in that war because the chaplain’s wife wanted organ music in the base chapel. As a result, his orders were changed in order to keep him on the base in Georgia.

Seth has been at Burke Library at the Union Theological Seminary in New York since 1973, serving as the Reference and Collection Development Librarian, playing and conducting in churches on Sundays. He served as an officer of the New York Guild of Organists.

In addition to his faithful tenure as ATLA choirmaster, Seth has been active in ATLA as a member of the board of directors, on various committees, and as the compiler of a yearly record of reference books published. In 2002 Seth organized a workshop on sacred music for the St. Paul ATLA conference. (It was my pleasure to collaborate with Seth and Judy Clarence for this workshop.) Seth's presentation for this workshop was a wonderful historical survey of choral and congregational church music from their origins to contemporary times.

What a joy to be able to read these essays—each clearly made me realize why the ragtag band of singers enjoys making the best music possible. Each one of us has had a supreme moment, or many moments, of singing that has blessed us and that we know has blessed others. It makes it worth it! All our thanks to Seth for giving us opportunities to learn music that would not have come our way and to expand our musical vocabularies, and more so, to witness of the power of music to transform and enlighten us.

Melody Layton McMahan
Editor
May 2011

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THE ATLA HYMN

“Our God, our help in ages past”

BY JAMES DUNKLY

Since 1990, every ATLA annual conference has ended with the singing of “O God, our help in ages past” at the closing banquet, usually led by the honoree of this volume, pitch pipe in hand. This hymn is sometimes called “the ATLA hymn,” although to my knowledge neither board nor membership has ever affirmed it as such.

This hymn, set to this tune, appears in many current hymnals and in many older ones as well. As a result, anyone wanting to know more about either text or tune can turn to any of the excellent historical companions that are now available. Companions to *The Hymnal 1982* (Episcopal), *The United Methodist Hymnal*, *Lutheran Book of Worship*, and *The Presbyterian Hymnal* are particularly helpful, as they are for many hymns. Yet this particular hymn is more than one more item to look up in one’s denominational hymnal companion. Its importance to the development of English hymnody is extraordinary.

The hymn is a paraphrase by Isaac Watts (1674-1748) of the first part of Psalm 90. Watts wrote many familiar hymns still in use today in a wide range of Protestant churches. He was an Independent (Congregational) minister in England during a period when English Christianity was sorting itself out with respect to many fundamental questions involving the state as well as the churches. Indeed, there was but one “church,” the Church of England by law established, and all persons in their majesties’ realm were expected to conform thereto. Despite that expectation, and the enforcement of it by various means, some of them quite harsh (Watts’ father was twice imprisoned, for example), the variety of English re-



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ESSAYS
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religious preference could not be stifled entirely. By the time Watts was an adult, the situation had been resolved, at least temporarily, in a more Protestant direction with the accession of William and Mary to the throne, but their successor, Queen Anne, tended to the High Church approach of her grandfather Charles I. Thomas Wright, one of Watts' biographers, insisted that "Our God, our help in ages past" was written in response to Anne's death in celebration of the deliverance of Dissenters from the threat of more punitive legislation. Wright argues that by *our* God ("O God" is Wesley's alteration), Watts meant to invoke the spirit of his fellow Dissenters: "The men of Watts' time regarded the almighty as *their* God" (Wright, 122). Possibly, but not definitively. Nevertheless, the historical context is very important for appreciating the role of this hymn.

As Conrad Donakowski has pointed out, the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 led not only to a new edition of the Book of Common Prayer (1662) but also to the resumption of widespread use of Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins' *Whole Book of Psalms* (1562), a metrical psalter that was superseded in 1696 by Nahum Tate and Nicholas Brady's "New Version." The New Version "bent biblical bluntness to the classical suavity of the Augustan Age" by increased paraphrase and a heightened appeal to the personal, thus paving the way for Watts' *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707) and *Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament* (1718)—in other words, for the beginnings of English hymn-writing of the kind most familiar to us today (Donakowski, 376).

"Our God, our help in ages past" appeared in Watts' 1718 volume, which was a metrical psalter with a difference. He aimed to move beyond both Anglican and Reformed tradition, arguing that the biblical psalms were "too constraining a standard for Christian worshipers" and that "original songs of Christian experience were . . . necessary for authentic worship" (Marini, 75-76). Further, the psalms themselves would be much improved, in Watts' view, if they could be "reno-

vated” or “imitated in the language of the New Testament” in order to become more explicitly Christian (Marini, 75-76). Happily (in my view), his avowed intent was not employed in his paraphrase of Psalm 90; save possibly for “saints” in the second verse, there is nothing peculiarly Christian about this text, so that the pre-Christian flavor of the psalm is retained throughout, even in the stanzas usually omitted.

Another innovation at this time was the movement away from the “lining out” of psalms and hymns by a leader, a scheme that doubled the time taken to sing a hymn (because the congregation would repeat each line after the leader) and that also obscured the hymn’s overall structure. Instead, “regular singing”—the kind most of us are used to—came to be used, with the congregation singing four-part harmony (when possible) with instrumental accompaniment (when available). With the publication of his *Horae Lyricae* (1706), *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707), and then *The Psalms of David* (1718), Watts’ hymns quickly became among the most popular. These hymnals constituted a new “system of praise” (Marini, 75). Watts’ approach was not without its detractors, of course. Some were opposed to singing anything, or anything except the biblical psalms, or anything except Sternhold and Hopkins (and/or Tate and Brady) (Wright, 132). But the popular vote went to Watts because his hymns were so singable. The composer Neely Bruce considered Watts’ hymns to be models for congregational song because they have “short lines, simple vocabulary, a vivid but not simple-minded vocabulary that’s capable of vivid imagery, that is fun to sing” (Marini, 286).

“Our God, our help in ages past” was very quickly married to the tune ST. ANNE, which William Croft (1678-1727) published in 1708 when he was organist at St. Anne’s Church in the Soho district of London. Croft, a pupil of John Blow (1649-1708) and influenced by Henry Purcell (1659-1695), became organist and music director of the Chapel Royal and, on Blow’s death, of Westminster Abbey. He was awarded the degree Doctor of Music by Oxford University in 1713 and is

buried in the Abbey near Purcell, whose tradition he continued.

The tune is in the wonderfully singable common meter, with eight syllables followed by six and then one repetition of the same pattern (8.6.8.6). Handel began his “Chandos” anthem “O praise the Lord” in the same way Croft began his hymn tune. Bach’s Fugue in E-flat Major, BWV 552, uses a similar theme, such that Bach’s work has become known as “St. Anne’s Fugue” in English-speaking countries, though there is no evidence that Bach knew the hymn tune and good reason to suppose that the same pattern of notes occurred coincidentally to both composers. It has been suggested that the phrase goes back to a motet by Palestrina, or to tunes by Henry Lawes, but Raymond Glover’s realistic judgment commends itself: “In reality the composer’s achievement lay in making a powerful new synthesis of preexisting elements ST. ANNE, with its swinging ‘sawtooth’ melodic line, is clearly modeled on some of the classic tunes of a century earlier” (Glover, 3B: 1256). The original (1708) version is for two voices; the four-part version we sing today is very like one that appeared in 1814 and another (by W. H. Monk) in *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (1861). The former appeared in Theophania Cecil’s collection of tunes used at St. John’s Chapel, Bedford Row, London, where her father Richard Cecil ministered until his death in 1810. Glover thinks he is perhaps the one who first matched text to tune (Glover 3B: 1256), though there is no way to tell, since texts and tunes circulated independently until well into the nineteenth century and were matched up locally. Still, a good match would become widely known, and it is hard to think of a better match than this one.

The popularity of this marriage of text and tune continues to this day. Carl Ruggles used it in his “Exaltation,” and Ralph Vaughan Williams in his “Lord, thou hast been our refuge” uses both Miles Coverdale’s translation and Watts’ paraphrase for the text of Psalm 90. “Our God, our help in ages past” is the official hymn of King Edward VI School (Watts’

own school). It was sung at the joint service on board H. M. S. *Prince of Wales* in 1941 when Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill met to further their wartime cooperation. The hymn was then sung at Churchill's funeral. It is often used on festive occasions in England and other English-speaking countries.

For the American Theological Library Association's annual conference at Evanston in 1990, as incoming president I suggested we sing a hymn to close the conference, and I suggested "O God, our help in ages past" to the tune ST. ANNE because this combination of text and tune appears in many hymnals and is therefore familiar to people from a very wide range of Christian denominations. My own parish church at the time was St. Anne's, which connected the hymn more personally to me. Further, because the text is a paraphrase of a psalm, I hoped it could serve to underline our interfaith character, having in mind particularly the director of the ATLA choir. Singing this hymn seemed an appropriate way of ending the conference by reminding us of our common service to theological education as a body of professionals who have never let religious differences trouble our time together. When the next year I was re-elected president, I once again asked that the banquet end with this hymn. By the next year, the hymn had become a tradition, and so it remains.

One more personal note: When Joan Blocher and I married in December 2005, we asked that "O God, our help in ages past" be one of the congregational hymns at our wedding. Our relationship was (and is) nurtured by ATLA, so that we wanted to sing "the ATLA hymn" as part of our wedding service. This hymn symbolizes our coming together and our prayer for the future. We share both hymn and hope with many others, and not least with the honoree of this volume, Seth Kasten, whose passion for music and kindly demandingness have imparted great joy to many. *Ad multos annos!*

[altered by John Wesley from "Our God, our help in ages past"]

O God, our help in ages past,

Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.

[altered by HA&M from “Under the shadow of Thy throne”]

Beneath the shadow of Thy throne
Thy Saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is Thine arm alone,
And our defence is sure.

Before the hills in order stood,
Or earth received her frame,
From everlasting Thou art God,
To endless years the Same.

[stanza commonly omitted]

*Thy Word commands our flesh to dust,
Return, ye sons of men:
All nations rose from earth at first,
And turn to earth again.*

A thousand ages in Thy sight
Are like an evening gone,
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.

[stanza commonly omitted]

*The busy tribes of flesh and blood,
With all their lives and cares,
Are carried downwards by the flood,
And lost in following years.*

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day.

[stanza commonly omitted]

Like flowery fields the nations stand

*Pleased with the morning light;
The flowers beneath the mower's hand
Lie withering ere 'tis night.*

O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be Thou our guard while troubles last,
And our eternal home.

Text as given in *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, historical edition (London: Clowes, 1909), 536-37; commonly omitted stanzas from various sources]

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1 O God, our help in a - ges past, our hope for years to come,
 2 un - der the sha - dow of thy throne thy saints have dwelt se - cure;
 3 Be - fore the hills in or - der stood, or earth re - ceived her frame,
 4 A thou - sand a - ges in thy sight are like an eve - ning gone;
 5 Time, like an ev - er - roll - ing stream, bears all our years a - way;

1 our shel - ter from the storm - y blast, and our e - ter - nal home:
 2 suf - fi - cient is thine arm a - lone, and our de - fense is sure.
 3 from ev - er - last - ing thou art God, to end - less years the same.
 4 short as the watch that ends the night be - fore the ris - ing sun.
 5 they fly, for - got - ten, as a dream dies at the o - pening day.

6 O God, our help in ages past,
 our hope for years to come,

be thou our guide while life shall last,
 and our eternal home.

Words: Isaac Watts (1674-1748), alt.; para. of Psalm 90:1-5

Music: *St. Anne*, melody att. William Croft (1678-1727), alt., harm. William Henry Monk (1823-1889), alt.

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The Hymnal 1982

A CONSTANT SENSE OF ABIDING PRESENCE

“Be with me, Lord”

BY CARISSE MICKEY BERRYHILL

Lloyd Otis (L. O.) Sanderson (1901-1992) was one of the most influential composers of hymn music in the Churches of Christ in the twentieth century. The author of music or words for more than 400 songs and hymns, Sanderson preached in Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Texas, Tennessee, and Georgia, taught singing and song leading, and edited three editions of *Christian Hymns* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1935, 1948, 1966).

He studied music first with his parents James P. Sanderson and Lucy Ann Hunt Sanderson, then at the Western Normal Music College in Dallas with Inez Dodds Barber of Friends University, with Fanny Marie Moody at Harding College, and with Effie Cline Jones at Little Rock Conservatory of Music. He studied English at the University of Oklahoma, and received an honorary doctorate from Harding University in 1975 (Mankin, 48).

“Be with me, Lord” is Sanderson’s best known hymn and appeared “in every major hymnal produced by Churches of Christ” in the second half of the twentieth century (Mankin, 49). The hymn was first published in 1935 in the first edition of *Christian Hymns*. Churches of Christ, most populous in the American upper south and Texas, emphasize *a cappella* singing and for much of the twentieth century employed shaped notes in hymnals to aid in sight singing. Singing schools and periodic “singing” educate leaders and singers and celebrate the vocal tradition of the community. Twenty-first century digital hymn slides continue to be available in



Carisse Mickey Berryhill is the Special Collections Librarian at Brown Library at Abilene Christian University in Abilene, Texas. She joined ATLA in 1992.

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shaped notes. Although Churches of Christ have been energetic in perpetuating their vocal culture, singability is a central principle for hymns that persists. Many of Sanderson's hymns have remained useful because the music is both lucid and melodic for SATB singers. These characteristics are especially present in "Be with me, Lord."

Sanderson tells the story of the hymn's composition in 1934:

In Springfield [MO], in 1934, I was working on my first hymnal for the Gospel Advocate Co. At about 2 a.m. one Tuesday a melody came to mind. I found it difficult to get rid of it. So I stopped and wrote it down, lest I forget. Even then, I kept seeing or sensing the harmony, which bothered my work; so I turned and wrote it out completely. It is a rare meter -- 11 notes in a phrase, 10 in the next, 11 in the third, and again 10 in the fourth. I couldn't come up with or find words to fit it. About eight days passed when I received a letter from Thomas O. Chisholm, who had long written words for me. He wrote that he had retired on the same night I was working, and a theme for a poem seemed to command his attention. Finally after midnight of that same Tuesday, he got up and wrote out the poem. He was sending it to me to see what I thought of it. It was an exact fit for my music. I bought the poem, and the twain have been together since. (Mindful, 27)

Be with me, Lord—I cannot live without Thee,
I dare not try to take one step alone.
I cannot bear the loads of life, unaided,
I need Thy strength to lean myself upon.

Be with me, Lord, and then if dangers threaten,
If storms of trial burst above my head,
If lashing seas leap ev'rywhere about me,
They cannot harm, or make my heart afraid.

Be with me, Lord! No other gift or blessing
Thou couldst bestow could with this one compare—
A constant sense of Thy abiding presence,
Where e'er I am, to feel that Thou art near.

Be with me Lord, when loneliness o'er-takes me,
When I must weep amid the fires of pain,
And when shall come the hour of "my departure"
For "worlds unknown," O Lord, be with me then.

The hymn is a confession of dependence upon God, especially in times of danger or suffering. The first stanza asserts the singer's need: "I cannot live without Thee," "I cannot bear the loads of life unaided." The second stanza contemplates dangers and "storms of trial" but concludes that these "cannot harm, or make my heart afraid." The third stanza points to the source of this heart's confidence: "a constant sense of Thy abiding presence." Based on the nearness of God, the fourth stanza contemplates the times ahead when the singer may face loneliness, pain, and death, and prays, "O Lord, be with me then."

The poetic language uses a formal style of address toward God that was common in Bible readings and prayers in the early twentieth century. Nonetheless, it has a heartfelt first-person voice speaking as if in direct prayer. Each of the four stanzas of the poem begins with the plea, "Be with me, Lord." There is very little ornament in the language except for metaphors of "storms of trial," "lashing seas," and "fires of pain." The second and fourth phrases of each stanza rhyme, where the first and third do not. The rhymes come at the end of a grammatical period and at the end of a descending musical phrase.

Musically, the first two musical phrases build toward the third phrase, which rises in a lyrical arc and then curves into the final phrase descending peacefully through a *fermata* to the final key note. The shape of the music, then, is adapted to expressing and resolving anxiety.

The sense of vulnerability in the hymn, and of the potential

for hardship, spoke well to its immediate environment, with the economic stresses of the Depression and Dust Bowl era. In the next decade, wartime anxieties were also addressed by the comfort of this text. In the latter half of the century, cultural shifts and the increasing pressures of urbanization find expression here. The center of the hymn is the third stanza, where the singer says that no other gift can compare with “a constant sense of Thy abiding presence, / Wher-e’re I am, to feel that Thou art near.”

When I learned to read, the hymnbook at the North Texas congregation where my father preached was Sanderson’s *Christian Hymns, No. II*, with dozens of hymns by Sanderson. Dad taught school children on Saturdays to read music using that hymnal. Sanderson’s baptismal hymn “A new creature” (Buried with Christ) and invitation hymn “Bring Christ your broken life” were familiar to me. In my middle school and high school years, when my Dallas congregation was singing with Max Wheeler out of *Great Songs of the Church* (Hammond, IN: Great Songs Press), only “A New Creature” was included. The 1974 supplement to *Great Songs* included both “Be with me, Lord” and “Bring Christ your broken life,” and so a few years later as a young adult at the Broadway Church of Christ in Lubbock, I was hearing them again.

During my college years in the late 1960s and early 1970s at Harding College, I sang in the A Cappella Chorus directed by Dr. Kenneth Davis, Jr. We recorded weekly radio hymn programs and issued vinyl LPs almost every year. One of the albums I sang on was *A Tribute to Sanderson*, which included “Be with me, Lord,” as well as many other Sanderson favorites, such as “All things bright and beautiful,” “Take the world, but give me Jesus,” and “The Lord has been mindful of me.” In the Chorus, we learned all the verses of the Harding College Alma Mater, which Sanderson had composed in 1924, and sang them routinely as the Chorus bus left on tour or returned to the campus, as well as on many school occasions. Harding named Sanderson its first Distinguished Alumnus in 1970.

When I became a theological librarian at Harding Graduate School in Memphis, Tennessee in 1992, Leon Sanderson was Associate Minister at my congregation, where among his many duties were worship planning and song leading, as well as arranging for wedding and funeral singing. Leon's father had lived in Memphis in his last years and had died earlier that same year. A vibrant singer with perfect pitch, Leon directed the congregation in a wide and yet thoughtful mix of old and new hymns, including Thomas O. Chisholm's "Great is thy faithfulness" and, of course, L. O. Sanderson's beautiful "Be with me, Lord." Murray Sanderson, Leon's son and L. O.'s grandson, is now the worship minister at the Otter Creek Church of Christ in Brentwood, Tennessee.

This hymn has been a blessing to me throughout the course of my life. Seth, I hope that your retirement is blessed with the "constant sense" of divine Presence.

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Be with Me, Lord

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T. O. Chisholm

L. O. Sanderson

1. Be with me, Lord— I can-not live with-out Thee, I dare not
2. Be with me, Lord, and then if dan-gers threat-en, If storms of
3. Be with me, Lord! No oth-er gift or bless-ing Thou couldst be-
4. Be with me, Lord, when lone-li-ness o'er-takes me, When I must

try to take one step a-lone, I can-not bear the loads of
tri-bur-st a-bove my head, If lash-ing seas leap ev-'ry-
stow could with this one com-pare— A con-stant sense of Thy a-
weep a-mid the fires of pain, And when shall come the hour of

life, un-aid-ed, I need Thy strength to lean my-self up-on.
where a-bout me, They can-not harm, or make my heart a-fraid.
bid- ing pres-ence, Wher-e'er I am, to feel that Thou art near.
"my de-part-ure" For "worlds un-known," O Lord, be with me then.

Music: L. O. Sanderson; Words: Thomas O. Chisholm (copyright by L. O. Sanderson, 1935; copyright renewed 1963; used with permission of Leon Sanderson)

IN THE RIGHT PLACE “Spirit of the living God”

BY ADAM S. BOHANAN

*Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me;
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.*



Adam S. Bohanan is Assistant Librarian of the Wiggin Library at Meadville Lombard Theological School in Chicago and has sung in the ATLA Singers since 2010.

In 2007, I was a first year master’s student at Chicago Theological Seminary. There were many reasons why I had chosen to study theology, all of which were perfectly valid and true. Despite this, I did not have what seemed to me to be a good answer when others asked why I was attending seminary. Ultimately, I felt drawn to it, called to it. Many who have not felt this inner stirring do not comprehend this. I did not yet have the vocabulary to express it. During the orientation retreat, I encountered others who were trying to put words to what they were feeling as we began to “do a new thing” as Isaiah would have it (Is. 43:19). It happened that some of the new friends I found were also musicians. Together, we made meaning of our experience through singing hymns.

We had been encouraged to offer music as we felt led and were able during the retreat. I met a few people at lunch who were interested in singing hymns and traditional sacred music. We formed an eight-person SATB choir on the spot. On the last day of the retreat, we stood around the piano with the *New Century Hymnal* and looked for a hymn that was appropriate for the occasion. We also needed one that all eight of us could learn in ten or fifteen minutes and then sing to a roomful of our new classmates without making fools of ourselves. Someone had flipped to #283 in the hymnal and saw that it was only one four-line stanza that would be reasonably easy to learn, and maybe we could even turn it into a sing-along in-

stead of a performance. “Spirit of the living God” also felt appropriate as we were beginning seminary because some of us could articulate little more than “the Spirit” when asked what had brought us there. We sang it through several times to learn it and noticed that aside from having a simple but lovely tune, it was rather meditative when repeated. We sang it adjacent to Prayers of the People during the last worship service of the retreat. This may be much the same way the hymn was used the night it was written.

In 1926, the George T. Stephans Evangelistic Party held a revival in Orlando, Florida. On one night of the revival, an evangelist preached a sermon on the Holy Spirit. A young minister from Georgia was among the crowd that heard the sermon, and afterward wrote a short chorus and tune for a hymn. People at the revival evidently liked the hymn and sang it that night and during the rest of their time there. “Spirit of the living God” was printed in leaflets and used at other revival services. In 1929, Robert H. Coleman published the hymn without the author’s permission in *Revival Songs* with slight alterations to the tune. It would take until the 1960s, by which time the hymn had become rather popular, for authorship to be restored to Daniel Iverson (Brink, 583). The tune is now commonly called IVERSON in hymnals in recognition of his role as composer.

Daniel Iverson was born in 1890 in Brunswick, a coastal town in southeastern Georgia. He was educated at the University of Georgia in Athens; Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Illinois; Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia; and the University of South Carolina in Columbia. Iverson was ordained as a Presbyterian minister in 1914 and served congregations in Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina (Forman, 353). He founded Shenandoah Presbyterian Church in Miami, Florida in 1927 and served as pastor until he retired in 1951. After starting a parish in Miami, Iverson would go on to plant seven more congregations during his time there (Brink, 583). Whether his experience with the Stephans group in Orlando was a formative experience that

led him to evangelism is not clear, but that was certainly an aspect of his ministry for the remainder of his career. The Reverend Daniel Iverson died in Asheville, North Carolina in 1977.

The scriptural references in the lyrics of “Spirit of the living God” are appropriate for a hymn written during a revival (James, 283). At revivals, some people devote themselves to God for the first time. Others rededicate their lives to the work of the church and are revived from doubt or lack of will. This hymn is a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to come down as it did in Acts 11:15 when Peter recounts his speech to the Gentiles. (The speech had taken place in Acts 10:44; some hymnals use this reference. All scriptural references here are to the *New Revised Standard Version*.) This reference to the Spirit embracing people as it had at Pentecost in Acts is a major reason why this hymn is often used at Pentecost and by pentecostal congregations. The title of the hymn is taken from Second Corinthians 3:1-6, where Paul tells the members of the church at Corinth that they are “a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God.” Iverson then took some liberties with his reference to Paul’s advice to the Christians in Galatia. Paul tells them in Galatians 5:25 that “If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.” Iverson expands on this theme of guidance when entreating the Spirit to melt, mold, fill, and use him as it “falls afresh” on him. These are fairly straightforward biblical allusions for a short, straightforward hymn.

As this hymn is entirely about the influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit, it is often used liturgically on occasions when an infusion of the Spirit is desired. Pentecost has been mentioned as one such occasion. Other such cases include ordinations or services in which people or groups are dedicated to a particular ministry or mission. It is also used as a general prayer in search of divine counsel or illumination. This hymn is also appropriate for professions or renewals of faith or in services of confession where God’s forgiveness as conferred by the Holy Spirit is sought (Brink, 584). Some hymnals con-

tain a second stanza written in 1980 by Michael Baughen, an Anglican priest who retired as Bishop of Chester in England. Churches use this verse with the original by Iverson to create bookends to congregational prayers, singing Iverson's stanza at the beginning and Baughen's at the end (Brink, 584). The *New Century Hymnal* does not contain this second verse, and since my exposure to the hymn comes from this hymnal, I will not further address the Baughen stanza here.

Apart from the *New Century Hymnal*, published in 1995 for the United Church of Christ, "Spirit of the living God" has appeared in a number of hymnals over the years published by an assortment of religious presses. After its initial printing in *Revival Songs* (1929), it was published in *Songs of Victory* (1937) with a harmony arranged by Baylus B. McKinney, a Southern Baptist composer and arranger (Brink, 584). It seems to have a wide appeal and is used across a spectrum of Protestant denominations. Since *Songs of Victory*, the hymn has appeared in several iterations of the *Baptist Hymnal*, *The New National Baptist Hymnal*, the *Foursquare Hymnal*, the *African American Heritage Hymnal*, the *Presbyterian Hymnal*, and the *Psalter Hymnal* of the Christian Reformed Church. A few hymnals have this hymn listed as "Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me" to differentiate it from another hymn entitled "Spirit of the living God." Some hymnals suggest singing this hymn unaccompanied in harmony or accompanied by organ, piano, or guitar. When using both verses to frame congregational prayers, some recommend accompanying the first line of each stanza and then singing the remaining lines unaccompanied.

In 2010, I attended my first ATLA annual conference in Louisville. I had received an email before the conference about participating in a choir that would perform at worship services. I was new to considering myself a theological librarian and was eager to meet others in the field beyond the few with whom I had worked. I was also anxious about whether I, a new addition to the profession and the choir, was in the right place vocationally and musically. My first experience after

checking into the hotel was choir rehearsal. As I found the bass section and prepared to do a new thing again, I remembered the hymn my friends and I sang as we started seminary and I knew I was in the right place.

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ON TURNING SEVENTY WITH JOSEPH HAYDN: TWO ADVENTURES WITH THE “HARMONIEMESSE”



BY JUDY CLARENCE

In the autumn of my seventieth year, my excellent amateur (auditioned) chorus, Chora Nova, chose Joseph Haydn’s *Missa Solemnis* in B-flat Major (“Harmoniemesse”) for its fall concert program. By coincidence, the huge local group, the Berkeley Community Chorus and Orchestra, programmed the same work for performance a few weeks later, hiring me as usual to play violin in the orchestra. Experiencing this work twice, first as a soprano vocalist and then as a member of the first violin section, was one of the great joys of a musical lifetime!

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Haydn wrote the “Harmoniemesse” in 1802 when he, too, was in his seventieth year, after composing the last of his symphonies. It is one of six late masses he created for Esterhazy Prince Nicolaus II. (One of these is the much more frequently performed “Lord Nelson Mass.”) In a letter to Prince Nicolaus, Haydn wrote, “I am laboring wearily on the new Mass, though I am anxious whether I shall receive any applause for it” (McCaldin, 3). Indeed, he has received much applause for it in the last two centuries!

The work was first performed on the morning of September 8, 1802, on the occasion of the Nativity of Mary, also the nameday of Princess Marie Hermenegild. Haydn conducted the musical services, which were followed by a lavish, celebratory dinner at the palace complete with toasts and trumpet fanfares. The guests danced all afternoon, paused briefly for a supper of several courses, and resumed dancing until two in the morning. The next day, “...the guests were woken by the sound of French horns, summoning them

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to a hunt. In the afternoon there was a concert directed by Haydn, including movements from the ‘Harmoniemesse’” (Jones, 127).

The title, “Harmoniemesse,” sounds to American ears as if it is supposedly more “harmonious” than most masses. Actually, the title refers to the enormous, and unusual, importance of wind instruments in this work—in German “*Harmonie*” means “wind band” and this work is considered the “Wind Band Mass.” Its orchestral forces, strings and winds combined, are the largest of any of Haydn’s masses.

The opening Kyrie section—marked *poco adagio*—is usually performed at a slow, somewhat draggy tempo, and this was the case with the Berkeley Community Chorus’ version. But I was used to our Chora Nova director, Paul Flight’s much more sprightly speed. Regardless of tempo, the Kyrie is dreamy, contemplative, beginning with a solo quartet echoed later by the full chorus. Haydn scholar H. C. Robbins Landon says of this Kyrie, “This is the real *Spätstil*, a genuine farewell to music” (Robbins Landon, 244). (For our annual chorus auditions this year, Paul asked us to prepare this movement—I loved singing it alone at home!) The Kyrie segues effortlessly into the lively, almost folk-like soprano solo at the beginning of the Gloria, followed soon thereafter by the choral entrance which moves along into a gentle “*et in terra pax*” section, a moderately quick “*gratias*,” an ominous “*qui tollis*,” that ends with the “*quoniam tu solus sanctus*” featuring a memorable brass and timpani entrance.

This Credo, though Baroque sounding, is utterly believable! It begins with declamatory honesty and determination; an emphatic “I BELIEVE!” Haydn seems to rush through the first section, as if anxious to arrive at “*et incarnatus est*” as quickly as possible. Here the four-bar clarinet solo leads into the soprano soloist’s gently melodious and reverent entrance. “*Passus et sepultus est*” ends with the bass soloist uttering a low E-flat. Truly, Christ has been lowered into his tomb. But the resurrection happens, with a vigorous *Vivace*, and the movement concludes with a fugal “*et vitam venturi*.”

Sanctus begins with a solemn Adagio, but turns vigorous at the “*pleni sunt coeli*” section. This is followed by the most surprising movement of all, the Benedictus. Scholars have puzzled for centuries over Haydn’s lively, cute, dance-like interpretation of what is usually a rather solemn movement. For Haydn, being “blessed” is to be gloriously jolly! The tempo is marked *allegro molto*, and some conductors have questioned this and slowed it down considerably—but our two Berkeley directors both honored what they felt was Haydn’s optimistic intent, and moved it right along, cheerfully, into the Hosanna, which uses the same music as the Sanctus.

Robbins Landon has noticed a similarity between this Agnus Dei and that of Mozart’s Coronation Mass, K. 317, of which Haydn apparently owned a set of manuscript parts. In this movement the choir is silent—only the soloists and orchestra are heard. Clarinet, oboe, and bassoon weave prominently, breathtakingly, in and out among the four soloists. The chorus enters again in the “*dona nobis*,” a movement that seems to express the gratitude felt in Austria and throughout Europe in 1802 that peace had finally arrived with the Treaty of Amiens.

Throughout my life, I have divided my musical time between singing in choruses and playing in orchestras. Thus I am familiar, both as a soprano and as a violinist, with several great choral works: Mozart’s and Brahms’ Requiems, Orff’s *Carmina Burana*, Bach’s B-Minor Mass and several of the Passions come to mind. But the experience of Fall 2010 was unique because I performed in the “Harmoniemesse” with two groups almost simultaneously. Indeed, rehearsals overlapped for a couple of weeks.

I was thoroughly engrossed and engaged in the soprano part for Chora Nova and had it pretty much down pat, when I picked up the first violin part. I had been warned! (I was responsible for hiring the Chora Nova string players, all of them professional musicians, who had shared with me, “This music is HARD!”) Initially, though, I surmised that they were wrong, and that the violin part would be easy—Haydn often

is—but the “Harmoniemesse” proved to be a notable exception! Mastery of the soprano choral part did not guarantee mastery of the violin score. There were passages which, no matter how hard I practiced, I could never quite get all the notes down perfectly (don’t tell my section colleagues!)

As I sang in the chorus, I was keenly aware of the structure and movement in the string parts. I listened for them, and fit my voice into their flow, feeling the first violin passages in my own arms and fingers as the vocal line came from my lips. As I played violin in the orchestra, I carried the words and vocal lines in my head, matching pitch, rhythm, and interpretation with those of the choral singers and soloists.

There were a few frustrations—our orchestra had engaged a new concertmaster whose bowing ideas were contrary to my understanding of the flow of the music, but I had to follow with the rest of the section, inwardly groaning at what I felt were awkward and inappropriate ways of playing the part. Our chorus had hired a soprano soloist whom our conductor had known years earlier in a distant part of the country—in the meantime, her voice had undergone changes and, unbeknownst to him, was no longer a good match for singing Haydn. She could not compare with the wonderful local soprano soloist who sang the “Harmoniemesse” with the huge community choir, and from the midst of the violin section I wished fervently that this local woman had been chosen to sing in our smaller, more select group. But for the most part, the joy of incorporating and absorbing this glorious Mass from within the violin section of the orchestra as well as from within the soprano section of the chorus was a profound musical experience of the greatest intensity.

When I was a child, people would jokingly ask me if I could sing and play the violin at the same time. Performing the “Harmoniemesse” with these two groups was as close as I’ll ever come.

In his Foreword to the Schirmer vocal score of the “Harmoniemesse,” William Herrmann wrote, “The ‘Har-

moniemesse' is...for Haydn what the *Requiem* and the *Magic Flute* are for Mozart, or *Falstaff* and the *Pezzi Sacri* for Verdi—the final summation of a long artistic life” (Hermann, 1). Soon after the first performance of this mass, the composer began to complain of a “lack of energy and inability to concentrate” (Jones, 127). To quote from Robbins Landon again, in the final paragraph of his chapter on the “Harmoniemesse” as he describes the work, “Haydn’s handwriting on his scores had become very small, very neat, and slightly shaky by this time. But he did not forget to begin this Mass with the words ‘In Nomine Domini’ and to close the last page with his private note of thanks, ‘Laus Deo’” (Robbins Landon, 251).

Laus Deo to you, dear “Papa Haydn,” and many thanks for the privilege of performing your magnificent work in my seventieth year, times two! And *Laus Deo* to Seth, with gratitude for his tireless work with the ATLA Singers for lo these many years...

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A SONG FOR ALL SEASONS

“Christ, the appletree”

BY BRUCE EUGENE ELDEVIK

The tree of life my soul hath seen
Laden with fruit, and always green;
The trees of nature fruitless be,
Compar'd with Christ the Apple-tree.

His beauty doth all things excel,
By faith I know, but ne'er can tell,
The glory which I now can see,
In Jesus Christ the Apple-tree.

For happiness I long have sought,
And pleasures dearly have I bought;
I miss'd of all, but now I see
'Tis found in Christ the Apple-tree.

I'm weary'd with my former toil,
But here I'll sit and rest a-while,
Under the shadow I would be,
Of Jesus Christ the Apple-tree.

This fruit doth make my soul to thrive,
And keeps my dying faith alive;
Which makes my soul in haste to be
With Jesus Christ the Apple-tree.

This anthem was chosen for the ATLA Choir to sing at the 2010 conference in Louisville. For one reason or another we did not rehearse or sing it there, nevertheless I was intrigued by the original intent to perform a piece in June that, at least in my experience, has been exclusively associated with music heard in Advent and Christmas. My first acquaintance with “Jesus Christ the apple tree” came from a recording by the Dale Warland Singers (*Sing We of Christmas*, Augsburg, 1983) with its hauntingly beautiful arrangement by Dale Warland himself. Perhaps because



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of the popularity of that arrangement, as it seems to capture the essence of an Advent mood of reflection and longing, it has become a staple of “Christmas music,” performed by choirs at Christmas concerts and heard in a variety of arrangements on Minnesota Public Radio in the weeks leading up to December 25th.

Knowing nothing about the background of the hymn, my interest was raised even more when I saw the attribution for the text, “Anon, collection of Joshua Smith, New Hampshire, 1784.” Today’s familiar melody by Elizabeth Poston (1905-1987) was composed in the mid-1960s, but the text predates the tune by nearly two hundred years. Questions began to arise. Was the text originally written with the season of Christmas in mind? Who was Joshua Smith and what kind of collection did he assemble?

Fortunately, these questions and many others are addressed in a masterful article by David W. Music, Professor of Church Music at Baylor University (Music, 63-81). Joshua Smith was a Baptist itinerant lay preacher in New Hampshire during the latter half of the eighteenth century. Smith, with the help of several Baptist colleagues, published a collection of folk hymn texts entitled *Divine Hymns or Spiritual Songs for the Use of Religious Assemblies or Private Christians*. Professor Music, in an impressive bit of descriptive bibliographic detective work, demonstrates that the accepted date of 1784 for the hymnal’s first printing is, in all likelihood, incorrect (Music, 68). The earliest extant copy is undated, but external evidence points to a publication date of 1791.

Joshua Smith died in 1795, but his hymnal proved highly popular, going through many subsequent editions and reprints, often with “large additions.” In the original and most of the later editions, “Christ, the appletree” appears and remains the second hymn. The editions of *Divine Hymns* do not list the authors or sources of the texts. Because “Christ, the appletree” had not appeared in any hymnal before Smith’s, it was assumed to be anonymous and of American

folk origin. However, as Music points out, it has been recognized in some circles for some time that the text first appeared in print in 1761 in the August issue of the *London Spiritual Magazine*, the author identified only as “R. H.” How Joshua Smith became aware of this poem is not known. Folk hymns are sometimes called white spirituals, characterized by their homespun, “intensely personal” nature (Downey, 284). Although “Christ, the appletree” did not originate on the American frontier, it is not hard to see why Smith would have chosen to include it with other hymns that did, given its individualistic and rustic qualities.

The tunes to which this hymn might have been set poses another round of speculation. Elizabeth Lockwood and Leonard Ellinwood have suggested that it could be sung to “OLD HUNDREDTH, WINCHESTER NEW, OR WAREHAM, OR ANY OTHER TUNE IN THAT METER WHICH ANTEDATES 1790” (Lockwood, 25). One very interesting arrangement is a setting taken from a secular source, a fife tune originating as a march by G. F. Handel (Downey, 285). This pairing dates from 1805 when Jeremiah Ingalls included it in his *Christian Harmony*, a hymnbook noted for drawing on secular folk tunes as settings for its texts (Downey, 285). Thus, throughout much of its history, “Christ, the appletree” found a home with tunes both sprightly and solemn. Nevertheless, it rested with the twentieth century English composer and folklorist, Elizabeth Poston, to give this folk hymn the simple, flowing melody by which it is known today.

Elizabeth Poston was a multi-faceted person. A student of the Royal Academy of Music, she spent most of the 1930s away from England collecting folk songs. She worked in broadcasting with the BBC during World War II. Following the war she returned to composing, as well as piano performance and writing articles on music. A friend to both Ralph Vaughan Williams and E. M. Forster, she lived her later years north of London in Rooks Nest House, the setting for Forster’s novel, *Howard’s End*.

“Jesus Christ the apple tree” appears in *The Second Penguin Book of Christmas Carols*, published in 1970 and compiled by Poston as the American counterpart to the English and other European carols collected in *The Penguin Book of Christmas Carols* of five years earlier. In her notes on the “song” she states that it is “suitable for all times and seasons” but she includes it because of its “association with Christmas in the carol services and broadcasts of the choir of King’s College, Cambridge...” (Poston, Second, 27). Judging from these remarks, her setting of the hymn surely became a Christmas favorite almost immediately following its composition, not only by virtue of its reaching a wide radio audience as part of this immensely popular holiday program, but also due to the successful way text and music combine to stir the emotions, eliciting feelings of both solace and joy.

The imagery and tone of the text are compelling. There is the condition of world-weariness and regret in the narrator’s voice at the same time as he or she relates a restorative vision of Jesus Christ as the (apple) Tree of Life “laden with fruit and always green.” The allusion to both Genesis 2-3 and Revelation 22 is clear. The fruit that was illicitly eaten to mankind’s death is now, in Jesus Christ, the means of a return to life. Present also is the hint that, like St. Paul, the narrator is conflicted whether to continue in his “former toil” or “to depart and be with Christ” (Phil. 1:23). The primary sense, however, is that the narrator has been given to see the “one thing . . . needful” (Luke 10:42) that has answered his longing and become the source of great joy.

Elizabeth Poston takes to task Victorian hymnody and its proclivity toward “heavy chording” that bogs down a tune meant to tread lightly (Poston, Penguin, 9). She writes, “To deny to carols the understanding we allow to the arts in general, is to dispossess them of their essential character in an equal partnership of words and music ...” (Poston, Penguin, 9). She disliked the over-produced and over-embellished, much preferring the vitality and simplicity of unadorned folk

melodies as the truest and most artful form. “Jesus Christ the apple tree” stands squarely in that tradition.

Seth, your own sensibility for the proper balance between text and music and your art in bringing both together through the ATLA Choir in worship settings has enriched our conferences immeasurably over many years. I have been blessed, again and again, through hearing, learning, singing, and now, remembering. Thank you for your service to the Christian choral tradition and to us.

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WHAT DO YOU GIVE TO A GOD WHO HAS EVERYTHING?

“In the bleak mid-winter”



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BY LESLIE ENGELSON

Christina Georgina Rossetti, English by birth and Italian by heritage, was born the youngest of four children to a literary and artistic family in 1830. Her father, Gabriele Rossetti, an Italian exile, was a poet and scholar. Her siblings, Maria, Dante Gabriel, and William, were authors as well. The oldest brother, Dante Gabriel, was a well-known artist and poet and founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. He painted a number of portraits of Christina, both as herself or posing as Mary the mother of Jesus.

Along with their mother Frances, Rossetti and her sister were devout High Anglicans. Her piety and religious conviction were such that, while Rossetti was engaged twice, she broke off both engagements because of religious reasons (one converted to Catholicism and the other was probably an atheist). As her brother, William, clarifies in the memoir he published in his compilation of her poetic works, Rossetti's religion was not merely acts and rites. It was "... far more a thing of the heart than of the mind: she clung to and loved the Christian creed because she loved Jesus Christ" (Rossetti, liv). She chose her faith in Christ day in and day out, regardless of the circumstances she faced.

Some of those circumstances included a variety of physical ailments as well as, what we would likely call today, depression. Suffering, possibly from Grave's disease, Rossetti remained single until her death in 1894 of breast cancer. In times of failing physical and mental health, Rossetti's faith sustained her, causing her to pen the line "Spring shall

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bloom where now the ice is ...” after declaring, in reference to faith, “It suffices” (Rossetti, 186).

While some today might judge her to be too straight-laced or perhaps consider her interpretation of the Bible too narrow, Rossetti’s faith ruled her life and she lived it out through her every act and decision. To this end, she felt a serious spiritual responsibility toward the literary works she wrote for publication. When only seven years old, Rossetti started creating poetry, and when she was eleven, her grandfather printed her first written poem “To My Mother, on the Anniversary of Her Birth”; it was a birthday card to her mother and a surprise to the entire family. When eighteen, she privately published her first book of poems. Dante Gabriel admired her poems and encouraged her to publish them in the Brotherhood’s journal, *The Germ*. However, it took another fourteen years for her first volume of poems to be officially published.

Answering a request in 1871 for Christmas poems, Rossetti sent in her poem “A Christmas Carol” to *Scribner’s Monthly* (Scribner’s, 278). Thirty-four years later, in 1906, her brother William included it in his compilation of her poetry, *The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti*.

That same year, Percy Dearmer, literary editor of *The English Hymnal*, included Rossetti’s poem along with other hymns of “... high scholarly standards” (Reynolds, 70). Ralph Vaughan Williams, music editor and a friend of Gustav Holst, published a pairing of Holst’s tune CRANHAM, composed specifically for this text, with Rossetti’s poem which has become the setting most used for congregational singing. However, the hymnal did not include her original title, facilitating the adoption of the first line of the poem, “In the bleak mid-winter” for its title. Another greatly admired setting for this poem was written in 1911 by Harold Darke, said to be “his finest work” (Cummings). Even today, every Christmas, the Kings College Choir at Cambridge sings and broadcasts it, and in 2008, British choirmasters voted it “... the greatest Christmas carol of all time ...” (Telegraph).

I first became aware of the song set to Holst's tune about a decade ago when a choir director introduced it to my church's Christmas choir in which I sang. The song immediately attracted me for a number of reasons. First is the rhythm of the text. Rossetti's poems often use arrhythmic stanzas which present an immediate challenge for any musical setting of the poem as well as a challenge to the singer to get the rhythm right. Darke's beautiful and haunting setting is a tremendous accomplishment, which takes advantage of the rhythmic challenges to enhance and emphasize the words.

Next, "In the bleak mid-winter" flows with similes and paradoxes. These create images that give us a glimpse of an event really beyond our comprehension. These images are fitting since the Christmas story itself holds many paradoxes: the God of the universe becomes a baby, the King of Kings is born in a stable and his cradle is a manger, the Holy of Holies is born to a young maiden who was pregnant before she was married. Rossetti's poem echoes some of these paradoxes.

In the first stanza, Rossetti describes the frozen earth and water as iron and stone. Into this cold, hard place, the second stanza declares, the almighty God, the magnificence of whom neither heaven nor earth could hold or sustain, came in the form of the infant Jesus Christ, finding a stable sufficient for His purpose. Stanzas three and four declare that for this One, whom cherubim and angels worship, it is enough to be fed at his mother's breast. Stanza five becomes reflective. The story turns inward as the singer questions her role in this scene. Noting the fitting gifts of the shepherd and wise men who came to worship him, the singer recognizes that her most valuable gift is also the only thing she has to give: her heart.

While readers will note a number of Rossetti's poems speak of the hope of heaven, many of her poems also reflect her feelings of unworthiness. For this reason, the final line of "In the bleak mid-winter" is even more poignant. Despite her feelings of uncertainty and perhaps shame, she could still de-

clare that the best, most worthy gift she could give her Lord and King would be her heart. Perchance she was able to apprehend this grace because she knew His heart.

The hopeful component of this carol is the parallel of the paradoxes to our life experiences. Who among us has not had a heart as “hard as iron?” Would any of us say that our lives are fit places in which God can abide? I would dare say, “No!” And yet God does and desires to do so. Does our worship of God surpass the time, energy, and expense we shower on our hobbies and entertainments? Nevertheless, the unsuitability of our hearts and lives does not deter God, for we would be doomed if it did as we can never be adequate enough for God. So, in spite of and despite the incongruity, Jesus Christ finds our hearts and lives sufficient for the purposes of God.

Thus Christina Rossetti, through her nineteenth century poem, leaves with us, even today, a timely and universal question: what is left, then, for us to do but to give Him our hearts?

In the bleak mid-winter
 Frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron,
 Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
 Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter
 Long ago.

Our God, Heaven cannot hold Him
 Nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away
 When He comes to reign:
In the bleak mid-winter
 A stable-place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty
 Jesus Christ.
Enough for Him, whom cherubim

Worship night and day,
A breastful of milk
And a mangerful of hay;
Enough for Him, whom angels
Fall down before,
The ox and ass and camel
Which adore.

Angels and archangels
May have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim
Thronged the air;
But only His mother
In her maiden bliss
Worshipped the Beloved
With a kiss.

What can I give Him.
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb,
If I were a Wise Man
I would do my part,—
Yet what I can I give Him,
Give my heart.

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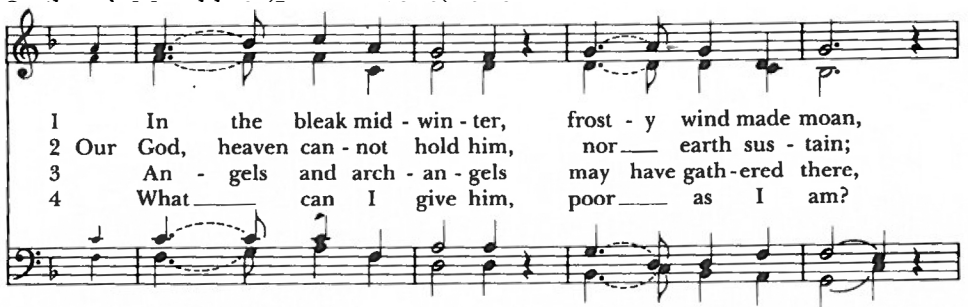
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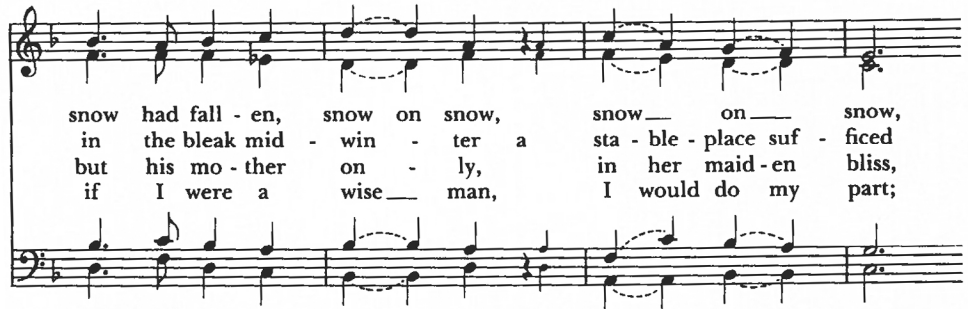
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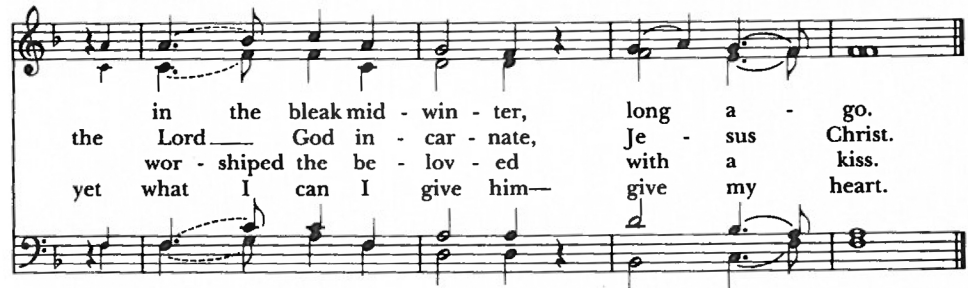
1 In the bleak mid-winter, frost-y wind made moan,
2 Our God, heaven can-not hold him, nor—earth sus-tain;
3 An-gels and arch-an-gels may have gath-ered there,
4 What—can I give him, poor— as I am?



earth stood hard as i-ron, wa-ter like a stone;
heaven and earth shall flee a-way when he comes to reign:
cher-u-bim and ser-a-phim thron-ed the air;
If I were a shep-herd, I would bring a lamb;



snow had fall-en, snow on snow, snow— on— snow,
in the bleak mid-winter a sta-ble-place suf-ficed
but his mo-ther on-ly, in her maid-en bliss,
if I were a wise—man, I would do my part;



in the bleak mid-winter, long a-go.
the Lord— God in-car-nate, Je-sus Christ.
wor-shipped the be-lov-ed with a kiss.
yet what I can I give him— give my heart.

Words: Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)
Music: Cranham, Gustav Theodore Holst (1874-1934)

111.

IN DEEPER REVERENCE, PRAISE

“Dear Lord and Father of mankind”



BY ELLEN FROST

Ellen Frost is the Acquisitions Librarian at Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University. Ellen has sung with the ATLA choir for sixteen years, usually in the alto section (although in times of duress, she plays the piano, directs the choir, or even – horrors—sings soprano).

The hymn “Dear Lord and Father of mankind” was written by John Greenleaf Whittier, first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1872 as part of the poem “The Brewing of Soma.” John Greenleaf Whittier was born in 1807 in Massachusetts to a devout Quaker family. He began writing poetry at an early age, after discovering the poetry of Robert Burns. His first poetry was published in the *Newburyport Free Press* when he was seventeen. Whittier’s initial editorial position was with *The American Manufacturer* (Boston) in 1828. He worked in editorial positions at several journals before taking up the cause against slavery in 1831. Whittier then began publishing pamphlets and poems expressing his abolitionist views. His first collection of published poetry (*Poems Written During the Progress of the Abolition Question in the United States, Between the Years 1830 and 1838*) was actually published without his knowledge by some of his anti-slavery associates (Von Frank, 360-71). Whittier continued his activity in the anti-slavery movement and avidly supported the Union, even though he was a Quaker pacifist. Throughout this time, he wrote both anti-slavery poetry and poetry of more regional interest. Following the Civil War, his poetry became increasingly introspective. It was during this period that Whittier wrote “The Brewing of Soma.”

“The Brewing of Soma” describes the Hindu ritual of brewing and drinking a hallucinogenic beverage in the first eleven stanzas; the remaining six stanzas are a Christian reaction to what in Whittier’s mind was a drug-induced pagan ritual. These six stanzas were extracted from the poem and first set to music

as a hymn by W. Garrett Horder (*Worship Song*, 1884). Most hymnals that contain “Dear Lord and Father of mankind” contain stanzas 12, 13, 14, 16, and 17 of the original poem, omitting the fifteenth.

“Dear Lord and Father of mankind” is frequently set to the tune REST by Frederick C. Maker. Many hymnal companions claim that Maker wrote the tune specifically for this text for inclusion in G. S. Barrett’s *Congregation Church Hymnal* (London, 1887). However, *The Hymnal 1982 Companion* quotes Bernard S. Massey, the editor of the *Bulletin* of The Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland, as attributing REST to a collection of Maker’s hymn tunes published prior to 1887 using the hymn “There is an hour of peaceful rest” (Glover, 351-53).

The Hymnal 1982 includes a setting of “Dear Lord and Father of mankind” set to the tune REPTON. This tune is from Sir C. Hubert H. Parry’s oratorio *Judith* (Glover, 351-3). REPTON’s meter is 8.6.8.8.6.6, which requires that the last line of each stanza be repeated. (The meter of Whittier’s poem is 8.6.8.8.6.) (An aside: in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, Timothy Dudley-Smith’s “He comes to us as one unknown,” another beautiful hymn, is set to REPTON.) The hymn was first published using this hymn tune in 1924 in a leaflet in the Novello & Co. *Parish Choir Book* series (Glover, 351-3).

Charles Ives set stanzas 14 and 16 of the original poem to music as well (“O Sabbath rest of Galilee!” and “Drop thy still dews of quietness”). He entitled his setting “Serenity,” choosing not to use a line from the poem as a title, or even to use more than these two stanzas. “Serenity” is more chant-like than it is a hymn. Oddly enough, this setting is in the 1989 *United Methodist Hymnal* (probably Carlton Young’s doing). It is a very haunting setting of the text.

Whittier had little or no experience singing congregational hymns since that was not part of his Quaker tradition. He wrote many poems from which numerous texts were extract-

ed and compiled as hymns. He said of himself that he was not a hymnwriter because he knew nothing of music. Whittier instead considered himself to be a writer of “religious verse.”

I have always known “Dear Lord and Father of mankind” as it is set to REST, with its close, chromatic harmonies. The prayer-like text of this hymn speaks to us today as much as it did to people of Whittier’s time:

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
Forgive our foolish ways!
Reclothe us in our rightful mind,
In purer lives Thy service find,
In deeper reverence, praise.

Here in the twenty-first century, we have to be reminded to clothe ourselves with righteousness. “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10a). So many times we hurry through worship so we can move on to the next thing. When do we stop for “deeper reverence?”

The next stanza reminds us to follow God’s call as the disciples did:

In simple trust like theirs who heard,
Beside the Syrian sea,
The gracious calling of the Lord,
Let us, like them, without a word
Rise up and follow Thee.

Then our Lenten reminder of Christ:

O Sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee
The silence of eternity,
Interpreted by love!

The fourth stanza is my favorite. I have repeated it to myself in times of need, I have spoken it to friends, and I have even e-mailed it to people. It is our reminder to stop what we are doing and rest in God's peace:

Drop thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace.

How beautiful these words are and still as true a need for people in the twenty-first century as it was in the nineteenth. And then, the final stanza of the entire poem:

Breathe through the hearts of our desire
Thy coolness and Thy balm;
Let sense be numb, let flesh retire;
Speak through the earthquake, wind and fire,
O still, small voice of calm!

During those hectic times of the year—Advent, when we are supposed to be anticipating the coming of our Lord, but are really caught in the commercial Christmas rush; Lent, when we should be spending our days in prayer and meditation, but are actually preparing our Easter Day music and festivities—I return to this hymn. We daily must be reminded to wait through the earthquake, wind, and fire, and listen for the “still, small voice of calm.”

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ESSAYS
40

A LIFE FULL OF PRAISE

“O for a thousand tongues to sing”

BY LISA GONZALEZ

I consider myself a hymn geek, for a variety of reasons. I have always been a history buff, so I find the sometimes archaic language of older hymns charming rather than confusing, and, like a lot of librarians, I can't resist showing off my knowledge of obsolete terminology. I also love to sing, and I am willing to sing anything that is within my range and ability. Hymns have generally fallen into these two categories, unlike many contemporary Christian tunes I tried so hard to sing back when Sandi Patty was all the rage. Another aspect of hymns that I have to admit appeals to my vanity is that the quality of the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; that is, I sound better singing in harmony with others than just by myself, no matter how pretty the melody.

I grew up singing a lot of the old Protestant standard hymns, though I did not really pay attention to who wrote them. In my independently minded church tradition, the Stone-Campbell Movement, the theological inclinations of the original authors did not make any real difference as long as we could adapt the lyrics as we saw fit. Now that I am a little more savvy theologically, I have started to pay attention to the background of the authors of some of my favorite hymns. Despite my church tradition's aversion to formal theology, I must admit I am partial to Wesleyan theology, so it seems appropriate that the hymn that caught my attention for this essay was “O for a thousand tongues to sing.”

Like most people, the most memorable aspect of a song for me is usually the melody, so it was the remembrance of the tune that first brought this hymn to the forefront of my mind. Since we sang this



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for Jesus combined with a mind open to what Christians of any background had to say may help explain how we came to share a motto with the Moravians.

Since the stanzas of this hymn come from a much longer original poem, it is fortuitous that I have recently gained a better appreciation of the progression of a hymn from stanza to stanza at the Disciples of Christ church I recently joined, since we diligently sing every stanza. I am not sure who came up with this system, but we generally sang stanzas 1, 4, and 5 on five stanza hymns at my church growing up, unless it was a particular favorite, like “The old rugged cross,” in which case it merited more stanzas. It seems this hymn was not a top pick, so I find myself less familiar with the second stanza:

Jesus—the Name that charms our fears
That bids our sorrows cease;
‘Tis music in the sinner’s ears,
‘Tis life, and health, and peace.

What speaks to me in this stanza is the implication that just the sound of a particular name can have a musical quality which touches the heart and mind and body. This portrait of the name of our Lord as a physical comfort is a comfort to me as well, in both body and spirit. I find that the word “charm” implies that there is also an enchanting, magical quality about the Name, and a power there that can calm any pounding, fearful heart. For me, this stanza also resonates with a concern for the connection between the words issuing forth from the tongue and the tongue’s real power to harm or heal—a word has a power all its own.

Stanza 3

He breaks the power of cancell’d sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean;
His blood availed for me.

While not everyone may have experienced the power of just the name of Jesus expressed in the earlier stanza, here the text

emphasizes the power of the blood to cleanse, a touchstone, I think, to the mysterious connection between the physicality of Jesus and our lives. If the blood that flowed on the cross can have real power to save, its power extends to every aspect of our being, and most especially our bodies.

Stanza 4

He speaks; and, listening to His voice,
New life the dead receive;
The mournful broken hearts rejoice;
The humble poor believe.

This stanza does not appear in my old church hymnal at all, which included the eighth and twelfth stanzas from Wesley's original poem instead (Carmichael, 21). If the connection between the healing power of just the right word and the incarnate Word who can heal those who are broken in every possible way, even broken by death, is not apparent earlier, it is surely evident here.

Stanza 1

O for a thousand tongues to sing
My dear Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of His grace.

I end this essay with the first stanza because I think the desire to praise the name of Jesus becomes more urgent after realizing the full import of the gift that is Jesus. His words manifest themselves in so many ways in our lives, words which can bring us true health in both body and spirit. Though some modern praise choruses have been criticized in various circles because of their first person focus, knowing the autobiographical nature of this hymn is assuring to me in that I can enter into Wesley's own conversion experience—I can also declare his dear Redeemer to be my own. In singing this hymn, the story of Christ's redeeming blood can be told once again for me, and realized anew in the hearts of others, just as it was for Charles Wesley so many years ago.

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A FAMILY CONNECTION

“Near to the heart of God”



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BY JULIE (MCAFEE) HINES

Family legend says there were three or four McAfee brothers who came over to America from Ireland in the early 1700s. It further says that at least one of those brothers went with Daniel Boone to help explore and establish the area that became Kentucky and Missouri. It was from this line that Cleland Boyd McAfee was born on September 25, 1866. While the direct link between the two of us has not been established, we are related in some way. It has always been a pleasure to look in a hymnal and see “Uncle” Cleland’s song.

Cleland was the fourth son of John Armstrong McAfee and Anna Waddell Bailey McAfee. John was the first president of Park College (now University), long associated with the Presbyterian Church in Parkville, Missouri (now a suburb of Kansas City). Cleland graduated from Park College in 1884 and returned there as teacher and pastor of the college church after having received his theological education at Union Theological Seminary in New York (Osbeck, 198). He also directed the church choir and would often write a response for the choir to sing at the end of his sermon, especially on communion Sundays (Morgan, 257). In 1892 he married Harriet (Hattie) Lawson Brown. They had three daughters—Ruth, Katharine, and Mildred.

In 1901 Cleland became pastor of Forty First Street (now First) Presbyterian Church in Chicago, Illinois and served there for three years. He then moved to Brooklyn, New York where he was pastor of Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church. In 1912 he returned to Chicago and taught systematic theology at McCormick Theological Seminary until 1930 (Reynolds,

351-2). (Cleland's association with McCormick adds personal significance to my involvement in ATLA, since the final event of the 2011 ATLA conference is being held at the seminary.) During his last year there, Cleland also served as moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA (Osbeck, 198).

After his professorship, Cleland led the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. He retired in 1936 to Jaffrey, New Hampshire and died on February 4, 1944 (Reynolds, 351-2). During his lifetime he wrote manuals to assist the Presbyterian denomination in providing practical advice for the day to day operation of the local church. At least one of these manuals was still being published after his death. However, he is best known for the hymn "Near to the heart of God."

The words of this hymn have always intrigued me. What was going on in Cleland's life when he wrote this song? It was near a communion Sunday in 1901, when his brother Howard's two daughters contracted diphtheria. Sadly, they died within twenty-four hours of each other. Cleland went to the psalms for consolation and in reading through them was compelled to write this hymn (Hymn stories). (The particular references in Psalms are not mentioned.) Cleland wrote not only the words but also the music; the tune is usually just called MCAFEE. It was first sung on the day of the funerals outside his brother's house, which was still under quarantine, and again by the choir of the church on the following Sunday. The first printing of it was in *The Choir Leader* in 1903 by Lorenz Publishing Company of Dayton, Ohio (Osbeck, 198). (*The Choir Leader* furnished an anthem for each Sunday of the month and was published monthly.) While Cleland was very involved as a Presbyterian, this hymn has crossed denominational boundaries and can be found in most major hymnals up to this day. It has even gone worldwide as I found a video of it on YouTube being sung in Talisay, Cebu, Philippines.

Throughout my life I have found music to be a way of drawing near to God. At times, I find music speaks more to me

than even Scripture does. This song in particular has personal meaning for me, but its appeal is universal.

There is a place of quiet rest,
Near to the heart of God;
A place where sin cannot molest,
Near to the heart of God.

Refrain:

O Jesus, blest Redeemer,
Sent from the heart of God;
Hold us, who wait before Thee,
Near to the heart of God.

There is a place of comfort sweet,
Near to the heart of God;
A place where we our Savior meet,
Near to the heart of God.

There is a place of full release,
Near to the heart of God;
A place where all is joy and peace,
Near to the heart of God.

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Near to the Heart of God

CLELAND B. MCAFEE

CLELAND B. MCAFEE

1. There is a place of qui - et rest, Near to the heart of God,
2. There is a place of com - fort sweet, Near to the heart of God,
3. There is a place of full re - lease, Near to the heart of God,

A place where sin can - not mo - lest, Near to the heart of God.
A place where we our Sav - ior meet, Near to the heart of God.
A place where all is joy and peace, Near to the heart of God.

REFRAIN

O Je - sus, blest Re - deem - er, Sent from the heart of God,

Hold us, who wait be - fore Thee, Near to the heart of God.

HEALEY WILLAN AND LITURGICAL SONG AT THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY MAGDALENE



BY ANDREW G. KADEL

When I began working at Union Theological Seminary with Seth Kasten, he encouraged me to join the American Theological Library Association and to attend the annual conference in Toronto in June of 1991. On Sunday following the conference, we went to a very special place, the Church of St. Mary Magdalene (Anglican). It is a modest building, beautifully decorated according to the traditions of the catholic, or high-church wing of Anglicanism. The reason for our pilgrimage to St. Mary Magdalene was the music, as well as the historical background of the music of this parish.

The Rev. Andrew G. Kadel is the Director of the St. Mark's Library at the General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church. From 1990 to 2000, he was a librarian at the Burke Library of Union Theological Seminary and a colleague there of Seth Kasten. He has sung with the ATLA Singers for 20 years, beginning with the 1991 Toronto annual conference.

Healey Willan (1880-1968) was a British musician who moved to Toronto in 1913 to be a professor at the Toronto Conservatory of Music (now The Royal Conservatory). In 1921, Willan gave up a better paying part-time position at a larger church to work with the Rev. Henry G. Hiscocks at St. Mary Magdalene to develop its distinctive liturgical worship. Willan described this as his birthday present to himself (*Canadian Encyclopedia*). He was Precentor at this church for the last forty-seven years of his life. Under Willan, the Solemn Mass each Sunday had two choirs: a Ritual Choir which sang Gregorian chants (in English), standing in the front, near the altar. These consisted of various propers, or texts specific for a given day, usually excerpts from psalms or other biblical texts, but sometimes other Christian poetry or hymns. At the back of the church, up in the balcony, was the Gallery Choir. They would sing the “ordinary” or recurring parts of the Mass: the Kyrie, the Sanctus/Benedictus, and the Agnus Dei. The two longer parts, the Gloria

and the Creed, were sung in chant by the entire congregation. The Gallery Choir was a mixed choir of very professional amateurs. In addition to the ordinary of the Mass, they sang one or two unaccompanied motets each Sunday. Before Willan, these had typically been Renaissance pieces, such as Tallis or Byrd. This tradition continued under Willan, but he enriched the repertoire with further music, notably his own compositions.

An examination of all of Willan's works would reveal a wide range of styles. He wrote for organ, orchestra, and solo voice, as well as for choir. Even his sacred music varies widely in style, harmony, and instrumentation based on the intended audience or congregation and the performers involved. Some of his works have been compared in style with Edward Elgar or Charles Villiers Stanford, with rich romantic harmonies and heavy accompaniments. His liturgical works intended for churches other than St. Mary Magdalene also differ substantially from those discussed here. Ironically, his *Missa de Sancta Maria Magdalena*, which is well known and loved in the Episcopal Church, is clearly among those works that are unlike his St. Mary Magdalene compositions.

The Gallery Choir was no more than thirty singers in a loft in the back of the church. Willan normally used five to a part, or twenty singers, since more would be louder than he wanted in the very live and small space of this church. The choir has sung without accompaniment since Willan began his tenure at St. Mary Magdalene. The location may have made it inconvenient, in the early days, to accompany the choir with the organ, however, the quiet and meditative atmosphere of the liturgy was the real motivation for the choice of the *a cappella* sound. Willan's music for this choir consistently had harmonies that sound both soft and clear to the ear. One of the better known examples is the motet, "Rise up, my love, my fair one." (A recording performed by Quintessential Vocal Ensemble can be heard on YouTube, as can many performances of Healey Willan's music.) All four voices move melodically within the scale of the given key. The chords are

conventional, except that there are some additional sevenths and ninths, extending the chords to add a little dissonance. Because all these notes occur within the scale, the sound is smooth and it is natural for the choral voices to sing them and to be in tune even in the dissonances. While this natural sound in some ways assists intonation, it is also a challenge. The harmony is so transparent that any faults in intonation, or any wobbles or excessive vibrato, are exposed in a jarring way.

Willan was particularly gifted at writing melodies. He was very interested in the study and promotion of Gregorian chant from his earliest days as a musician in England and he co-founded the Gregorian Association of Canada. His melodies show the deep influence of the melodic contours of plainchant, along with its rhythmic flexibility. The article in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* describes it well: “His lifelong love of plainsong suggested a greater use of modality, while the sinuous melismas of chant found an echo in more subtle vocal lines. Equally, a preoccupation with Renaissance music drew from him a more contrapuntal style and a greater rhythmic freedom” (*New Grove*, v. 27, 401). Willan wrote many motets, like “Rise up, my love,” as well as Masses for the choir and many *fauxbourdons*, which are brief harmonic elaborations of the plainchants. He would often compose them for use the next Sunday; many of these have not been published or recorded. In some of the choral works (including most of the *fauxbourdons*) the voices would move together, in others they would move in imitation or in other contrapuntal rhythms.

Willan’s early education was as a chorister at the residential school at St. Savior’s parish in England. (*New Grove*, v. 27, 400) Though he was not a great singer, he had a feeling for how vocal parts worked most comfortably. His pieces are not always easy, but the contours of the lines do not fight with the natural tendencies of the voices. This is something that Willan’s music for St. Mary Magdalene shares with the music of the Renaissance, as contrasted with much of nineteenth

and twentieth century music that prefers harmonies and dissonances as more of a block effect with the melody in only a single voice. Thus, his Gallery Choir could regularly perform sophisticated music without hiring virtuoso voices, or straining with harsh musical effects. Whether the voices moved contrapuntally, with each voice entering at different times, or with them moving together, as in “Rise up, my love, my fair one,” every voice part has an independent melody that can stand on its own. Willan knew and wrote in many other styles, and certainly many twentieth century musical styles do not use several independent melodic voices.

Healey Willan met with Fr. Hiscocks in 1921 to consult about the musical and liturgical future of the parish of St. Mary Magdalene. He asked to come and participate in that development, not because of any agenda of professional advancement, but because it would be his own spiritual home. That spirituality was one of prayer through singing God’s praises in the beauty of holiness. The structure of the liturgy encouraged meditation, through listening and through singing. The scriptures, especially the psalms, were integrated into that structure. Willan had the opportunity to set many of these scriptures to music and to conduct and perform in this modest and humble church, his spiritual home.

Many of us who have sung in the ATLA Singers over the past twenty or nearly thirty years can appreciate the spiritual benefit of singing several melodies together in one voice. We appreciate Seth’s appropriation of Healey Willan’s musical values: clear lines, with no wobble to the voices, simplicity of sonority, and love of melody, particularly those of Gregorian chant. In fact, I recall that Seth composed *fauxbourdons* for psalms sung by the ATLA Singers, just as Healey Willan did. While the ATLA Singers seldom have enough time to prepare pieces as difficult as Willan’s, his influence shines through.

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EXCEEDING GREAT AND PRECIOUS PROMISES

“How firm a foundation”

BY ANDREW J. KECK

How firm a Foundation, ye Saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your Faith in his excellent Word;
What more can he say than to you he hath said?
You, who unto Jesus for Refuge have fled.

In every condition, in sickness, in health,
In poverty's vale, or abounding in wealth;
At home and abroad, on the land, on the sea,
As thy days may demand, shall thy strength ever be.

Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismay'd,
I, I am thy God, and will still give thee Aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by my righteous omnipotent Hand.

When thro' the deep Waters I call thee to go,
The Rivers of Woe shall not thee overflow;
For I will be with thee, thy Troubles to bless,
And sanctify to thee, thy deepest Distress.

When thro' fiery Trials thy Pathway shall lie,
My Grace all sufficient shall be thy Supply;
The Flame shall not hurt thee, I only design
Thy Dross to consume, and thy Gold to refine.

Even down to old age, all my people shall prove
My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love;
And when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn,
Like lambs they shall still in my bosom be borne.

The Soul that on Jesus hath lean'd for Repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his Foes;
That Soul, tho' all Hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never—no never—no never forsake.



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NEVER ENOUGH SINGING: ESSAYS IN HONOR OF SETH KASTEN

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this hymn and talking about the power of the hymn in her own life.

The first stanza, from which the hymn takes its title, uses some of the language about foundation articulated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:11, “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (KJV). Paul is not the first to use the analogy of a firm foundation as this also appears in the prophets (Is. 28:16) as well as within the sayings of Jesus in the Gospels (Luke 6:48). The use of “you” and “your” makes this hymn personal from the outset. This is not about some anonymous Kingdom of God or Communion of Saints—this is about *your* faith, what Jesus has told *you* through his word, and *you* who has fled to Jesus.

The second stanza (the one commonly used as the second stanza) shifts the tone even further as the “you” identified in the first stanza enters into a conversation with the Lord—a conversation that continues through the end of the hymn. The stanza starts with a command, “Fear not,” and closely follows the text of Isaiah 41:10, “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (KJV). This particular section of Isaiah is an assurance to Israel of God’s protection and help. Within the hymn, God’s protection becomes universal, extending well beyond any political and physical protection.

The third and fourth stanzas break down Isaiah 43:2 into the two central images: water and fire. “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee” (KJV). The water and fire metaphor is also an allusion to baptism in the Christian tradition (see Matt. 3:11 and Luke 3:16). The stanzas together become a call to baptism of repentance (water) and purification (fire). Simultaneously, the stanzas also allude to the current troubles and trials of the believer with an assurance of the Lord’s presence

“I will be with thee”) and activity (“My Grace all sufficient”). The troubles and trials are not designed to hurt or destroy but rather to “sanctify” and “refine.”

The last stanza is the most powerful of these stanzas, and indeed, much of hymnody. The repetition of words in this stanza has a powerful effect and affect. “The soul that on Jesus hath leand’ for repose, *I will not, I will not* desert to his Foes.” In the original and in most modern hymnals, the repeated phrase is italicized for additional emphasis. The assurance of God’s presence is a major Biblical theme that weaves throughout the text of this hymn. God emphatically asserts that he will not desert those who, to use a phrase from another hymn, are “leaning on Jesus.” Although this alone could be the high point of the text, the hymn is not over yet. To further emphasize the point in strong and colorful language, the lyricist conjures up images of hell and evil trying to take down the poor sinner’s soul. This is the final battle for the soul and the Lord’s message is simple and triply repeated with the added emphasis of the melodic rhythm. “That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake, *I’ll never, no never, no never* forsake.”

“How firm a foundation” is a powerful hymn that deserves a regular place among congregational hymnody. The lyrics, infused with Biblical texts and images, are well-matched with a musical setting that contributes to the power of the words. The last verse is particularly strong in merging the forceful rhythm and melodic line with the emphatic and repeated texts. The message of the hymn as a whole emphasizes the unchanging presence of God in the life of the believer, despite any and all indications to the contrary. “How firm a foundation” illustrates this message through its combination of vivid imagery and conversational intimacy to create one of my favorite hymns.

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ESSAY

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SEEKING AFTER GOD

“Be Thou my vision”



BY ELIZABETH A. LEAHY

I have long been drawn to the hymn “Be Thou my vision,” perhaps because it is rooted in the Irish culture in which I was raised, perhaps for the lovely melody, but I think particularly because it serves as a meaningful reminder of the desire of our hearts to follow after God entirely.

I have delighted in discovering the rich history of this hymn. Some believe that this was penned in the sixth century by St. Dallán Forgaill (530-598) who served as Ireland’s chief poet and who was also a leading scholar of Latin. The name Dallán apparently is a nickname for “little blind one,” and he is said to have gone blind due to his love of reading. Dallán is particularly remembered for his *Amra Choluimb Chille* written in 580, which is an elegy of St. Columba, an early missionary to Ireland, the founder of many monasteries, and a close friend. Dallán lived in an island monastery at Inniskeel in County Donegal, and it was there he met an untimely end when pirates broke into the monastery in 598 and beheaded him. It is believed that God reattached his head to his body after his martyrdom. In the eleventh century he was declared a saint, and his feast day is January 29 (MacKillop, 128).

But this is not the only theory as to the origin of this lovely hymn. Some scholars believe it was written much later, approximately in the tenth or eleventh centuries, and that the authorship remains unknown (Hamrick). Gerard Murphy, the late Professor of the History of Celtic Literature at University College, Dublin, cited this as part of a corpus of monastic poems and similarly thought that it was likely written in the tenth or eleventh centuries. He noted that the monastic poems have largely survived intact through the

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centuries because they were included in monastic *scriptoria* and preserved (Murphy, xvi-xvii, 42-45).

What we do know is that *Rop tú mo baile* was discovered in a manuscript collection at the Royal Irish Academy by young Irish linguistic scholar Mary Elizabeth Byrne (Byrne, 89-91). She prepared her translation from manuscripts that contained this poem and date to the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, and translated the text from Old Irish. It was published in *Ériu*, an Irish literary journal in 1905, as “A Prayer” (Byrne). In addition to her translation of this prayer, Byrne is remembered for her contributions to the *Dictionary of the Irish Language* published by the Royal Academy of Ireland (Hamrick).

Eleanor M. Hull, also a prominent Gaelic scholar and the founder of the Irish Text Society, then published this in verse in her *Poem Book of the Gael* in 1912. Hull condensed several passages and brought the text from sixteen to twelve stanzas. It was published as a hymn in the *Irish Church Hymnal* (Anglican Communion) in 1919, added by hymnal editor Leopold Dix and set to the Irish folk tune SLANE (Hamrick). The tune was named for the Hill of Slane that St. Patrick is said to have lit a fire upon for a Paschal service in 433 in defiance of an edict by pagan King Laoghaire (who had a fire lit at the Hill of Tara for a celebration, about ten miles away). Slane is at a high elevation and the fire was seen for a great distance. The fire lit by Patrick incensed King Laoghaire but he respected Patrick and allowed him to travel throughout Ireland. One of King Laoghaire’s followers, Erc, left to follow Patrick and was baptized and later consecrated as bishop. The monastery at Slane is attributed to St. Erc, and today there is still a parish church at Slane, although the original buildings of the monastery perished with a Norman invasion in 1175 (Slane Parish).

BE THOU MY VISION

What does it mean for God to be our vision? The Scriptures show that the term is commonly used for seeing with the

eyes, as we might expect, but it has extended and metaphorical meanings as well. A study of the Hebrew רָאָה (vision) includes a variety of possible usages including having cause to know, a revealing of oneself, to become aware of, and to look after. The Book of Exodus reflects God's allowing Himself to be seen by His appearing to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In Moses' life it shows the great care of God, allowing Moses the opportunity to hear God's voice but providing cover for him in the cleft of a rock to protect him as His glory passes by (Ex. 33: 19-23) (Naudé, 1007-1015).

Psalm 42:2 speaks of the psalmist's longing for God—

“My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?”

The idea of “beholding” or “seeing” the face of God expresses the desire for deep relationship, and I believe this might be especially a part of the intent of this hymn. Be in relationship with *me*, Lord. Be in my thoughts through daytime and night. Be intimately present in my life and cause me to be aware of your presence. I want my focus to be placed on you. Seth, may God continue to be this intimate presence in your life and cause you to seek after God, as your vision, no matter where your journeys may now lead.

BE THOU MY WISDOM

As the hymnwriter desires the intimacy of relationship with God, he also writes of his prayer that God be his wisdom. He could have sought many things, but he asks for God's leading and direction, God's wisdom and knowledge. This recalls King Solomon's prayer at the tent of meeting, where he asks God for the wisdom and knowledge to lead his people (2 Chronicles 1). Solomon is blessed by God because he sought God first and requested wisdom to both follow God more closely and to lead his people more effectively—wisdom based in the already established relationship. God blesses Solomon with his request and much more.

The literature of academe is replete with writings that reflect *knowledge* of many disciplines. On occasion it may be confused with the term *wisdom*—in that a scholar might be “wise” due to years of study. Lord Tennyson, in his *In Memoriam*, writes of knowledge and wisdom as such: “For she (knowledge) is earthly of the mind, But Wisdom heavenly of the soul” (Tennyson, 487). The hymnwriter’s request for wisdom seeks something outside of us, for it recognizes what we lack and what only God can give. The hymn connects this with an indwelling of God—seeing wisdom and God’s presence as being intimately linked. And it sees it for the great blessing it is. Seth, may your love for learning and academic strengths continue to bless students, colleagues, and friends alike; but most of all, may you be blessed with a desire for the wisdom that God gives.

BE THOU MY BATTLE SHIELD

This stanza allows us to reflect upon the time the text was likely written—with conquering tribes plundering lands and killing those in their way, and a monk in a monastery surrounded by the sea. Some literary scholars think that an understanding of “battle shield” should consider the hymn St. Patrick composed, which is known alternately as “St. Patrick’s Breastplate” or “The Deer’s Cry” (Kelleher, 16). Reportedly the hymn was written and sung or chanted by Patrick on his journey to Tara as a prayer for protection. Those lying in wait for him on the journey were deceived into believing that a herd of deer was passing by, and Patrick and his companions were allowed to travel in safety (Greene, 6-7).

But as I pray that God will be strength for you, I also resonate with the latter part of this stanza—“Thou my soul’s shelter.” The hymn does not mention a roof for our head but a shelter for our soul. A place where we might be protected from fear. A place where we will know and see the strength of God. A place close to God’s heart. And in finding this place, we will see it as delight. Seth, may you be blessed with this sheltering place, a true dwelling place with God.

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THOU MINE INHERITANCE, NOW AND ALWAYS

The hymnwriter speaks of the treasures of this world—the gifts we might receive of wealth and property, of praise and honor before peers, and writes of them in comparison to the treasure of his relationship with God, and in this comparison they fall short. “First in my heart” is the relationship that he has with God, and it is the priority he expressly desires. This is a difficult thing, no matter our desire. It is far too easy to become caught up with nearly everything else, whether we think of material blessings or relationships with the people God surrounds us and blesses us with. The stanza stresses the focus on the relationship the writer has with God, the sense of majesty and awe in recognizing God upon the throne of Heaven, and that this, then, is the true treasure of his life.

Seth—you have blessed all of us in ATLA with your ministry of music... whether we were singers or listeners, you brought us together in worship. When I think on this favorite hymn, I expect that you will come to mind and I will remember your wonderful gifts to us. May our Lord God lead you in peace and protect you along the way. May God send gifts of mercy and blessings and kindness wherever you may go.

Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art.
Thou my best Thought, by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Be Thou my Wisdom, and Thou my true Word;
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father, I Thy true son;
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.

Be Thou my battle Shield, Sword for the fight;
Be Thou my Dignity, Thou my Delight;
Thou my soul's Shelter, Thou my high Tower:
Raise Thou me heavenward, O Power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,
Thou mine Inheritance, now and always:

Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,
High King of Heaven, my Treasure Thou art.

High King of Heaven, my victory won,
May I reach Heaven's joys, O bright Heaven's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.

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ESSAYS
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CHRISTIAN FAITH AS A WRESTLING MATCH

“Come, O thou traveler unknown”

BY ROGER LOYD

In the judgment of many, this is Charles Wesley’s greatest hymn text. I certainly agree; it has been a personal favorite since my teenage years because it powerfully describes the encounter with God as being like a wrestling match. In days when spirituality seems to me sometimes altogether too tame, this hymn depicts the time one spends with God in much more interesting terms.

The title “Wrestling Jacob” was given to the hymn for its first publication in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1742), edited by John Wesley. Of it, the superb hymn composer Isaac Watts said that “Wrestling Jacob” was worth all the verses that he himself had written (Baker, Young). The hymn is based on Genesis 32:22-32, in which Jacob wrestles with God all night. In Charles Wesley’s interpretation, based on the biblical commentary of Matthew Henry, the angel comes to represent Jesus Christ. Here, we find Charles Wesley’s characteristic identification of Jesus with Love, in the final sung stanza:

‘Tis Love! ‘tis Love! Thou diedst for me,
I hear thy whisper in my heart.
The morning breaks, the shadows flee,
Pure, Universal Love thou art.
To me, to all, thy mercies move;
Thy nature and thy name is Love.

The first three stanzas are as follows:

Come, O thou Traveler unknown,
Whom still I hold, but cannot see!
My company before is gone,
And I am left alone with thee.
With thee all night I mean to stay,



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And wrestle till the break of day.

I need not tell thee who I am,
My misery and sin declare;
Thyself hast called me by my name,
Look on thy hands and read it there.
But who, I ask thee, who art thou?
Tell me thy name, and tell me now.

Yield to me now, for I am weak,
But confident in self-despair!
Speak to my heart, in blessing speak,
Be conquered by my instant prayer.
Speak, or thou never hence shalt move,
And tell me if thy name is Love.

(*The United Methodist Hymnal* (1989), hymn 386. Hymn 387 prints all fourteen stanzas, without music.)

John Wesley taught this hymn to a Methodist gathering at Bolton in 1788, just two weeks after his brother Charles' death in March. When he reached the line, "My company before is gone, and I am left alone with thee," he broke down in grief (Baker, Footnote).

The hymn is currently sung to the tune CANDLER, named in honor of Bishop Warren A. Candler, who suggested that the tune be matched with Wesley's words for the 1935 *Methodist Hymnal* (Baker). The original name of the hymn tune was YE BANKS AND BRAES O' BONNIE DOON, the first line of a Robert Burns poem. Young further cites information supplied by Richard L. Burns, who cites the *Scots Musical Museum* about the curious origin of the tune:

A good many years ago, Mr. James Miller, writer in your good town ... was in company with our friend Clarke; and talking of Scottish music, Miller expressed an ardent ambition to be able to compose a Scots air. Mr. Clarke, partly by way of joke, told him to keep to the black keys ... and he would infallibly compose a Scots air ... In a few days, Mr.

Miller produced the rudiments of an air, which Mr. Clarke, with some touches and corrections, fashioned into the tune in question. (Young)

The finest historian of the Wesleys of the twentieth century, Frank Baker, speaks further about the rhyming scheme of this and other Wesley hymns:

The most prolific of all was his favorite scheme of six eights—8.8.8.8.8.8, rhyming ABABCC. In this metre he composed over eleven hundred poems, a total of nearly twenty-three thousand lines, most of them with a vigour, a flexibility, yet a disciplined compactness, that proved this to be the instrument fittest for his hand. This, the metre of ‘Wrestling Jacob,’ represents over one-tenth of his total output. (Baker, *Charles Wesley’s Verse*, 70)

Another way to view the text of the hymn is the wrestling between brothers John and Charles Wesley over the Methodist movement, with John Wesley’s increasing separation from the Church of England against his brother Charles’ advice, though that was not Charles Wesley’s intent in composing the hymn.

Thomas Langford summed up Charles Wesley’s contribution in this way:

In Charles Wesley’s hymns—both the hymn form, which requires participation, and the hymn context, namely worship—theology is given its proper instrumental role. In this sense Charles Wesley’s theology is a most appropriate medium for Methodist theology. (Langford, 105)

As a long-time member of the ATLA choir, I offer this hymn interpretation in grateful thanks for the work that Seth Kasten has done in forming and leading the group through the years, with the love of one who wrestles with the music, with the choir, and with the event of worship, to the good of all.



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KEEPING HIS OS

The great O antiphons

BY V. K. MCCARTY

O Wisdom, which camest out of the mouth of the most High, and reachest from one end to the other, mightily, and sweetly ordering all things: Come and teach us the way of prudence.

Amid the chaos of holiday shopping and traffic in New York, some folk are gathering in a candlelit church the eight nights before Christmas for a quiet Vesper service of psalm-singing, Bible readings, traditional canticles, and sweet incense. In order to make it appropriate for the day, a proper antiphon is chanted before and after the principle canticle, the Magnificat. For each of these special Advent evenings, the antiphon describes images of the longed-for Messiah from Old Testament prophecy, written long before people realized the awaited Savior would be born as a helpless infant cradled in a manger. Because each one begins with the exclamation “O” spelled in the old-fashioned poetry way, they have come to be known as the Great O Antiphons.

Today, as in Medieval times, it is a special practice of devotion to attend all the “Great Os” in order to offer individual prayer intentions for the coming of the Christ Child, so my fellow worshippers and I find ourselves surrounded by familiar faces in the candlelight as we process over to the crèche, which fills a side chapel for the closing prayers of the service. The Holy Family has not yet arrived, nor has the flying archangel come to rest over the scene, but the animals are quietly assembled at the manger. As we gather to “keep our Os,” each evening draws us closer to Christmas. Seth Kasten is one of those known for keeping his Os.



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The Great O Antiphons have been regarded as one of “the most beautiful and impressive elements of the Christian liturgy” (Cabaniss, Note, 440) and called the “Heralds of Christmas” by none other than John Henry Newman (Thurston, 618). It has even been suggested that their popularity might account for the prevalence of “O” in many a Christmas carol (Cabaniss, Jewish, 39). Each one is sung to the same haunting tune which winds mysteriously upward in the voice; each greets the coming Messiah and ends with a petition of hope. With a hymnal at home, anyone can join in with countless families and follow along with these beautiful prayers in the stanzas of the popular hymn derived from them, “O come, O come, Emmanuel.” We ask God to come among us as wisdom and make us prudent; as Adonai the Lord to save us and deliver us, as the Root of Jesse to redeem us in love, as the Key of David to bring freedom, as the Day-spring from on high to shed light on our lives, as the King of Nations to bring peace, and as Emmanuel to bring hope and salvation. The final antiphon, addressed to Mary, is an acknowledgment that “the mystery of the Incarnation will always be just that—a mystery” (Winifred, 3).

The antiphon texts reflect an ancient, anonymous author well-steeped in the rich tapestry of Old Testament prophecy and wisdom literature. Each one searches out facets of Israel’s prophecies which find their completion in the life of Christ (West, 122). The first antiphon, for example, derives its text from the scriptural threads of Proverbs 2:6 and Wisdom 8:10.

O Adonai, and leader of the house of Israel, who appearest in the bush to Moses in a flame of fire, and gavest him the law of Sinai: Come and deliver us with an outstretched arm.

Here, we remember the mighty acts of God by which he revealed himself to Moses in the fire of the burning bush (Ex. 3-4) and we enter into them afresh as we sing. Early Church scholarship teaches that the back-and-forth style of antiphonal singing used in these services may have been inspired by Bishop Ignatius in the first century when he saw in a dream “a

vision of angels hymning in alternate chants” (Socrates Scholasticus, 144) and introduced it into his churches in Antioch. From there the tradition was said to have spread to the rest of the Church. In the parish church which honors him in New York City, St. Ignatius stands leaning on his serpent-topped physician’s staff as a doctor of the church, but the places of honor are given to Christ and his mother Mary. The call and response of our chanting praises them as we stand before them; it has been a personal pleasure to have served as precentor for many of the Advent Vesper services the first dozen years they were offered at St. Ignatius. It will probably be no surprise to anyone who worked with Seth over the years, and appreciates his diligence when he is interested in something, that at our church Seth’s enthusiasm and persistence helped keep alive our observance of the Great O Antiphon vesper services in the years after the rector at that time had retired.

O Root of Jesse, which standest for an ensign of the people, at whom kings shall shut their mouths, to whom the Gentiles shall seek: Come and deliver us, and tarry not.

The image of the Root of Jesse appears in Isaiah 11:1-10, and the idea of the silencing of kings in Isaiah 52:15. Matthew’s gospel interprets the birth of Jesus as fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah with genealogical links connecting him to King David through the root of Jesse, his father.

O Key of David, and Scepter of the house of Israel; that openest and no man shutteth, and shuttest and no man openeth: Come and bring the prisoner out of the prison-house, and him that sitteth in darkness, and the shadow of death.

This antiphon presents a nuanced embroidery of biblical verses: the Key of David which assigns the coming Messiah the power to open and shut is prophesied in Isaiah 22:22; the scepter rising out of Israel appears in Balaam the seer’s oracle in Numbers 24:17. The healing ability to open the eyes of the blind and free the prisoner derives from the First Servant Song in Isaiah 42:7, knitted together with threads of Psalm 142:9 and Psalm 107:10. Nevertheless, as Canon West

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from the Cathedral of St. John the Divine has observed in his meditations on the Great O Antiphons, “It is love himself who is the Key of David, and it is he alone who is the real deliverer” (West, 95). The date and authorship of the Great O Antiphons is still under debate. An early witness, the ninth century liturgical scholar Amalarius of Metz, added the last antiphon, which honors the Virgin Mary. This version is present in the Sarum breviary, among others. Furthermore, elaborate paraphrasing of the Great O Antiphons is present in the poem known as “Christ” written before 800 by the Anglo-Saxon poet, Cynewulf (Thurston, 618-631). An even earlier date has been suggested by certain lines in *The Consolation of Philosophy* which indicate that the sixth-century Christian philosopher Boethius was probably familiar with them (Cabaniss, Note, 440-442).

In the web of interlocking traditions and symbols so prevalent in the Church, each of the antiphons also illustrates, in order, the gifts of the Holy Spirit which are honored by seven lamps hanging high above the altar rail: O Wisdom (the spirit of wisdom), O Adonai (the spirit of understanding), O Root of Jesse (the spirit of counsel), O Key of David (spiritual strength), O Day-spring (the gift of knowledge), O King of the Nations (true godliness), O Emmanuel (holy fear). From the original seven listed in their Latin form, as they mark the days in some church calendars (*O Sapientia, O Adonai, O Radix Jesse, O Clavis David, O Oriens, O Rex Gentium, O Emmanuel*), some have also noted that, “If we look at the initial letters which follow the O and read them upwards we obtain the words *ERO CRAS*, which can be translated: ‘I shall be (with you) to-morrow’” (Thurston, 622). Whether or not this acrostic is intentional, it adds a mystical dimension to the interpretation of the Great O Antiphons: the Messiah promises that he will be with us tomorrow.

O Day-spring, Brightness of Light everlasting and Sun of Righteousness: Come and enlighten him that sitteth in darkness, and the shadow of death.

Here, the Light of God that led the Israelites and blinded Paul with new faith is recalled. The rising sun of righteousness with healing in his wings is promised by the Prophet Malachi (4:2-4); the brightness of light everlasting is an attribute of Wisdom (7:26). The enlightening petition comes from the Benedictus canticle describing God's mercy (Lk. 1:78-79).

O King of the Nations, and their desire, the Cornerstone, who makest both one: Come and save mankind, whom thou formest of clay.

A foundation of strong assurance is laid down in this text, combining the King of the Nations (Jer. 10:7) who is the cornerstone (Is. 28:16). Each year the Great Os fall in sequence starting on different days of the week, but at some point one of them is observed on Saturday as the church is being prepared for Sunday services; then one is offered on Advent IV Sunday and often includes the festive greening of the church for Christmas. Wooden posts are assembled on the ends of the pews to hold candles overhead and are dressed with fragrant evergreens and ribbons. Perhaps some of the crèche figures now appear, although the Baby Jesus will arrive at the beginning of Midnight Mass. So, a subtle excitement ensues with these last few Vesper services, when Christmas is so near.

O Emmanuel, our King and Lawgiver, the Desire of all the Nations, and their Salvation: Come and save us, O Lord our God.

The promise of a sign from the Lord, one named Emmanuel—God-with-us—is pronounced in Isaiah 7:14, and echoed again in Isaiah 33:22 and touched upon in Haggai 2:7. Although in the context of Isaiah it foretells sobering historical events, from time immemorial it has been interpreted as a sign of the long-expected Messiah.

O Virgin of Virgins, how shall this be? For neither before thee was any like thee, nor shall be after. Daughter of Jerusalem, why marvel ye at me? The thing which ye behold, is a divine mystery.

The message of the final antiphon is proclaimed in Zechariah 9:9. Reflecting on the Christ Child born to Mary heralded in the Great O Antiphons, Canon West has observed, “This isn’t God being winsome; rather, it is our humanity starting on its journey to its ultimate goal, the fullness of the stature of God himself” (West, 69). Particularly in the busy lives that the complexities of our modern Advent create, “keeping the Os” is still a valuable practice which prepares our hearts for the coming of Jesus.

(Translations of the O Antiphons are from the usage of the Episcopal Church of St. Ignatius of Antioch in the City of New York, derived from *The Order of Vespers Throughout the Year: From the Salisbury Use* / Translated into English & Adapted to the Original Musick-Note by G. H. Palmer (Wantage: St. Mary’s Press, 1968).

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OUTPASSING THE POWER OF HUMAN TELLING

“Come down, O love divine”



Melody Layton McMahon is Director of Library Services at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. She began singing with the ATLA Singers in 1999.

BY MELODY LAYTON MCMAHON

Come down, O love divine,
Seek thou this soul of mine,
And visit it with thine own ardor glowing;
O Comforter, draw near,
Within my heart appear,
And kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.

O let it freely burn,
Till earthly passions turn
To dust and ashes in its heat consuming;
And let thy glorious light
Shine ever on my sight,
And clothe me round, the while my path illuming.

And so the yearning strong,
With which the soul will long,
Shall far outpass the power of human telling;
For none can guess its grace,
Till he become the place
Wherein the Holy Spirit makes his dwelling.

I am not alone in my love for this hymn—while researching this hymn, I found that of the twenty hymns that Anglicans would take to a remote island with them, “Come down, O love divine” ranked fourth. (Interestingly, the first and third hymns were the Irish hymns, “St. Patrick’s breastplate” and “Be Thou my vision” with its tune SLANE.) This hymn was not a part of my evangelical youth; the first time I heard it was in the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine in New York City, appropriately during the time I was preparing for confirmation. In addition to finding the imagery captivating and inspiring, I became curious

to learn how obscure fourteenth century verse became such a well-loved hymn. The historical accidents that must have happened to bring Bianco and Vaughan Williams together seem fascinating.

“Come down, O love divine” (*Discendi, amor santo*) was one of almost a hundred hymns of the type known as *laudi spirituali* written in Italian by Bianco da Siena, a Tuscan wool worker living in Siena in the fourteenth century. Outside the control of the Roman Catholic church, fringe groups were formed, often by dissenters, to develop this kind of popular vernacular devotional singing in Italy (Routley, 20). By 1367, Bianco had become a Gesuati (not to be confused with the Jesuits, the Gesuati were a group of laity who followed the Augustinian Rule) and lived in the order’s monastery in Città di Castello, later moving to Venice (Kleinheinz). Interestingly for theological librarians, the Gesuati were initially called *Clerici apostolici Sancti Hieronymi* (Apostolic Clerics of Saint Jerome) because of a special veneration for the patron saint of librarians. Many of Bianco’s *laude* play on the words “light” and “fire,” standing in the long line of Christian mystical poetry that uses erotic images to represent union with God. However, these poems were mostly unknown until published in Italy in 1851.

In the 1870s an Anglican priest and liturgical scholar, Richard F. Littledale, found and translated a number of these *laude*. Littledale was educated at Trinity College, Dublin, then went on to an illustrious career at Oxford, where he possibly discovered the recently published volume of Bianco da Siena’s *laude*. He translated and published four of them in *A People’s Hymnal*. Falling ill, he had to give up parish work and spent the rest of his life publishing in the fields of theology, liturgy, and hymnology. In addition to the hymnals he compiled, he contributed his own hymns, and those he translated from Danish, Swedish, Greek, Latin, Syriac, German, and Italian, to many other hymnals. Littledale became an acquaintance of several of the Pre-Raphaelites and was convinced that the Middle Ages had been the golden era of Christianity, which

must have made hymns like Bianco's *laude* particularly appealing. His *People's Hymnal* had a goal of providing a "volume of devotional song successfully blending the stern simplicity and clear doctrinal teaching of ancient hymns with the more emotional and personal type which later ages have produced" (Littledale, Preface). Of the *laude* he translated, only "Come down, O love divine" has achieved any common usage.

Sir William H. Harris, an organist who studied at the Royal College of Music (organ under Walter Parrott, and composition with Stanford and Woods) and became organist at St. George's, Windsor, wrote the tune that was published in the 1930 edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (it appears that it has never been used in any other hymnals). Harris also arranged NORTH PETHERTON, the hymn tune for a four part choir (SATB) with an organ accompaniment. A couple of modern hymn tunes have also been written for this text including Malcolm Williamson's "Whitsun processional" (with words) from his *Sixteen Hymns and Processionals* (1975) and a 1994 hymn published in *Songs for the People of God* with the tune LOVE DIVINE by Keith Landis. Numerous anthems have been composed on the hymn, as well.

The tune most often associated with the hymn is DOWN AMPNEY by Ralph Vaughan Williams. DOWN AMPNEY is one of the very much loved tunes (quite in the style of Anglican Church tunes of the past) written by Vaughan Williams for the *English Hymnal*. He completed editing the hymnal in 1906 with the aid of the Rev. Percy Dearmer. Vaughan Williams arranged many tunes and wrote several original ones, including SINE NOMINE, the tune for "For all the saints," and DOWN AMPNEY. Vaughan Williams named the tune for Down Ampney, a village near Cirencester where he was born and had lived with his cleric father and family.

The hymn begins with the plea for God as love to come to our soul and bring his light and fire to illumine and warm us. Because of its fiery imagery and its call upon the Comforter, another name for the Spirit, this hymn is often used for Pen-

tecost (tongues of fire were seen above the heads of those gathered in Acts 2:2-3) or other services where the Spirit is invoked.

In the second stanza, we ask for two more uses of fire—for the purifying, burning aspect to rid of us earthly desires, and for fire’s illumining power to guide us and lead us on the path of righteousness. Who has not sat by a warm, cheerful fire, or used a burning lamp for illumination and not felt the yearning for these at a time when the world felt cold? The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, in the guise of fire will be this help in time of need.

The third stanza presents the speaker as being restless for the pursuit of the Holy Spirit, to fill that longing that he now knows can be filled by this comfort of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives us words and breathes life into them so that we can tell of its existence. For many people, this music-making with the Spirit can also “outpass the power of human telling” and help to overcome all kinds of emotional, memory, and neurological disorders (Wong). (Some inclusive language advocates have changed the lines “For none can guess its grace, Till he become the place wherein the Holy Spirit makes his dwelling” to “For none can guess its grace, till Love create a place wherein the Holy Spirit makes a dwelling.” I do not find this convincing. I am the one who has to become the place, to make the place, for the Holy Spirit—I cannot have it made for me!)

Hymns (evangelical, pentecostal, Anglican, and Roman Catholic) have played an enormous part in my life, bringing me back to God after a period of disbelief. They allow me to express different aspects of my beliefs in a way that “far outpasses the power of human telling.” When my children were young, I did not read to them—I sang to them. Hymns from all periods of my life were staples of this nightly ritual, and “Come down, O love divine” was a nightly favorite. Singing it over and over helps me to make the place where the incendiary love of the Spirit can start to burn.

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SACRED POETRY FROM A CHASTENED LIB- ERAL

“Hope of the world”

BY KIRK MOLL

It is my privilege to contribute to this *festschrift* in honor of Seth Kasten. For many people, Seth’s name is inextricably linked with Union Theological Seminary in New York—and, of course, not without good reason. From his days as a student in the School of Sacred Music to the conclusion of his long career in the library, Seth has been at Union. For me, Union represents an extraordinary place for people to grow as human beings, whether as students, scholars, ministers, activists, believers, or any combination of these. During my time with Seth in the library at Union (and beyond), he has guided me to appreciate the marvelous richness of Union as a kind of scholarly laboratory for exploring the interaction between faith and the world. In the world of hymns, for me, no example represents this sacred interaction better than “Hope of the world,” the hymn text written by Georgia Harkness for the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Evanston, Illinois in 1954.

Georgia Harkness was born into a pious Methodist family in 1891, raised in rural New York, and won a state scholarship to attend Cornell University (Doenecke, 792). After several years teaching languages in a high school, she continued her own education, earning a doctorate from Boston University where she studied philosophy with Edgar Brightman. Following her early career teaching in liberal arts colleges (1922-1939), she became the first woman to hold a position as a full-time seminary professor in the United States, serving as professor of applied theology, first at Garrett Biblical Institute (1939-1950) and



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then at the Pacific School of Religion (1950-1961).

Harkness was a leading Methodist writer and scholar for some fifty years, from the 1920s to the 1970s, penning over thirty books. Her writing covers a vast range of topics. It includes theological and historical works such as *John Calvin: The Man and His Ethics* (1931) to *Understanding the Kingdom of God* (1974); many books on social issues, such as *Immigrant and the Church* (1921) and *The Methodist Church in Social Thought and Action* (1964); and others on spirituality: from *Religious Living* (1937) to *Prayer and the Common Life* (1948). Although many of her writings were intended to address her fellow theological writers, “she was also concerned to write on Christian Faith in a manner accessible to the educated laity” (Ruether, 29). Harkness herself expressed dismay that there were so few scholarly books written for the laity. In works such as *Toward Understanding the Bible* (1954) and *Foundations of Christian Knowledge* (1955), she gave lay readers substantive works that “did not flinch in presenting the most difficult truths that constitute the faith” (Keller, 270). She “sought to make sense of liberal theology for ordinary people” (Dorrien, 387).

Although some views that Harkness held would not be considered feminist today, she was an early and tireless advocate for the full ordination of women in the Methodist Church. This work culminated in the 1956 decision at General Conference to grant “full clergy rights and Conference membership for women” (Keller, 279). She was often “the first woman” or the “only woman” among groups of male leaders in theological seminary faculties, academic societies, and ecumenical commissions.

Ecumenism was a deep and life-long passion for Georgia Harkness. She had a broad and ecumenical perspective on human life that transcended gender, race, ethnicity, and often religious persuasion. She was also a devoted and stalwart spokeswoman for the cause of peace, maintaining a pacifist position throughout her long public career. As one exam-

ple, when the Dun Commission of the Federal Council of Churches was formed to consider the implications of the use of weapons of mass destruction in World War II, Harkness and Robert Calhoun of Yale were the lone voices categorically denouncing any Christian endorsement of the use of atomic weapons in a first strike (Keller).

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Harkness lived life at a frenetic pace, trying to find balance between teaching, lecturing, writing, and working for church and social causes. In the late 1930s, the death of her father and the advent of war in Europe sent Harkness into a deep spiral of physical illness and dark depression. She “survived this emotional trauma by leaning upon the gospel truths of spiritual death and new birth in Jesus Christ” finding “her calling for the days that remained to her: to explicate the essential meaning of gospel-centered liberal Christianity, which for her always included the causes of peace, women’s rights, and racial justice” (Dorrien, 410).

Harkness became what she called a “chastened liberal.” “Liberalism needed to see in the Bible something more than a collection of moral adages and a compendium of great literature. It needed to see in Christ something more than a great figure living sacrificially and dying for his convictions. It needed to be recalled to the meaning of the cross and the power of the resurrection” (Harkness, 349).

The deep creative instincts that George Harkness expressed through her poetry form a final dimension to this “Renaissance woman” (Meeks, 312). Through the years, she published over thirty of her own poems in *The Christian Century*. Her poetry often demonstrated the inseparability, for her, of spirituality and social responsibility. This interconnection also carried into hymn writing, giving us one of the finest expressions of this spirit in “Hope of the world.”

“Hope of the world” was selected by the Hymn Society of America as the winner of its contest to select a new hymn for the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches,

held in Evanston, Illinois in 1954. In many ways the Evanston meeting embodied many of Harkness' central concerns. It represented a search for biblical foundations between the world's churches to be found in "Christ—the Hope of the World," the main theme of the assembly. Major statements of the assembly expressed the shared Christian responsibility to work towards international peace and justice, including the cause of racial equality.

So many hymns are dominated by individualism, other-worldliness, or a spirituality and concern that seem remote from the social and political contexts of life. This hymn text brings together a rich sense of corporate spirituality with a vivid picture of the real world social setting. Phrases such as "fearful hearts by conflict rent," "consuming passion," and "false hopes and aims are spent" graphically portray a world so terribly divided, misguided, and empty. The saving power of Christ is also vividly portrayed in this-worldly terms, such as "heal earth's wounds and end all bitter strife," and "save us from death and dark despair, from sin and guilt," and in terms that transcend this world, such as "bringing to hungry souls the bread of life," and "Christ o'er death victorious...we would be faithful to thy gospel glorious."

This hymn text, especially when set to *DONNE SECOURS*, a Genevan psalter melody, has a powerful, almost triumphal feel—yet without the militaristic overtones found in many hymns. "Harkness helps us sing this prayer with the certainty of Christ's Easter victory in our hearts" (Polman, 37).

This hymn is a marvelous combination of the affirmation of the highest ideals of the social gospel—"still let thy spirit unto us be given, to heal earth's wounds and end all bitter strife" and the saving power of Christ—"Hope of the world, who by thy cross didst save us." Indeed, Georgia Harkness' "mature theology of evangelical liberalism is nowhere more fully and succinctly expressed than in the words of this powerful and compassionate hymn" (Keller, 280).

Hope of the world, O Christ of great compassion:

Speak to our fearful hearts by conflict rent.
Save us, your people, from consuming passion,
who by our own false hopes and aims are spent.

Hope of the world, God's gift from highest heaven,
bringing to hungry souls the bread of life:
still let your Spirit unto us be given
to heal earth's wounds and end our bitter strife.

Hope of the world, afoot on dusty highways,
showing to wandering souls the path of light:
walk now beside us lest the tempting byways
lure us away from you to endless night.

Hope of the world, who by your cross did save us
from death and dark despair, from sin and guilt:
we render back the love your mercy gave us;
take now our lives and use them as you will.

Hope of the world, O Christ, o'er death victorious,
who by this sign did conquer grief and pain:
we would be faithful to your gospel glorious;
you are our Lord, and you forever reign!

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Hope of the World

1 Hope of the world, thou Christ of great com - pas - sion:
2 Hope of the world, God's gift from high - est heav - en,
3 Hope of the world, a - foot on dust - y high - ways,
4 Hope of the world, who by thy cross didst save us

Speak to our fear - ful hearts by con - flict rent.
Bring - ing to hun - gry souls the bread of life:
Show - ing to wan - d'ring souls the path of light:
From death and dark de - spair, from sin and guilt:

Save us, thy peo - ple, from con - sum - ing pas - sion,
Still let thy Spir - it un - to us be giv - en
Walk thou be - side us lest the tempt - ing by - ways
We ren - der back the love thy mer - cy gave us;

Who by our own false hopes and aims are spent.
To heal earth's wounds and end our bit - ter strife.
Lure us a - way from thee to end - less night.
Take thou our lives and use them as thou wilt.

5 Hope of the world, O Christ, o'er death victorious,
Who by this sign didst conquer grief and pain:
We would be faithful to thy Gospel glorious;
Thou art our Lord! Thou dost forever reign!

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SOARING GRANDEUR OF HOPE AND HEAVEN

“For all the saints”



James C. Pakala serves as Library Director at the Buswell Library of Covenant Theological Seminary in Saint Louis. Jim has sung off and on with the choir since its beginning.

BY JAMES C. PAKALA

For this brief essay, originally “Lo, how a rose e'er blooming” was my choice, but a less procrastinating colleague beat me to it. One reason for that first choice was sheer love for the 1609 tune by Praetorius and the fifteenth century lyrics, but another was the intriguing way the carol evolved with stanzas 1-2 translated in 1894 by one person, stanzas 3-4 in 1875 by another, and stanza 5 in 1914 by a third person, who possibly wrote that last stanza, or at least my hasty exploration left the matter ambiguous. Another aspect that intrigued me is the presence of all five stanzas in some hymnals, four in others, three in others, and two in still others. I found one example of each simply by quickly browsing my library's hymnal section. That browse also yielded the surprise that some major hymnals seem to lack the carol altogether.

“For all the saints” was my next choice, although “The God of Abram praise” came to mind because the honoree of this *festschrift*, Seth Kasten, is Jewish and the latter hymn's lyrics almost all suit the Jewish faith. Choice of a psalm perhaps would be even more appropriate, both for a Jewish resonance and the Presbyterian context in which I serve. Indeed, our friends the Reformed Presbyterians or “Covenanters” sing only the psalms. Seth, however, is both appreciative of fine Christian hymnody and highly informed musically, theologically, and historically. Indeed, there is no irony in the production of a *festschrift* like this for the gifted theological librarian, musician, and colleague we all know and love. His conducting of the ATLA choirs over many years has

inspired and blessed singers and hearers alike in the worship of God at many beautiful campus chapels, churches, ballrooms, and other venues during our annual conferences.

Why choose “For all the saints?” There are two tunes, and I confess that if SARUM, the tune by Joseph Barnby used since the 1860s, is all there was, I would not be completely enthralled by this hymn. I like that tune well enough, but deem it far inferior to the one composed in 1906 by Ralph Vaughan Williams. But a robust organ is necessary to do justice to the twentieth century tune, and a rapid—but not rushed—tempo is important. (I found an inspiring rendition at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0YLSZLDu-ok.>) Vaughan Williams called his tune SINE NOMINE, “without name,” in reference to its use for the Feast of All Saints, November 1 (or the first Sunday in November, All Saints’ Sunday in the Lutheran Church). Some deem it one of the twentieth century’s very finest hymn tunes.

Anglican Bishop William Walsham How wrote the lyrics of “For all the saints,” originally titling it “Saints’ Day Hymn—Cloud of Witnesses—Hebrews 12:1.” It was first printed in *Hymns for Saint’s Days, and Other Hymns*, by Earl Nelson in 1864. How was born in 1823 and educated at Oxford. He turned down offers of the Bishoprics of Manchester and then Durham, laboring many years in the rural parish of Whittington. In 1879 he moved to London and worked among the poor as a suffrage bishop. Refusing the perquisite of a private coach, he took public transportation. He had no problem with evolution but was a passionate soul-winner and evangelical hymnist. In 1897 he was asked to write the national hymn for the Empire’s observance of Victoria’s sixtieth year as queen. He died late that summer.

Only eight of How’s eleven stanzas seem to appear in hymnals and most have seven, six, five or even fewer. A rapid spot-check of library shelves turned up four in the 1964 Moravian hymnal: the original first, second, sixth, and eleventh stanzas. Those with fewer than eight do not all have the same stanzas,

nor necessarily the same order. Not a few hymnals have the original sixth and seventh stanzas as their fourth and third, respectively. The uniformly absent stanzas are the original third, fourth, and fifth which begin “For the Apostles....For the Evangelists....For Martyrs....” Wording also varies, such as “Far off we hear” for “Steals on the ear” in stanza eight, though most other differences are very minor, such as “fight” for “strife” also in stanza eight (which is stanza five in many hymnals, though in *Trinity Hymnal*, the eighth is missing and the fifth is the original tenth stanza). SINE NOMINE was written for eight stanzas, and unlike so many English hymn tunes, it is primarily unison (verses 1, 2, 3, 7, and 8) with organ accompaniment, but originally had three stanzas (4, 5, and 6) set in the traditional four-part sung harmony. The tune appears in this form in most English hymnbooks and in some American ones, such as the *African American Heritage Hymnal* (2001), the *Christian Reformed Psalter Hymnal* (1987), and the *Roman Catholic Worship* (3rd ed., 1986).

What about the meaning of this great hymn’s lyrics? Ultimately, at least to me, the words are more important than the tune despite the way that the musical composition can affect the meaning and singing of the words in profound ways. For many people, and certainly a worshiping congregation, these two components as well as their specific rendition and immediate context cannot be segregated. When my mother reached her late eighties but still came from Florida to visit us in Missouri, she said after a Christmas Eve service that she could catch very few of the words, but throughout each of the bell choir’s carols it did not matter too much, for she had the lyrics going through her mind and heart. Of course the Christmas aura of the sanctuary and the expectant feel among the clergy, choirs, and congregation also provided for her a memorable and deeply spiritual context. In it all, the words and music were intertwined, as the music was essential in bringing the words to mind. That lends much support to the importance of heritage and continuity. If we denigrate or even dispense with the music and words, replacing them

with ever new and changing content and carriers of that content, our loss is beyond belief, and countless minds and hearts will be bereft.

Watching President Gerald Ford's funeral at the National Cathedral in Washington was a particularly moving experience for me. The huge pipe organ, large congregation, excellent military choir, and the architecture and acoustics made the spirit soar with the music and lyrics of "For all the saints." Betty Ford and her family clearly were moved. Owing to Billy Graham's hospitalization, Episcopal priest and noted Senator John Danforth officiated and his sacred role was well complemented by that final hymn of the service.

"A librarian's work is never done," and that is certainly the case for theological librarians. As our friend, colleague, and ATLA choral conductor Seth Kasten retires, we wish him well as his work becomes more directed by his many musical, intellectual, and other interests rather than by the needs and interests of faculty, students, visiting scholars and others. He well deserves this "rest" and may he enjoy every minute of it!

Holy Days and Various Occasions



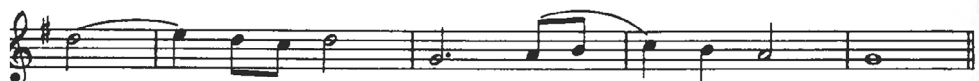
1 For all the saints, who from their la - bors rest, who
 2 Thou wast their rock, their for - tress, and their might: ___
 3 O may thy sol - diers, faith - ful, true, and bold, ___
 4 O blest com - mun - ion, fel - low - ship di - vine! ___



thee ___ by faith be - fore the world con - fessed, thy
 thou, Lord, their Cap - tain in the well - fought fight; ___
 fight as the saints who no - bly fought of old, and
 We feeb - ly strug - gle, they in glo - ry shine; yet



Name, O ___ Je - sus, be for ev - er blessed.
 thou, in the dark - ness drear, the one true Light.
 win, with ___ them, the vic - tor's crown of gold.
 all are ___ one in thee, for all are thine.



Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia!



*5 And when the strife is fierce, the war-fare long, steals on the ear the
 *6 The gold-en eve-ning bright-ens in the west; soon, soon to faith-ful





dis - tant tri - umph song, and hearts are — brave a - gain, and arms are
war - riors com - eth rest; — sweet is the calm of par - a - dise the



strong. Al - le - lu - ia. al - le - lu - ia!
blest.



* 7 But lo! there breaks a yet more glo - rious day; the
* 8 From earth's wide bounds, from o - cean's far - thest coast, through



saints tri - umph - ant rise in bright ar - ray; the
gates of pearl streams in the count - less host, —



King of — glo - ry pass - es on his way.
sing - ing to Fa - ther, Son, and Ho - ly Ghost,



Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia!

All Saints' Day (November 1).

Words: William Walsham How (1823-1897)

Music: *Sine Nomine*, Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

10 10 10 with Alleluias

WHEN I WAS SINKING DOWN

“What wondrous love is this”

BY DAVID R. STEWART



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at Bethel University,
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has been an occasional
ATLA chorister since
1998.*

What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul,
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul.

When I was sinking down, sinking down, sinking down,
When I was sinking down, sinking down,
When I was sinking down beneath God's righteous frown,
Christ laid aside His crown for my soul, for my soul,
Christ laid aside His crown for my soul.

To God and to the Lamb, I will sing, I will sing;
To God and to the Lamb, I will sing.
To God and to the Lamb Who is the great 'I Am';
While millions join the theme, I will sing, I will sing;
While millions join the theme, I will sing.

And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on;
And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on.
And when from death I'm free, I'll sing and joyful be;
And through eternity, I'll sing on, I'll sing on;
And through eternity, I'll sing on.

Every Christian hymn has its own story, which is almost always best understood in the context of the greater Story, whose cast of characters is no less than The Communion of Saints.

Considering the theme of “What wondrous love”—a humble expression of gratitude at the experience of Salvation—what is most striking about this hymn is its plaintive character. To modern tastes, it would have seemed more sensible to match such a somber motif with a tune that is more cheering, more celebratory. Particularly at first hearing, “What wondrous love” seems a curious fusion of a forlorn tune with a lyric of

profound and humble thanksgiving. A sadness that is sweet. It is exactly this enigmatic quality that caught my attention when I heard this hymn for the first time as a college student, and the occasion to explore it further here has only drawn me in more deeply.

At least for me, a first hearing of any piece of music calls up pictures—of where the music might have come from, of the setting in which the performers recorded it, and so on. Even when such impressions are wildly inaccurate or fanciful, they play a helpful role in my appreciation of the words and music. I make no attempt to explain, but what came to my mind on first hearing “What wondrous love” was the thought of someone in a rustic setting, completely alone with his thoughts, trying to fathom what had happened to him, and how he improbably finds himself in a far better situation than he deserved.

There are folk traditions, repeated too often to be discounted easily, which tell us that different versions of this tune were passed along for many generations before it appeared as a hymn in America. Some earlier versions include “Ye Jacobites By Name” (with a lyric by Robert Burns), “Sam Hall,” “Admiral Benbow,” and most prominently, “Captain Kidd.” As a sample of the lyrics,

My name was Robert Kidd, when I sailed, when I sailed;
My name was Robert Kidd, when I sailed;
My name was Robert Kidd, God’s laws I did forbid,
So wickedly I did when I sailed, when I sailed
So wickedly I did when I sailed.

Very probably, earlier renditions were commonly sung in the open air, on the decks of ships and elsewhere. As something like a “sea shanty,” it might have had a responsive quality, perhaps with the onlookers or crew chiming in on “when I sailed, when I sailed,” etc.

Both Captain Kidd and Sam Hall met their fate as condemned pirates on the gallows in London, which gives us further rea-

son to believe that these earlier versions drew some of their character from these scenes of execution. The hymn as we know it has been associated with “sorry ends” then, which, it is not too much to say, lends additional resonance to that plaintive quality that caught my attention from the beginning.

The text for this hymn, said to have been written by Alexander Means (who was a physician, a scientist, a professor, and college president, as well as a preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church), had appeared in a few hymnals as early as 1811, but it was not until 1835 that the lyrics for “Wondrous love” appeared with the current tune (also called WONDROUS LOVE), in *The Southern Harmony and Musical Companion*, edited by William “Singin’ Billy” Walker. This collection turned out to be one of the most influential hymnals of the nineteenth century, and is still considered one of the foundational collections of Shaped Note singing (of which Sacred Harp singing is one form). Many are folk songs (provided with religious texts), others are traditional sacred tunes, while some are revival songs that were widely known and sung throughout the south. The book was immensely popular, selling an amazing 600,000 copies before the Civil War, and was commonly stocked “along with groceries and tobacco” in general stores across the American frontier ([Southern Harmony](#)).

“Shaped Note” referred to the use of a greatly simplified musical notation, which made it comparatively easy for untrained singers to learn their way around the music. The ready acceptance of this system fed a rapid growth in the publication of tune books, and its popularity expanded geographically as well, from New England to the south and west. The primary workshop for the development of Shaped Note singing was “the singing school,” led by a “singing master,” whose task it was to train groups of the faithful to sing in a relatively uniform manner.

Shaped Note singing fell into decline in urban areas (at least in the Northern States) after the Civil War—too rustic, and

not sophisticated enough—and came increasingly to be associated with the American South. In recent years, it has not only come back, but has proliferated across the country and beyond.

My reflections on this hymn have been illuminated by a rich variety of performances (via YouTube, etc.). Many of them shed their own light on what makes “What wondrous love” unique and beautiful. Examples: a. As a Shaped Note Hymn: from the 1942 Alabama Sacred Harp Singing Convention (http://www.ccel.org/ccel/walker/harmony/files/ala_sacred_harp/Wondrous_Love.mp3) captures vividly just how different this style is. It has a spare, artless quality, which brings back to life some of the primal religious impulse of the hymn; b. As an Organ Work: Samuel Barber’s (1910-1981) *Wondrous Love: Variations on a Shape-Note Hymn*, Op.34, has a very different texture from vocal interpretations. I would say this version has a slightly darker, moodier sense than many others (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLrO3ofSbeU>); c. Also, Donald Grantham (1947 -) a respected composer and faculty member at the Butler School of Music (University of Texas) orchestrated his *Southern Harmony for Band* in 1998. The second movement, “Wondrous Love,” explores the chord structures and moods of the hymn in a profound way (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWUo9hO7bhA>).

My memories of what we sang in church when I was young are neither strong nor vivid. Some hymns seemed morose and some found just the right balance between words and music. With some of them it felt even then as if at the very instant of flipping to the right page, a whiff of mothballs was released into the air, from who knows where.

“What wondrous love” did not become familiar to me until somewhat later. I must have encountered it during Holy Week, and what caught me immediately was how bittersweet it was—a song of someone stopped dead in his tracks by an experience full of wonder, of beauty, of comfort, that had cost someone else everything. It has a character that is both so-

bering and sustaining, and that is what keeps drawing me back.

One of my earliest conversations with Seth concerned the early American composer William Billings (1746-1800). I had never heard of him, but was intrigued after listening during my homeward commute one day to a Mars Hill Audio discussion on Billings with Richard Crawford (University of Michigan). Not surprisingly, as both a reference librarian and a choral conductor, Seth was familiar with Billings, and this exchange was my first exposure to early American hymnody. It turned out that Billings was an early influence in Shaped Note singing, and before long I purchased several CDs by the Boston Camerata, which included selections from Billings' "The Singing Master's Assistant." There are plenty of other reasons to be grateful to Seth, but this collection provides a perfect occasion to thank him for helping open up this chapter in the history of church music to me.

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252 WONDROUS LOVE. 12, 9, 6, 6, 12, 9 *Christopher.*

What wondrous love is this, oh! my soul! oh! my soul! What wondrous love is this, oh! my soul! What wondrous love is this! That

caused the Lord of bliss, To bear the dread-ful curse for my soul, for my soul, To bear the dread-ful curse for my soul.

TO TRULY WORSHIP

Mozart's Requiem (1791)



Christina Torbert is the Head of Serials and the Bibliographer for Philosophy and Religion for the University of Mississippi. She has sung soprano or alto in the ATLA choir since 1998.

BY CHRISTINA TORBERT

Our church's choir director regularly reminds us that music in worship should contribute to worship. We should be performing to glorify God. Most every singer knows the sensation when the performance stops being a struggle and the spirit of worship takes over. A singer can feel the quality of music flow through her, when singing feels less like effort and more like praise. In my experience, one of the most worshipful pieces of music to perform is Mozart's Requiem Mass in D Minor, K. 626. A Requiem Mass (or Service for the Dead) may seem a strange choice for a celebratory volume, but when I could not select a favorite hymn, I had to select my favorite performance piece.

The Requiem Mass developed early in Christian church music as a selection of texts from the regular mass arranged in a particular order. Originally, the texts were sung as Gregorian chant, but after the Council of Trent in the mid-sixteenth century established the requiem as a particular service for the dead, composers began arranging polyphonic versions. Even though the texts had been formally established, modifications to those texts, their order, and inclusion have continued into the twenty-first century. The requiem form is so popular that "secular" requiems have been written to commemorate major events.

The structure of a requiem takes the congregation on a journey through the grief process. The Introit and Kyrie express praise for God and grief for the one lost. This grief is blended with concern for the soul through the *Sequentia*, particularly in the *Dies Irae*. The words through this section focus on God's

righteous judgment of the soul. The Offertory shows the lost one's dependence on God's mercy, while the Sanctus and Agnus Dei highlight the whole world's dependence on God's mercy. Finally, the Lux Aeterna delights in the assurance of paradise.

Mozart wrote his version of the Requiem Mass at the end of his life, and it is surrounded by controversy and rumor. Count Franz von Walsegg commissioned the piece in secret, and because it was incomplete at Mozart's death, it was finished by Franz Xaver Sussmayr. Accounts vary as to which movements were written by Mozart and which by Sussmayr. Both Sussmayr and Mozart's wife claim that Sussmayr worked from "scraps" left by Mozart for most of the movements, but much of the orchestration is credited to Sussmayr. A public performance of the work after Mozart's death prevented the Count from claiming the piece was his composition, a practice the amateur musician was known to do, and established the Sussmayr completion as the authentic version of the work.

Performing Mozart's Requiem is a visceral experience. With its many quick shifts in tone and energy, it engages a singer's mind and body. Concentration is required to remember the necessary dynamics and expression while physical control is needed to maintain the right tone of voice and tune of notes. Mozart's Requiem remains a great work of art because the emotions communicated through music and words range from sorrow and longing through prayerful pleading to power and praise. Often, this whole range of emotions is reflected in the same movement.

For example, the Introitus expresses all of these emotions. It begins with a soft pulse of low strings under the higher melody. As the low male voices enter, the dark mood strengthens and then changes as the other voices join. By the time the chorus reaches its climax at "*lux aeterna*," the whole tone of the movement reflects the focus on eternal light. The soaring soprano solo that follows continues the light feeling, offering

hymns and vows to God. The bold section of men crying “*exaudi*” calls on God to hear again and again before the sound shifts to a smooth, sustained plea for “*requiem aeternam*,” or eternal rest for the lost. The climax of the movement is still to come as the choir begins a powerful, punctuated “*et lux perpetua*,” calling attention to the perpetual light of God through a focus on consonants and rhythm before softening to a prayerful ending.

As a chorus singer, the most powerful moments are in the Kyrie and Dies Irae. The Kyrie brings so many layers of melody, with each voice highlighted for moments before another takes the lead. While the structure is complex, the sound never conflicts as the whole choir reaches to outdo each other in pleading with Christ. The abrupt ending makes the silence between the Kyrie and the Dies Irae vibrate with tension and allows the loud, punching entrance seem like an extension of the prayer in the Kyrie. Yet the focus has shifted from Christ’s mercy to the need for that mercy. The “Day of Wrath” includes the world dissolving into ashes as predicted by the prophets. Then the heavenly judge will appear to investigate everything strictly. The chorus sings “*quantus tremor est futurus*” repeatedly. How much fear there will be on that day!

When I first learned this music, the Dies Irae was my favorite movement. We singers would nearly bounce on the risers in anticipation of the energy of the music. It makes one want to dance, but the words are about judgment from an angry God. Perhaps it reflects the complex emotions we all have about the coming day of the Lord. Do we fear it or do we welcome it? The prophets struggled with this question and warned against desiring that day, and yet images of the apocalypse are still popular entertainment staples today. Mozart’s setting carries a similar dichotomy, making it one of the most memorable experiences in his dynamic Requiem.

The entire Sequentia, which begins with the Dies Irae, consists of contrasts: high and low, loud and soft, legato and toc-

cata, call and response. The Tuba Mirum pleads for justice, followed by the Rex Tremendae which calls on the triumphant king to deliver salvation. The cries of “Rex” plead and glorify, and “*salva me*” completes the attitude of prayer. The Recordare contrasts the soloists with the orchestra, building to a Confutatis that conveys the battle for the soul. The energy of the low voices contrasts with the ethereal high voices as they trade cries of “*confutatis maledictus*,” the wicked are confounded. Gradually, the conflict resolves into a prayerful “*voca me cum benedictus*,” call me with the blessed ones. The entire meditation on the righteousness of God concludes with the Lacrimosa, a sorrowful movement full of tension between “*judicandus*,” judgment and “*parce*,” mercy. The prayer ends with strong faith in the mercy of the Lord to grant rest: “*Dona eis requiem. Amen.*”

The Offertorium consists of two parts of a prayer asking for Christ the King of Glory to deliver the faithful from punishment. The praise of the singers is offered as a sacrifice for this favor, but deliverance is called more than a favor. It is compared to the promise made to Abraham. The chorus of “*quam olim Abrahae promisisti*” is repeated prominently in both parts adding emphasis to this idea. As a continuation of the offering of praise, the Sanctus replicates the words sung by the heavenly hosts in Isaiah and the words used regularly in most worship services to praise God’s holiness and glory. It opens strongly and continues in a slightly discordant forte that causes the long notes on “Gloria” to almost shimmer. The competitive repeated choruses of “*Hosanna in excelsis*” ring in the ears after the piece ends.

So far the prayers of the Requiem have been for the beloved who have passed on. In the Agnus Dei the prayers turn to the whole world. The text is simple: “Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant them rest.” Each sung phrase glides from glorifying praise of the Lamb to quiet prayer for the souls of the world. The rise and fall of voices pulses with power and fragility. Such prayers are followed by a Communion movement that begins with a gentle soprano solo calling

for “*lux aeterna*,” eternal light on the saints forever. The rest of the movement repeats the orchestration of the Introitus and the Kyrie. The words of the Kyrie are changed to “*cum Sanctis tuis in aeternum, quia pius es*” but the score is the same. Pleading for Christ’s mercy has become assurance that the saints will be with God forever because God is merciful.

My enjoyment of Mozart’s Requiem has only increased through repeated hearings. I still get caught up in the power of the music every time I listen to it. I barely understood the words or the music when I first learned it for a concert performance. It was just a fun and challenging piece for a young singer used to a small church choir. As my singing has matured and my knowledge of church music has expanded, I have learned to appreciate the texts and how Mozart (and Sussmayr) played with the emotional currents to create this iconic composition.

Musical praise has always been our goal in the ATLA Choir, and under Seth’s leadership we have strived to reach a level of true worship. True worship transcends notes and technique, and it takes a special leader to guide an irregular group to quality. As singers have come and gone, Seth has been constant and has consistently expected our best every year. In beautiful cathedrals and in hotel ballrooms with low ceilings, Seth made it possible for us to present our worshipful best to the congregation and to God. Thank you, Seth. Blessings.

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THE DESERT SHALL REJOICE AND BLOSSOM

Lo! how a rose è'er blooming

BY CHRISTINE WENDEROTH

Lo, how a rose è'er blooming
From tender stem hath sprung,
Of Jesse's lineage coming,
By faithful prophets sung.
It came a floweret bright,
Amid the cold of winter,
When half spent was the night.

Isaiah 'twas foretold it,
The rose I have in mind,
With Mary we behold it,
The virgin mother kind.
To show God's love aright
She bore for us a savior,
When half spent was the night.

Music is not lyric, of course. One of the shocking things I learned from Carol Doran, Professor of Music and Liturgy at Bexley Hall and then Virginia Theological Seminary, is that hymns and carols are the words, not the tune. But the words take hold—in me at least—*because* they are sung and their theology subversively stays in my DNA. I remember the melody and therefore I remember the words.

Christmas carols have had a special place in that regard because I grew up among the unwashed, the unchurched. My folks did not go to church and so we did not sing hymns. But we sang carols in the manner of the Randolph Singers, a New York based, 5-voice madrigal group founded by David [Rosenberg] Randolph (1914-2010) in 1947. Those were the LPs my parents owned and played each December. My mother still has them. And with their help



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and with my piano teacher dutifully assigning carol arrangements, I had carols in my head—music first, words merely bringing up the rear as a way to carry the music.

This is how I know God (the God with whom my parents are not acquainted) works in mysterious ways. I learned Christmas carols because they were part of the holly, jolly season that kids love. I did not think much about them, any more than I thought about stockings or pumpkin pie or Pfeffernusse cookies. They were just part of the best time of the year. But years into my adulthood, a Christmas carol began its stealth attack. Smack in the middle of Advent, on December 18th, my sister died. Ellen was barely 28, a young woman of beauty and purpose. She struggled the whole of 1985 to defeat a disease that held the upper hand from the beginning. By November it was clear to everyone, including Ellen, that death was imminent. We entered Advent that year knowing it was a time of waiting all right, but a waiting for death, not birth.

I remember thinking, “What is the point of celebrating the birth of a baby, when that baby is coming into a world only to suffer ostracism, loneliness, physical pain, and death? How sadistic that is, really, celebrating the birth of a baby born to die. How sad it is that any baby be born: we all come into this world to suffer and to die.” I looked at the joy around me and wondered how all those people could be so oblivious to the pain.

I know now that many people enter Advent bearing grief or depression or loneliness. We are all grieving something and suffer it most when others seem so happy or when it seems we are told we should be happy. Biblical texts for the season do not offer much comfort, at first blush. Isaiah 35, for example, speaks of an extravagant transformation of creation in which the desert blooms, the blind see, the dry land becomes grassy swamp, the impassable wilderness becomes a highway, and “everlasting joy” prevails. I would look out my window and see only winter. Never mind that Isaiah speaks

in the future tense. I felt indicted by the vision, by the promise, by the seasonal revelry. I would not believe the promise; it was too abundant.

“Lo! how a rose e'er blooming” is actually based on Isaiah 11:1 (“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots”) and “originally referred to Mary as the rose. Sixteenth century reformers sought to change the emphasis of the hymn to refer to Jesus,” however (McKim, 49). Both work for my purposes here as I point to the promise of hope and life. My reference to Isaiah 35 particularly highlights stanza 1 (“The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly”), though stanzas 5 (“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened”), 6b (“for waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert”), 8 (“And a highway shall be there...”), and 10 (“And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away”) are alluded to as well. Chapter 35 of Isaiah echoes chapter 11’s promise of a desert made lush...beginning with a shoot, a bloom.

Yes, Isaiah sings of an extravagant garden with flowers and grasses and pools of clear water. It is a daunting picture, and it is clear we are not in that garden yet. So, too, speak the psalms and the gospels and the epistles of an immoderate promise from an immoderate God. In 1985 I put my soul on mute and could hear nothing of promises of new life. But just before she died, my sister and I were singing carols in her hospital room. She told me her favorite was “Lo! how a rose e'er blooming,” a carol with its roots in the fourteenth and fifteenth century. A very old and madrigal-like carol, it was found in a manuscript from St. Alban’s Carthusian Monastery and translated by American scholar and editor Theodore Baker (1891-1934) in his *Rejoice in the Lord* (1894). The words were first published with the tune *ES IST EIN ROS ENTSPRUNGEN* in the Cologne *Gesangbuch* of 1599, but it

was the harmonization by Michael Praetorius (1571-1621), the most “versatile and wide-ranging German composer of his generation” (New Grove), that popularized it. And so we sang it. As we sang I listened to the words and it struck me: in this carol we have a modest image of one flower, a rose, blooming from tender stem. This single flower emerges, the carol says, out of the cold darkness, one little flash of color in a vast, colorless desert. One flower does not erase the winter or command the spring, of course. But it signals the life underground, the life to come. Here is your God, it whispers. There is life after all.

I could sing the tune with Ellen. We knew it from our childhoods. And the tune carried the words and brought them to us, words we had never really noticed before. The music allowed the words to finally speak. That is the genius of music. It gets in your bones unnoticed, and emerges from deep inside to support you when you need it most. “Amid the cold of winter, when half spent was the night.” A floweret bright.

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CHRISTMAS

Lo, How A Rose

16th Century Melody

Harmonized by M. Praetorius (1571-1621)



Lo how a rose e'er bloom - ing, From ten - der root
The sweet rose of this sto - ry I - sai - ah did



From ten - der root
I - sai - ah did



has grown: From Jes - se's off - spring com - ing To
pro - claim. What God or - dain'd for glo - ry, By



has grown:
pro - claim.



all the world made known. It came a - mid the cold
bless - ed Ma - ry came. The Child the Vir - gin bore,



world made known.
Ma - ry came.



A bright and shin - ing blos - som As pro - phets had fore - told.
The world's sal - va - tion bring - ing Through Him for ev - er - more.



had fore - told.
ev - er - more.

THE BALM OF SINGING

“There is a balm in Gilead”



Laura C. Wood is the director of the Andover-Harvard Theological Library at Harvard Divinity School. She has been an occasional participant in the ATLA choir.

BY LAURA C. WOOD

In 1996, I recommended a movie to my dad. *The Spitfire Grill* is a small film, but filled with wonderful themes of trust and redemption. It takes place in Gilead, Maine where a young woman, fresh from prison, tries to start her life over and heal her wounds. She goes to Gilead because of the hymn, “There is a balm in Gilead.” The words of that hymn reach her and make her believe that she might find a new and better life. She longs for the chance to heal her pain.

There is a balm in Gilead
To make the wounded whole
There is a balm in Gilead
To heal the sin-sick soul

When my dad saw the film, he liked it well enough, but something bothered him deeply: the melody. The movie, for some reason, used a different tune rather than the one commonly associated with this hymn. (BALM IN GILEAD is the tune name, given that common association.) Little did I know that this is one of my father’s favorite hymns. He tried to explain how the movie’s tune choice offended him and why the melody was so important to the message, but found he could not do it justice with words. He broke into song, and with his lovely baritone voice, sang the refrain slowly, mournfully, and almost without thinking, right there in the kitchen. I was surprised by his singing and by the strength of his opinion. Intellectually, I thought his complaint was small, but emotionally, I was deeply moved. I will never forget that conversation.

“There is a balm in Gilead” is an African American spiritual. It is a song of hope and salvation. The burden of today, the pain of a “wounded” and “sin-sick

soul” will be lifted by the love of Jesus. The song acknowledges our daily struggle and recognizes our setbacks, but offers a promise of relief and healing.

Marian Wright Edelman, president and founder of the Children’s Defense Fund, writes of her memories of this spiritual from childhood:

When I don’t know what to do, which way to go, or feel profoundly inadequate to the task at hand, an echo of my father’s frequent off-key humming of the spiritual “There Is a Balm in Gilead” wells in my heart, reminding me that I don’t have to preach like the Apostle Paul or Martin King or Jesse Jackson or meet Harvard or Yale or congressional or White House or society’s decreed standards of anything to be a useful messenger or servant in the world. (Edelman, 17-18)

Like most spirituals, the origins of the song are unknown. By the late nineteenth century, it was being adapted for use in Methodist and other denominational hymnals. According to *The Companion to the United Methodist Hymnal*, their version “as in most collections, is adapted from *Folk Songs of the American Negro*, 1907, compiled and edited by Frederick J. Work and John W. Work, Jr.” (Young, 646). However, it had been included in earlier Methodist hymnals as well. “The text with another tune entered our hymnals at 895 in *The Methodist Hymnal*, 1889” (Young, 646). Such musical adaptation continues today. A current search on YouTube turns up numerous twentieth and twenty-first century renditions of the song, with several variations on the tune and the mood.

Balm is referenced in numerous Hebrew Bible texts, including Genesis 37:25 and 43:11, Ezekiel 27:17, and Jeremiah 8:22, 46:11, and 51:8. It was a resin or plant extract that offered soothing for wounds, or at least fragrance to counteract the putrid smell of wounded flesh. Found in Gilead, a highland region of Transjordan, the balm was regularly exported and highly valued for its medicinal properties (Lundbom, 536).

In Jeremiah 8:22, however, it asks “Is there a balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?” It is a rhetorical question because the wound is fatal.

Yet the spiritual turns this scriptural reference on its head. Unlike Jeremiah, grieving for an injured nation, the singer of this song is filled with assurance. Howard Thurman writes:

The slave caught the mood of this spiritual dilemma, and with it did an amazing thing. He straightened the question mark in Jeremiah’s sentence into an exclamation point: “There *is* a balm in Gilead!” Here is a note of creative triumph. (Thurman, 56)

The lyric assures us that there is certain healing to be found. It is not found in a physical location, but can be found in faith. Thurman continues, “The basic insight here is one of optimism—an optimism that grows out of the pessimism of life and transcends it. It is an optimism that uses the pessimism of life as raw material out of which it creates its own strength” (Thurman, 56).

This theme of hope is found in many spirituals. The power of hope is a way to survive oppression. James Cone writes:

Hope, in the black spirituals, is not a denial of history. ...It is the belief that things can be radically otherwise than they are: that reality is not fixed, but is moving in the direction of human liberation. To believe that there was hope in the midst of oppression meant that black slaves’ vision of the future was not limited to their present state of slavery. (Cone, 86)

That transcendence beyond our present position lends itself to music. In addition to the sentiment captured by the lyric, the music can lift us and transport us to another place. As Paul Oliver writes, “...to quote spirituals out of context tends to emphasize their naivety; it is in the course of the singing that their beauty and freshness is most apparent” (Oliver, v.4, 288).

kitchen and I have heard him sing it since. When he is given the opportunity to sing it as a solo in church, his voice fills the sanctuary and all can hear the commitment and depth of feeling in his voice. The notes are both rich and floating. There is a combination of sadness and sweetness in the sound. Of the tune, Thurman writes:

The melody itself is most suggestive. It hovers around the basic scale without any straying far afield. Only in one place is there a sharp lifting of a tonal eyebrow—a suggestion of escape; and then the melody swings back to work out its destiny within the zones of melodic agreement. (Thurman, 56)

For my father, the suggestiveness of the melody is vital. It is not just the words of this hymn that are powerful. If we strip away the music, if we change the tune, it loses its strength and meaning. Once we have tied a melody and lyric together the melody alone can carry the sentiment without the need for the words, even if the melody varies somewhat from performance to performance. For Edelman, as well as her father, just humming the tune, even off key, was sufficient to evoke the assurance of a better future and recognition that what we are doing now is enough.

A melody can have a healing ability. It soothes and calms us. It is the balm itself. We know this as listeners, but we know this too as singers. The act of singing the music, of letting it pour out from our bodies, can be a healing ritual.

Sometimes I feel discouraged
And think my work's in vain
But then the Holy Spirit
Revives my soul again

Each year, the annual conference of the American Theological Library Association serves as a kind of revival for theological librarians. Surrounded by kindred spirits, old and new friends, we gather to listen, learn, and teach. Our tradition of including music—during worship services and in the closing

hymn—is soothing, a way to transcend our day-to-day work, and to reconnect with our profession.

Refrain:

There is a balm in Gilead
To make the wounded whole
There is a balm in Gilead
To heal the sin-sick soul

Sometimes I feel discouraged
And think my work's in vain
But then the Holy Spirit
Revives my soul again

Refrain

Don't ever feel discouraged
For Jesus is your friend
And if you lack for knowledge
He'll ne'er refuse to lend

Refrain

If you cannot preach like Peter
If you cannot pray like Paul
You can tell the love of Jesus
And say, "He died for all".

Refrain

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THERE IS A BALM IN GILEAD

Refrain



There is a balm in Gil-e-ad to make the wound-ed whole,
there is a balm in Gil-e-ad to heal the sin-sick soul.

Verses



1. Some - times I feel dis-cour-aged, And_ think my work's in vain,
2. If you can - not preach like Pe - ter, If you can-not pray like Paul,
3. Don't_ ev - er feel dis-cour-aged, For_ Je - sus is your friend;
1. but_ then the Ho - ly Spir - it Re - vives my soul a - gain.
2. you can tell the love of Je - sus, And say, "He died for all."
3. and_ if you lack for knowl-edge, He'll ne'er re - fuse to lend.

Text: 76 76 with refrain; based on Jeremiah 8:22.
Music: BALM IN GILEAD; Spiritual.

HERE I RAISE MY EBENEZER

“Come, thou fount of every blessing”



Jennifer Woodruff Tait is affiliate professor of church history at Asbury Theological Seminary, adjunct professor of church history at United Theological Seminary, and adjunct professor of history at Huntington University. She has sung alto in the ATLA Singers since 2002.

BY JENNIFER WOODRUFF TAIT

(Portions of this essay are adapted from a sermon preached at St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church, New Providence, NJ on January 25, 2005, for the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul. Scripture readings for the feast day were Acts 26:9-21; Psalm 67; Galatians 1:11-24; and Matthew 10:16-22.)

“Come, thou fount of every blessing” is a hymn which comes, as I do, squarely out of the evangelical tradition. Yet, as I have, it has found a broader home.

The author of its text, Robert Robinson (1735-1790), while raised an Anglican, dated his spiritual awakening to hearing a sermon by George Whitefield in 1755. He first became a circuit minister in the Calvinistic Methodist connection, but by 1759 (after a brief stint as a Congregationalist pastor) he had taken charge of the Stone Yard Baptist church in Cambridge, an act which required him to be rebaptized by immersion. He later wrote several theological and historical works, including a history of the Baptists. There is some evidence that he became influenced by Unitarianism late in his life (Hymnary.org). He did not write many hymns, and this is the only one which has gained popularity in modern hymnals. He wrote it for Pentecost Sunday 1758, and it originally had five stanzas. (As usually sung currently, the hymn includes stanza 1, the last quatrain of stanza 2 and the first quatrain of stanza 3, and stanza 4.)

Many modern hymnal revision committees have decided that their congregations will not be biblically literate enough to recognize what an “Ebenezer” is, an allusion to I Samuel 7:12, and have “modernized”

it; others have decided that once saved, Christians should not be “prone to wander” and altered that line as well (Glover, v.3, 1268). This despite the apocryphal but widely spread story that tells of Robinson many years later riding in a stage-coach with a woman who was singing the hymn. When she observed that this distressed him, he supposedly responded: “Madam, I am the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago, and I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the feelings I had then” (Graves). In addition to the troublesome Ebenezer, the hymn also makes reference to Revelation 21:6 and 7:17; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Col. 1:21-22; Ephesians 2:7-8; and 1 Corinthians 1:22 (Psalter Hymnal).

The tune which modern Americans usually sing this hymn to is NETTLETON. Its namesake was a nineteenth-century Calvinist evangelist, Ahsael Nettleton, but he had nothing to do with composing the tune, which is anonymous. It first appeared in a collection of hymn tunes and folk songs, *Repository of Sacred Music, Part II* (1813) collected by John Wyeth (1770-1858), a Pennsylvania Unitarian newspaper publisher. While Wyeth compiled the first part, published in 1810, on his own, he had the help of a Methodist preacher and musician, Elkanah Dare, for the second (Psalter Hymnal). Both of Wyeth’s collections were profoundly influential on *Southern Harmony* collections and on future American shape-note and camp-meeting hymnody. The tune also acquired several other names in its history, including LIVING WATERS and GOOD SHEPHERD, and did not become firmly attached to Nettleton’s name until the 1850s (Glover, 1269-71).

The first time I clearly remember being aware of this hymn’s existence was as a freshman in college, standing in the choir of a small Methodist church in Illinois, where the preacher—an old family friend—had selected it for the closing hymn. I seized on it as only a seventeen-year-old evangelical Methodist can seize on a new religious experience, and later that day I asked my mother on the phone, “Have you ever heard of this hymn?” And my mother told me that, fifty-five years before when *she* was a young nervous evangelical Method-

ist college freshman music major at a school eight hundred miles from home, she was sitting in an college orientation worship service and a young man got up to play this hymn, which he did with power and vigor. And somehow, for reasons not entirely clear to her, she found peace in his playing. And fifty-five years later she remembered this and told me so.

I grew up, as did my mother, in a tradition where you had to have a story. It was important to be a member of the Methodist church, and to go to Sunday School, and to go to youth group, and to try very hard to be a good person. But it was even more important to have a story. Preferably one with lots of changes from darkness to light. Preferably one where you could discuss all the things you had done wrong, all the ways your background had not prepared you to be a “real Christian,” until the moment when there was a flash of blinding light, and you were struck dumb and blind, and afterward you were never the same. Afterward, you went out and preached to the masses. Afterward, you went out and shared your joy. Afterward, you went out and conquered the world.

But slowly, I began to realize that perhaps what we have is not a story, but *stories*. And for me, far more of those stories that anyone might expect centered around “Come, thou fount.” They were, in a manner of speaking, my Ebenezers.

Several years after I first heard the hymn, I was in the throes of the time-honored tradition of professors challenging my faith in college. Just then my parents asked if I would come home with them for a weekend to a Methodist church where my father had previously pastored. The church was having a homecoming service. I sat there in the congregation, feeling very superior and undergraduate, and I remembered my moment of grace in the church choir, and my conversation with my mother, and I said to myself, “I can handle anything unless they play ‘Come, thou fount of every blessing.’”

After the church service was over, one of the older gentlemen asked my brother and me if we would like to go up in

the tower and hear the carillon—a real-old-fashioned carillon with ropes and bells—while he played as he always did on Sundays at noon. So we climbed up long, steep wooden stairs to the top of the tower, and he chimed the noon hour, and he played several hymns. And then he said, “I have one more hymn to play. It’s a request.” And he began to play NETTLETON.

So I thought, maybe that is my story.

Then I went away to seminary in Kentucky. I was still young and foolish, and I sat around contemplating my soul the way one does when called upon to think about theology all day, and found all the deep dark places in it. Then one day I was the worship assistant in the seminary chapel, reading Scripture and leading prayers. The day before, I had told a few friends of mine the story about the bells playing “Come, thou fount.” And now, as I stood on the platform, the Dean of the Chapel announced the last hymn. We had no bulletin and I had no idea what was coming; he simply announced it. He said, “I have chosen for our last hymn an old camp-meeting favorite, and one I dearly love, ‘Come, thou fount of every blessing.’” So we sang, five hundred people in the huge chapel. Outside, rain was pouring down, and inside, as I stood on the platform I suddenly thought to myself, “If I never have another day so full of grace as this one, this is enough.”

And I thought, maybe this is my story.

But there were other stories. Eventually I graduated from seminary and went home to Illinois and into the pastorate. The church was full of conflict, and so was I. I decided to forget this ministry thing. I said to myself, “I think I’ll go to library school and become a librarian.” And when I graduated from library school I said, “Well, maybe religion isn’t so bad after all. I’d like to get my Ph.D. in it.” And somehow I found that in the doing of all that, I had not forgotten the “ministry thing” at all. Instead, while I had been wandering, God had been taking my heart and sealing it, calling me to the voca-

tion of the theological librarian I have been ever since.

Along the way there were other moments of suffering, and of grace, of the kind no seventeen-year-old evangelical ever expects. In 2003, when I married the holiness-raised and Anglican-formed young man who had unexpectedly appeared in my life in God's time, not my own, we sang that hymn during the Eucharist at our wedding. I remember looking across the aisle and catching my mother's eye where she was seated—not passively in a mother-of-the-bride pew, but at the piano. She smiled back. Five years later, we sang that hymn at her funeral.

And yet, even after that moment when it seemed that only God's help could bring any of us hither, other Ebenezers come. For all of us. Every now and then there are sudden moments of grace. Sudden moments of turning. Small moments of changing, almost imperceptible sometimes to outsiders. And we see. There is some area of our life, some thought, some idea, some habit, that still serves darkness rather than light. That still is not devoted to God. And we find ourselves turning it over to God. As a spiritual writer once said, "After a while something happened inside me and I said yes."

Everybody has a story to tell. And it says: God never gives up on us. Not at the beginning. Not in the middle. Not at the end.

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A SERMON IN SONG

“Give rest, O Christ”



BY MARIAN M. (MIM) WARDEN

The first time I walked into a Russian Orthodox Church was by invitation of Seth Kasten. He was singing in the choir of this church as a “ringer,” a non-Orthodox person who had special permission to sing in the choir because of his musical skills and knowledge of the Orthodox liturgy. Born a Jew and raised in the Reform tradition of Judaism, Seth fell in love with the pipe organ and choral music as a teenager. He pursued graduate degrees in those fields as well as in Library Science. Attending that Orthodox service was as part of a wider “experiential education” course in diverse liturgies Seth gave me when I arrived in New York City to study at Union Theological Seminary. I had never attended any Eastern Orthodox services before, and as I entered the narrow hallway that led to the small sanctuary where the choir was rehearsing, I felt I might be at the gateway to heaven, so beautiful, ethereal, and profound was the music.

Marian M. Warden (aka “Mim”) is the Chair of the Friends of the Burke Library, one of the Libraries of Columbia University, located at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. She is a member of the Seminary Choir and the Board of Trustees of Union Seminary. She is a frequent participant in the Berkshire Choral Festival and has sung in the ATLA Singers since the late 1990s.

So when Seth brought the Orthodox hymn “Give rest, O Christ” (*Kontakion for the Dead*) to the ATLA Singers to be chanted for deceased members, it didn’t surprise me. What I could not have predicted was the emotional response this simple and lovely hymn would evoke in listeners. Since then, singing the *Kontakion* has become a ritual at the annual convention that helps us express our grief at the loss of theological library community members. It always elicits tears from some in the congregation.

I immediately thought of this piece when I was offered a chance to write about the ATLA Singers, founded by Seth twenty-five years ago. The hymn’s history is long and treasured by all who value the Early Church and its liturgy, although this history is not as straight-

forward as one might like. There is a certain mysticism about the creation of the *Kontakion* and its importance to the Orthodox Church, itself the earliest Christian tradition still in existence.

Kontakion is the Greek word for the wooden pole holding the scroll of the liturgy, presumably so that it could be lifted up for the choir to see. Orthodox services are almost entirely chanted. There are different tropes for various occasions; the scroll would have been rolled to the proper place for the appropriate service. *Kontakion* also came to mean a form of service music. Librarians might be interested to know that the prayer book presented to an Orthodox priest at his ordination is also named *Kontakion* (Foley, 172).

Tradition holds that the *Kontakion* was a “sung sermon.” The most revered composer (some would even say initiator) of this form was Romanos the Melodist, born in Syria during the age of Justinian the Great (527-565 CE). R. J. Schork’s biography (1995) of Romanos describes this new musical creation:

Inside the domed basilica of Hagia Sophia and within the churches of the imperial metropolis [Constantinople] the congregation listened—and contributed—to a most improbably exotic hybrid in the development of Christian liturgy. This new and dynamic homiletic form was the *Kontakion*, a sermon that was sung, poetry written to be chanted from the pulpit. (Schork, ix)

Born in Syria, Romanos recognized the contribution of Syriac poetry to the evolving literature of the Eastern church in a theologically turbulent, Greek-speaking Constantinople. He created a format that would take root and become beloved. It seems one can often communicate more directly by singing than by speech alone. Romanos knew this, and he exegeted, poetized, and set to music many stories of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. He lived under the rule of Justinian in a period of relative Christian optimism. The *Kontakion* seems

to have given voice to both the accomplishments and trials of that time.

Tradition says Romanos received the gift of composing the *Kontakion* in a vision from the Blessed Virgin on Christmas Eve. She appeared to him with a paper that she directed him to swallow, and when he had done so, he arose and began to sing,

Today the Virgin gives birth to the superstantial One . . .

Thereafter Romanos composed approximately one thousand *Kontakion* to celebrate Feast Days and commemorate saints. Scholars today can account for only 87 of the supposed thousand. These sung sermons were quite long—usually 18 to 32 stanzas—and they often contained an antiphon or refrain which the congregation would sing with the choir.

The *Kontakion for the Dead* as we have it today was not among Romanos' collection, however. The form in which the ATLA Singers perform it is printed in the 1982 hymnal of the Episcopal Church. The companion to that hymnal attributes the piece to Theophanes, who died circa 842. It is an integral element of the *Panikhida*, "The Service for Orthodox Christians who have fallen asleep" (Glover, v.3, 355). It is at once a prayer, an affirmation, and a celebration:

Give rest, O Christ, to your servants with your saints,
Where sorrow and pain are no more,
Neither sighing, but life everlasting.
You only are immortal
The creator and maker of mankind;
And we are mortal, formed of the earth—
And to earth shall we return
For so did you ordain when you created me, saying,
"You are dust, and to dust you shall return."
All of us go down to the dust,
Yet even at the grave we make our song:
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

A few weeks ago Seth and I were invited to a *Panikhida* in memory of a friend of his. Again I marveled at the near-celestial tones of the Orthodox chant, and when the choir began to sing “Give rest, O Christ,” I found myself in tears even though I had not known the woman who was being remembered. The sincerity and simplicity of the music have given comfort, hope, and blessing to many generations of faithful Christians. I pray that Seth’s musicianship and spiritual leadership will live on at ATLA through “Give rest, O Christ,” and that this hymn will bring comfort to us all as we face our final days on earth. Most of all—THANK YOU, SETH, for all those years of helping me with papers, for taking me to so many worship services, and for bringing so much music and meaning to the ATLA conventions for twenty-five years.

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