

# STUDIES IN LUTHERAN CHORALES

*by Hilton C. Oswald*

*Edited by Bruce R. Backer*

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## EDITOR'S PREFACE

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The forty-seven essays in this book appeared in *The Lutheran School Bulletin* between 1947 and 1961. This bulletin was the predecessor to *The Lutheran School Educator*, in which the last essay of this series appeared. *Studies In Lutheran Chorales* is unique. There is no other collection of essays on German Lutheran hymns in the English language. In this series Hilton Oswald commends to us the treasure of hymns that God gave the Church as fruit of the Reformation Gospel in Germany. Through the Scriptures God showed Martin Luther, as he had once shown Saint Paul, how helpless and hopeless people are in their attempt to live a righteous life before him and how graciously helpful he has been in lifting them from hopeless helplessness to the solid rock of deliverance: Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior. Martin Luther expressed desperation and deliverance with Spirit-born insight when he wrote in "From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee":

*Thy love and grace alone avail  
To blot out my transgression;  
The best and holiest deeds must fail  
To break sin's dread oppression.  
Before Thee none can boasting stand,  
But all must fear Thy strict demand  
And live alone by mercy.*

The clarity and power with which Luther preached this Gospel in everything he said and wrote is also reflected in the writings and particularly in the hymns of his friends, of the confessors of his generation, and of the generations of Lutherans in Germany that followed him. Hilton Oswald asks us to ponder the Gospel in these hymns and to sing them into our bloodstream. These hymns will help us sing no other Gospel than the salvation that has come to us by God's free grace and favor. These hymns will help us, who are reaching ahead and writing hymns on American soil, to steer a straight course and sing to God and to one another the wonders he has done:

*Therefore my hope is in the Lord  
And not in mine own merit;  
It rests upon His faithful Word  
To them of contrite spirit  
That He is merciful and just;  
This is my comfort and my trust.  
His help I wait with patience.*

EDITOR'S PREFACE

The editor wishes to thank Dr. John Isch for encouraging him to do this work, Prof. Meilahn Zahn for supplying a complete set of *The Lutheran School Bulletin*, Prof. Arlen Koestler for the thankless work of proofreading, and D.M.L.C. Graphics for publication of this book.

*Bruce R. Backer*

*April 22, 1981*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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The professors who trained many of the men and women active today in the educational institutions of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod present a distinguished profile. They worked hard; their teaching load was normally twice that of the current professor. They prepared diligently; with Spartan discipline they equipped themselves in order to present their message effectively to the students. They taught well; the next generation seated before them received the clear message, which often included good advice for Christian living. They also confirmed their teaching with their way of life. Many active pastors and teachers are deeply indebted to these faithful servants of the Lord.

One such professor was Hilton C. Oswald. Born in New Ulm, Minnesota, in 1907, he attended St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran School, Martin Luther Academy, Northwestern College, and graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 1932. After teaching as tutor and professor at Northwestern Lutheran Academy in Mobridge, South Dakota, he accepted a call in 1939 to become professor of music at Northwestern College and Preparatory School in Watertown, Wisconsin. He taught the numerous music classes, directed the choirs and the band in both departments, and taught college Latin. When a need arose at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 1944, Prof. Oswald rendered willing assistance and traveled once a week to Mequon to rehearse the Seminary choir and to teach classes in hymnology and church music. In 1963 he accepted an offer to do literary work at Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis, and soon became house editor. In this position he aided the completion of the American Edition of Luther's works. After he retired from this position, he became editor of the Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, the official publication of the Concordia Historical Institute. In 1979 Concordia Seminary conferred upon him the honorary degree, Doctor of Letters. The following quotation is taken from the service folder for the occasion:

*In honoring Hilton Oswald on the 140th anniversary of its founding, Concordia Seminary pays tribute to all those who labor tirelessly in expounding the Word of God through the printed page. Mindful that their efforts have an abiding effect on the life and thought of the church, may they be strengthened by the words of St. Paul, "Be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor 15:58).*

# 1 THREE REPRESENTATIVE CHORALES OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER

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# 1

One cannot speak about Lutheran hymnody without beginning with the work of Dr. Martin Luther. It is indeed hard to imagine that Lutheran hymnody could have developed into the rich heritage that it is without the tremendous impulse given to it by Luther himself. Luther is at once the originator, the chief producer, and the most enthusiastic prompter of the chorale.

Luther's own chorales were arrived at in various ways. The problem of promoting congregational singing has perhaps never again been so well understood and so ably solved as it was by Luther himself. Within one lifetime to transform into a singing church a fourth, let us say, of the German-speaking people, who had for centuries literally never raised their voices in the church, was an achievement that required the attention of a genius, and that genius was Luther. He chose his materials with exquisite care and with extraordinary felicity. He devised chorales by independent composition and by adaptation of existing materials. We shall briefly study both types.

## 1.1 A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD

We need no longer point out that we have in this chorale Christendom's greatest hymn both on spiritual and artistic grounds. The glowing terms in which it is usually described rather call for a reminder that while this chorale has been called the battle hymn (*Trutzlied*) of the Christian Church, it ought more correctly be thought of as a hymn of comfort (*Trostlied*). It was definitely the latter in the eyes of Luther. He would invite his friends to sing it when courage was at low ebb. When they felt least like defying the whole world, yes, when they all felt that their struggles were futile and their cause lost, then Luther would say to them, "Kommt, lasst uns den 46. Psalm singen" (Come! Let us sing the 46th Psalm). We ought to remember that as we sing it today so that this chorale does not become a mere chip on our shoulder, but that we remember our own confession in it, "With might of ours can naught be done, Soon were our loss effected." Neither will that thought dim our enthusiasm in singing this great chorale; it will rather keep us mindful of the true source of strength and so base our enthusiasm upon an unshakable foundation.

Both text and melody of this chorale are Luther's own creation. (We need not here consider the nineteenth century hymnologist's opinions to the contrary.) The text is based on Psalm 46, but it is neither translation nor versified paraphrase of the psalm. This is a new composition based on the first verse of the psalm and generalized to fit the circumstances of the Christian Church of all time. What seems at first glance to refer especially to Luther's own time and circumstances is in the final analysis typical of the experience of Christendom generally. Really subjective and purely personal elements do not appear in this chorale because Luther so closely

identified his own person with his cause that he could not but express himself always in terms of his cause, and that was the cause of thousands in his own time and of millions yet to be born. Thus this intensely personal verse rises to the stature of a true chorale (*Gemeindelied*, or, congregational hymn). The result is obvious; this hymn was eagerly adopted by Luther's followers, for they found in it their own struggles and the balm that could heal all their wounds.

And as Luther himself set the proper style for congregational hymnody in the verse, so he also furnished the ideal melody to carry the message of the text. He himself said, "Die Noten machen den Text lebendig" (The notes enliven the text). With sensitive discernment he avoided the monotonous and uninteresting as well as the sensually overwrought and overembellished melody and found that heroic and yet folk-tune-like melodic and rhythmic line that was ideally suited to his text. An analysis will be rewarding. Just as the text with its clipped, straightforward sentences that avoid literary complexity at every turn, with its vigorous imperfect rhymes, and with its incisive vocabulary carries an elemental force, so the melody also bears the mark of sturdiness and strength. This melody begins with a bold triple announcement of the keynote at the highest pitch that is reached in the whole chorale. Not unlike the blows of Luther's hammer upon the Castle Church (the first light blow sets the nail), these repeated tones in every stanza drive home the word on the fourth syllable, where the melody suddenly leaps an elemental leap down to the dominant of the scale. Notice the emphatic keywords found in the German text at this fourth syllable. The melody then starts once more at the keynote and descends to the dominant to complete the first textual and melodic unit. And a third time the descent from the keynote is made, but this time there is the artistic variation of only a momentary stop at the dominant and then a scalewise continuation down to the lower keynote. This is very appropriate, for the text in this section is parallel and complementary to the first unit. After a repetition of the pattern so far, a new and surprising deviation occurs. The melody now writhes its way upward from the lowest tone in the chorale and then assumes a bolder upward march in notes of equal duration, beginning with a leap of a fifth and extending scalewise to the very summit to match the crises or victories announced at this point in the text. That suspense is maintained in the following two units by an apparent unwillingness of the melody to subside to a final cadence. The close is an exact repetition of unit two, and the texts of the closing unit and of unit two complement each other admirably. Going back over the chorale once more, one will note that throughout the chorale secondary accents are laid upon words of secondary import by means of syncopation. Only the original metrical version of the melody will show this feature; the effect of this syncopation is utterly lost in the isometric version which arose out of the contrapuntal settings and the instrumental transcriptions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a version which has unfortunately become standard in many hymnals. In the original form text and melody are so well mated that one is unthinkable without the other. That makes an ideal chorale.

Dr. Martin Luther was not only a talented lyric poet and musician and as such the chief originator of the Lutheran chorale, but also a discerning hymnologist. This is to be understood not in the sense that he had inclination and time for leisurely research and scholarly inquiry after sources and variant versions of old hymns or that he had an interest in collecting for publication such a body of pre-Reformation hymns, much as such a collection by Luther would be of inestimable value today. Luther's hymnological activity served a more practical and a more immediate purpose, namely, that of preserving and making available for congregational use what was valuable in the heritage of the old church. With insight and a singular sense of values, Luther recognized and chose the good and then polished these gems, adapting them to the needs of the Church of the Reformation and expanding and enriching them with added composition of his own. In the following two chorales we see Luther at his best in his hymnological work.

## 1.2 WE NOW IMPLORE GOD, THE HOLY GHOST

Only the first stanza of this hymn represents the hymnological find of Luther. Of it we have a record dating back to the latter half of the thirteenth century. In a sermon, Berthold von Regensburg (1272), quoting the German stanza, says, "It is indeed a useful song. Therefore you should desire to sing it more and more. You should sing to God and call upon him with all your heart and with pure devotion.... The man was wise, who first brought this hymn to light." In later centuries of the Middle Ages, when mystery plays flourished and dramatic representation was a common means of religious instruction, this stanza was commonly sung at Pentecost while a wooden dove (and sometimes even a live one!), representing the Holy Ghost, was lowered from the ceiling of the church to brood, as it were, upon the congregation. In 1523 Luther included the stanza in his *Formula Missae* as a hymn that might be sung after the communion. Thus, while the original single stanza, as well as Luther's later four-stanza hymn, was first identified with the Festival of Pentecost, both came to be used at a variety of occasions—at ordinations, at the deathbed, in time of tribulation, upon entering the church, and after the sermon. In Luther's *Deutsche Messe* (1526) it is suggested that the hymn be sung between the readings of Epistle and Gospel. In some German cities it was regularly sung at public executions and became known as *Das Armesuenderlied* (Song of a Wretched Sinner).

The words, "Lord, have mercy," with which the stanza closes remind us of the way in which this stanza came into being. In the earlier Middle Ages active congregational participation in the service was limited to the singing of the response *Kyrie eleison* (Lord, have mercy) in the litany. Toward the end of the Middle Ages, however, yielding reluctantly to the popular demand for more active participation in worship, the church began to permit the congregational singing of the so-called *Leisen*. These derived their name from the word *eleison* and consisted of the text *Kyrie eleison* and one or more stanzas of German verse prefixed to it. Naturally, congregations enthusiastically received and exercised this new privilege of song, and the *Le-*

isen became very popular. The popularity and familiarity of the stanza under discussion is, for instance, implied and established in the interesting little parodic jingle attributed to Medieval grain merchants:

*If you sing "We now implore," The price goes up a little more.<sup>1</sup>*

This stanza together with its melody, which is also a product of the Middle Ages, Luther found already in use. Carefully following the pattern of this stanza, he added three further stanzas of his own composition, in each of them continuing the prayer announced in the traditional stanza and addressing the Holy Spirit respectively as the "Precious Light" who alone can lead us to Christ, as the "Sacred Love" who alone can engender brotherly love and unity among Christians, and as the "Highest Comfort" who alone can give us courage in the face of the severest trials. With these additional stanzas Luther makes the prayer very specific, and so the worshipping Christian is effectively reminded of the many blessings brought to him by the work of the Holy Spirit. Again Luther produced the ideal congregational chorale, this time making use of an existing German hymn and expanding it to greater usefulness for the Christian Church.

The melody of this hymn is again perfectly mated to the text. It bears the marks of noble simplicity as befits the thoughtful and humble prayer. It shifts back and forth between triple and duple meters as if it were deliberately trying to avoid showing any regular metric recurrence and were intent only on following the thought and no artificial syllable arrangement. Furthermore, we have in this melody only the simplest of melodic progressions — scalewise or by small skips of a third. Even the tonality, Ionian mode or major key, is the most natural known to us (in spite of the fact that it was one of the last discovered or identified by the musical theorists). All these features combine to furnish for this excellent text a simple but substantial and noble melody. Again text and melody form an inseparable unit.

### 1.3 IN THE MIDST OF EARTHLY LIFE

In the hymn before us we again see Luther in his role as hymnologist, preserving, editing and expanding a hymn of considerable antiquity even in his own time. Apparently the basis upon which Luther built this wonderful chorale was one of several available German versions of the old Latin hymn *Media vita in morte sumus* ("In the Midst of Life We Are in Death").

This Latin hymn is interesting because of the way in which it evolved from the liturgy of the church. Whether or not it is true that a certain monk, Notker Balbulus (d. 912) of the monastery of St. Gall in the Swiss Alps, is the author of the Latin hymn makes very little difference now, but the manner in which he or someone else

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<sup>1</sup> *The German reads: "Wenn man singt 'Nun bitten wir den Heiligen Geist,' so bringt uns das Korn am allermeist."*

brought the stanza into being is of interest to us. This hymn was originally conceived as a form of interpolation in the liturgy of the Catholic Church. In that liturgy the gradual or antiphon was sung between the gospel and epistle on festal days with the word Hallelujah. Since the urge on the part of composers and choirs to beautify the public worship with new and more "human" music was constantly repressed through a strictly enforced ban on any additions to the traditional liturgical music, musicians had to content themselves with a procedure which brought them at least a measure of satisfaction and which could be rationalized as representing no infraction against the code of tradition. They resorted to the practice of sustaining the last syllable of the word Hallelujah, first on one tone, then on a short series of tones, that had the effect of deferring the final cadence somewhat. But such a series of tones would grow longer and longer, and as it grew, legitimate standing was, tacitly at least, accorded to it. Before long the product of the efforts of these church musicians carried its own name, *Sequentia*, or sequence. When composers had once gained this outlet, there was no convenient way of checking their inspiration and their enthusiasm, and soon the syllable "jah" was sung to very lengthy, jubilant melodies expressive of the new freedom. Presently, however, these sequences turned into a real problem for the composers—choirmasters themselves, for the boys in their choirs began to have trouble remembering these long series of tones without the help of a text or even adequate notational systems. Consequently, the mnemonic aid of a Latin text was furnished by the choirmaster, and naturally an effort was made to use words which would most easily suggest the mood of the melody and which were in keeping with the liturgical season for which it was written. Out of this combination of text and melody there grew a product which needed only to be served from its liturgical origin to become a new and independent song, complete with a legitimate place in the service and in the liturgical season. The further addition of rhythm and rhyme transformed many sequences into very beautiful and very popular hymns. One of the best and most popular was *Media vita in morte sumus*.

So well known and appealing was this sequence that, considerably before Luther's time, German translations of the text appeared and the sequence had risen to the rank of an independent hymn. But in the form in which it came into Luther's hands, the hymn was a prayer for preservation, especially from physical death. In fact, it is a matter of record that it was used not only as a funeral hymn, but that it was often sung before battle, yes, that it came to be looked upon as a kind of chant of divination by which one might not only avert one's own death, but by that very token invoke death upon the enemy. On account of such abuses the church eventually had to forbid its use entirely.

Luther changed all that by giving to the hymn an entirely new character. The death of which his revision speaks is death eternal, damnation. It is eternal hellfire that lies in wait for us every hour of our lives, yes, even during the best hours, the midst of life. Once that is clear and the fear of that death has brought repentance to utter a plea for help, from that point on, Luther's hymn is a hymn of life, not of

death. When Luther prays, "Save us lest we perish / In the bitter pangs of death!" it is not preservation from physical death that he has in mind, but salvation from eternal perdition. Lest that first stanza, even in its revised form be misunderstood, Luther added two stanzas of his own composition, and in these he made very clear reference to the real death that plagues mankind. But that reference, too, is secondary to the message of the hymn, namely that there is eternal life in store for us through the compassion of God as it expressed itself in the saving blood of Jesus Christ. The prayer then is that our gracious God may keep us in that saving faith and so make us confident of our salvation, of life eternal, even in the midst of death and the threat of eternal hellfire. Luther himself stated the point in one of his sermons as follows:

*When I am about to die, I must be able to say, "Yes! In the midst of death I shall find life. I shall die here; my Lord is with me." Thus the sense of the precious hymn we sing is actually changed from "In the midst of earthly life / Snares of death surround us" to "In the midst of earthly death/ Joys of life surround us."*

In our own time this hymn is heard practically only in connection with physical death. We ought to use it more among the living, for it touches directly upon the fundamental issues of eternal life and death, and these must be of prime concern for us. Sound bodies need spiritually sound minds.

The tune "Mitten wir im Leben sind" has been closely associated with Luther's text ever since the two were first published in Johann Walther's Geystliche Gsangbuchlin ("Little Hymnal") of 1525. This melody has no apparent connection with the melody that was responsible for bringing the Latin text into existence, but it seems to have been adapted from the melody of a thirteenth-century gradual. In any event, a happy union between text and tune has resulted. The directness of the text is well reflected in the simple and straightforward tune in the Phrygian mode. It is interesting and worthwhile to note how the highest tone in every phrase points either to him who saves us from damnation or to the cause of our sad state from which we seek deliverance, sin and death. Then note the contrast between the strong repeated phrases on "Holy and righteous God, Holy and mighty God," and the infinitely more tender "Holy and all-merciful Savior," and then, as if struck with awe at that combination, "Eternal Lord God!" And we must not neglect to appreciate how well the tune interprets that quiet, peaceful, confident refrain to all the stanzas, Kyrieleis, Lord, have mercy! Truly, this hymn must be reckoned among the best in our great chorale heritage.

## 2 CHORALES BY CONTEMPORARIES OF LUTHER

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# 2

Certainly the most effective step taken by Martin Luther toward the realization of his desire to provide suitable congregational hymns for the church of the Reformation was that he himself led the way in composing new hymns and in editing or translating appropriate hymns already in existence. Besides that, however, Luther tried in every way possible to enlist the services of all other poetic and musical talent that came to his notice, and so he urged many of his contemporaries to lend their gifts toward producing an adequate collection of hymns for the church. Thus in 1524, the year in which his own hymns first appeared in print, Luther wrote to his friend Georg Spalatin, "We are looking everywhere for poets. Since you use the German language so masterfully and are so eloquent in it, I beg you to assist us in this matter and to versify one of the psalms after the pattern of my own work enclosed herewith as an example." And Luther was not content to assume that his good friend would, without further instruction, produce the kind of hymn that would be ideal for the church. Therefore the letter continues, "But I should like to urge you to avoid the new literary style of the court in order that your words may reflect the simple and homely concepts of the common people and yet may move along in a clear and artistic manner and give adequate and unmistakable expression to the true sense and spirit of the psalm." Upon many of the hymns called into being by his example and encouragement Luther placed his own stamp of approval by including them in the various hymnals in the publication of which he had a part. We must not assume, however, that the contemporary hymns not included in Luther's hymnals did not have his approval. Many of these undoubtedly never came to his attention.

### 2.1 MY SOUL, NOW BLESS THY MAKER

In his commentary on Psalm 103, the Lutheran theologian Martin Chemnitz (1522-1586) tells us that this hymn, based on Psalm 103, was written by Dr. Johann Graumann in 1525 at the request of Count Albrecht of Brandenburg. Graumann joined the Reformation soon after the conclusion of the Leipzig Disputations (1519), where he had served as the secretary to Dr. Eck, Luther's Catholic opponent. After several years as rector of the famous St. Thomas School in Leipzig, Graumann came to Wittenberg to get into personal contact with Luther and Melanchthon. He then served as a Lutheran pastor successively in Wuerzburg, Nuernberg, and Koenigsberg until his death in 1541. Although only this one hymn is now assigned to him, it is evident that he wrote a goodly number of them, for fifty years after his death he was still referred to as the "Prussian Orpheus." It is possible that the melody of our chorale is also the work of Graumann. Chemnitz describes it as "a joyful tenor, which, like the words, can awaken and delight the heart."

This hymn is a truly majestic metrical paraphrase of Psalm 103, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: all that is within me, bless his holy name!" Stanzas one and two present a

recital of the marvelous works of God wrought in our behalf. Notice the order of climax in the first stanza: “maketh thee partaker of mercies,” “still bears with all thy sin,” “healeth all thy weakness,” “renews thy life within,” “whose grace and care are endless.” The original German version shows this climax still more clearly. The music aptly follows that rise in emotion as phrase upon phrase heightens the effect. The last two lines in each stanza form a kind of coda, a short summary of what has been carried out in the stanza or a statement of the result of what has been said. Likewise in the music one feels that conclusive force of the last two lines. A special rich effect is attained by the telling contrast between stanzas three and four. It is worthwhile to give some time and thought to a comparison of the third stanza’s accent on man’s utter weakness and the fourth stanza’s brilliant description of the mercy of the Lord. After an exhortation that the angels in heaven sing praises to God, the poet, like the psalmist, closes his hymn with an emphatic repetition of the words with which the hymn began. About 1550 a fifth stanza was anonymously added to our hymn. Whoever added it caught the mood and style of the first four stanzas very well. This added stanza reminds one vividly of the medieval custom of embellishing and prolonging the last tone of sequences. It is an extra stanza, an appendage, but a marvelous one. It contains a doxology, a prayer and a mighty amen. Unfortunately we do not have this stanza in translation. This chorale is a fine example of the hymns that were called forth by Luther’s example and encouragement.

## 2.2 IN THEE, LORD, HAVE I PUT MY TRUST

“A wonderful and unparalleled hymn of comfort” — such is Daniel Seiffert’s estimate (1704) of this chorale by Adam Reusner (1496-1575). By 1533, when this chorale was written, Reusner had experienced a great variety of hardships; he had, in fact, led a very stormy life as the personal secretary of General Georg von Frundsberg. Upon his return from the campaigns of his general, Reusner had become intimately acquainted with Kaspar Schwenkfeld and apparently remained an adherent to the mystic spiritualism of his friend. But in spite of the fact that Luther knew of Reusner’s adherence to Schwenkfeld’s heresy, he recognized the merits of this hymn and included it in the so-called Bapst Gesangbuch of 1545.

This chorale is a paraphrase of Psalm 31:1-5. Each sentence of the psalm is represented by one stanza, and the seventh stanza forms a closing doxology. While the language of the hymn is emphatically personal, its meaning is truly universal. Even though the author’s own stormy life is reflected in every phrase, the reader will know that that is typical of the Christian’s sojourn upon earth even as the original words of David’s psalm mirror not only the troubles and afflictions which beset him but also those of every Christian. Who does not have to pray this confident prayer every day?

The melody now associated with Reusner’s chorale is anonymous and was first used with this hymn in 1581. Its ruggedness is well suited to the text, and although

the tune is at first rather hard to remember, it is never again forgotten when one has once learned it and has come to appreciate how well it reflects the bold confidence of Christian prayer. We need to revive this fine chorale in our congregations.

Of the three dozen chorales which Luther prepared for the Lutheran Church we may assume that perhaps not quite a third are in common use in most of our congregations today. Under more ideal circumstances, a few congregations may—especially since the introduction of *The Lutheran Hymnal*, which contains twenty-two of Luther’s hymns—be able to sing about one-half of the splendid chorales of the founder of our church. When we compare these estimates with the number of such chorales actually in use in Germany, the land of the Reformation, and find that, except in Luther’s own century and since the remarkable revival of the latter half of the 19th century, many of Luther’s hymns were neglected and unknown where our problem of language and translation did not even enter in, we may feel inclined toward the conclusion that our record is very good. In fact, however, it is not. When we reflect that our time is heir to all the blessings of the restudy and revival of Lutheran hymnody which began in the latter half of the 19th century and continued in Germany up to the beginning of the late war, and when we remind ourselves of the splendid opportunities for music education which have been available to the average person in our country for many years, we may well wonder why we did not include all of Luther’s chorales in our recent hymnal or why we do not more generally and more often sing at least those contained in the hymnal.

May the present studies be of some help and encouragement toward reviving among us an interest in some of the forgotten chorales of Luther so that efforts might be made in our schools and churches to recapture the priceless Lutheran heritage which these represent.

#### 3.1 MAY GOD BESTOW ON US HIS GRACE

Since this is written in the midst of our Mission Festival season, it is appropriate that we begin with the discussion of a chorale especially suited to this season, the first missionary hymn of the Lutheran Church, *Es wollt uns Gott gnaedig sein* (“May God Bestow on Us His Grace”). Obviously Luther recognized the great mission opportunity and responsibility of the newly-formed church very early, for this is one of the first of his chorales written specifically for congregational singing. Its date, quite unlike those of the other hymns of Luther, is known fairly exactly, January 18, 1524. It is first quoted at the close of Paul Speratus’ monograph entitled *Ein Weise christlich Mess zu halten* (*The Proper Way to Conduct a Christian Mass*), which was a translation of Luther’s *Formula Missae et Communions*. Some rather interesting inferences may be drawn from the fact that the chorale made its initial appearance at the conclusion of Luther’s first order of the service. Something of Luther’s intention for this chorale may thus be learned. This hymn was written for use in congregational worship, yet not for a special festival (Mission Festivals did not exist in Luther’s day), but for the close of the regular Sunday service. The fact that Luther suggested the use of

Psalm 67:7-8 as an alternate form of benediction in the Formula Missae, closing it with an Amen not contained in the psalm itself, coincides well with the use of the same material in stanza three of our hymn. Further proof for the fact that we have here the first "closing hymn" for the regular service is given by a Strassburg liturgy of 1525, which places the chorale after the sermon, and by a Nuernberg broadsheet, which assigns to it a place just before the closing benediction. We have, then, a hymn intended to be used regularly as the closing hymn and containing the thought of invoking our Lord's blessing upon ourselves with the purpose that we may, as we leave the house of God, carry God's "saving health" out into the world in order to show "Christ's riches" to the heathen and thus convert them to God. Could a more fitting thought for the close of worship be suggested? Is there another hymn that offers so grand a finale, particularly for a Mission Festival service?

Two widely different tunes for this hymn presented themselves in the year 1524. In Johann Walther's *Gesangbuechlein* ("Little Hymnal") a melody in the Dorian mode accompanied the text. This tune, however, very soon became more closely identified with Luther's baptismal hymn, *Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam* ("Christ Our Lord to the Jordan Came"). The tune which bears the name of our hymn appeared first in Strassburg and since 1543 has been the only melody associated with the text. This tune in the Phrygian mode is rather difficult for the memory at the first hearing, but its modal beauty and melismatic patterns never cease to grow for him who will go beyond a mere nodding acquaintance with it. For a quick sample of this beauty, consider the depth of comfort which the melody evokes from the words *gnaedig sein* (bestow on us his grace) in the first line, *hellem Schein* (brightness of his face) in the second, and *ew'gem Leben* (life eternal guide us) in the third; or if you must convince yourself in English (you need not be medieval or German to enjoy this), take the words "praise," "increasing," "fruit," and "blessing" of the third stanza.

How effective this chorale once was in the hearts of Lutherans can perhaps best be learned from the opposition shown to it by the Catholics in the 16th century. One chronicle reports that a certain citizen of Magdeburg, who promoted the sale of a printed sheet containing this hymn and *Aus tiefer Not* ("From Depths of Woe") and who attracted his customers in the city square by singing the hymns on the street-corner, was falsely accused to the burgomaster, who was just coming from attendance at early mass, and by him arbitrarily sent to prison without inquiry into the offense. In justice to the burgomaster, however, it should be said that he corrected matters a few days later upon the insistence of the salesman's friends. An even more reliable report of 1529 tells us that in two suburbs of Leipzig the priests forbade the people "to sing the German Christian hymn, 'May God Bestow on Us His Grace,' in church and at home." But the story of a failure of such tactics should also be added. In Wolfenbuettel the Catholic prince permitted the singing of several of Luther's hymns in his chapel. When a priest remonstrated with him concerning this practice and told him finally that the singing of such hymns could no longer be tolerated, the

prince asked, "Which hymns?" The priest answered, "My lord, it is called 'May God Bestow on Us His Grace.'" Whereupon the prince snapped, "Well, then, should the devil be gracious to us? Who can be gracious to us but God?" And the practice of singing Luther's hymns was continued in that particular chapel!

In seven years of Mission Festivals since the introduction of The Lutheran Hymnal the writer has heard only one congregation try to sing this chorale, and that congregation did it remarkably well, even without preparation. Shall we try to get away from Greenland's icy mountains and reinstate this Reformation gem? That would be another worthwhile project to complete for the centennial of an Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and who can estimate how much it would help the other projects?

### 3.2 WE ALL BELIEVE IN ONE TRUE GOD

In his effort to give to the Christian congregation further opportunities for active participation in the liturgy, Luther provided two splendid hybrid chorales, "Isaiah, Mighty Seer, In Days of Old" and "We All Believe in One True God." We call them hybrid chorales because to the question whether these chorales are predominantly liturgical chant or Christian folksong there is only the evasive answer: neither, yet both. Elements of both types of church song are plainly in evidence in these chorales, and the fusion of these types into one great new song is a rare artistic achievement. At least the latter of these liturgical chorales is, however, much neglected today and must be classed among the unfamiliar chorales of Luther. It is Luther's metrical version of the Nicene Creed and is often referred to as *Der grosse Glaube* ("The Great Credo").

Neither the Creed nor a metrical version of it was new or arresting in Luther's time. Joint confession of the Christian faith seems to have been a regular feature of public worship from the earliest Christian times; already the legends concerning the origin of the Apostles Creed indicate that very plainly. We may also assume that the custom of singing or chanting the Creed goes back to the first centuries of Christianity. Almost from time immemorial Latin creeds have been presented musically, and long before Luther's time even German metrical Credos were in use here and there. There is extant even now a German version which is traced to the beginning of the 15th century.

It was a long way, however, from translating the Creed into German metrical form to actually making the German version the standard of usage so that it might entirely eliminate the Latin version from the German service. To that step Luther's German version contributed much. Certain orders of the service extant from the 16th century show how Luther's German Creed gradually replaced the Latin version. A particularly interesting order of the service contains the following directions. "Then the priest (!) again turns to the altar and chants, 'Credo in unum Deum (I believe in one God).' Whereupon the students' choir sings the *patrem* (Creed) in Latin and then

joins the people in singing 'We All Believe in One True God' immediately after the Gospel." This document shows the transition from the Latin Credo sung by a choir to the introduction and the exclusive use of the German Creed as sung by the whole congregation. Thus our chorale becomes a regular feature of the liturgy.

From this specific use in the liturgy our hymn soon acquired a more general usefulness. It was to be expected that a hymn regularly sung and therefore generally familiar would be appropriated to ever new and different situations and occasions. It is interesting to note also that this chorale was always treated with special regard. Thus one order of the service accords it special distinction by specifying that this chorale should regularly be preceded by an organ prelude. Another stipulates, "If the Creed is sung in German, it should not be sung in alternation with the organ" (soll darunter nicht georgelt werden). The custom of alternation (according to which the congregation might, for instance, sing stanza one, the organ might interpret stanza two while the congregation followed the text silently, and the choir and the congregation might sing stanza three together) was not to be exercised with this chorale. No, the whole congregation should have the opportunity to confess the whole creed by word of mouth. Incidentally, this seventeenth century injunction might profitably be weighed today by those who insist on soft background music on the organ while the congregation speaks the Creed. About a hundred years after its introduction into the liturgical service our chorale was appropriated to so great a variety of uses that it became a matter of record to allow its omission from the liturgy. Soon it became a great favorite for Trinity Sunday and for funerals. Luther himself had included the chorale in the collection of funeral hymns which he published in 1542. Eventually this general use of the hymn for many varied occasions was again narrowed down, and "We All Believe in One True God" became the standard congregational hymn for Trinity Sunday.

Of the two melodies given in our hymnal the first has been the most common, if not the only, one in use in our congregations. It was composed in the 18th century. The second melody is much older, for it was used already with Latin text as early as the 13th century. This is the tune that Luther adapted to his German version of 1524. The original version of this melody in the sturdy and vigorous Dorian mode strongly emphasizes the objective character of Luther's versification of the Nicene Creed, and in spite of certain changes in our version of the melody that have taken away some of the modal flavor (especially the introduction of the more modern raised seventh step in the cadences), the tune as we have it retains a good deal of its solidity and strength. It will be worth the time and some trouble to learn to sing this sturdy confessional chorale in its original setting, for it is a heartening experience to sing it in the company of fellow believers.

## 3.3 IN PEACE AND JOY I NOW DEPART

No season of the church year received so much attention in Luther's hymns as the Christmas season. Of his thirty-six hymns only twelve are closely associated with festivals of the church year, but seven of these are Christmas hymns. It stands to reason, of course, that Luther, already because of the environment and experience of his own youth, should consider Christmas an emotional favorite over the other festivals of the church year. When we appreciate the dramatic way in which the whole Christmas story, with all its charming auxiliary characters, its engaging scenery and its imaginative and tender folk songs and carols, was annually presented to the people in cathedral and hamlet, we do not wonder that an alert and sensitive person like Luther, even in his mature years, never ceased to gaze with childlike awe and wonder at the miracle of Christmas. It was natural for the Christmas festival to take emotional precedence over all other church festivals, and it was inevitable that Luther's muse should stir and break out in Christian song most profusely at Christmas. Most of Luther's Christmas hymns have remained in constant use among us and through successful translations have weathered even our transition to English. One of them, however, together with its beautiful tune, has long been lost to most of our congregations and is only slowly coming back into use. It is the chorale for the post-Christmas season, "In Peace and Joy I Now Depart."

The very title of this chorale suggests its place in the Christmas cycle and recalls the story of old Simeon in the temple, rejoicing over the fulfillment of God's promise that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ and prophesying that the Child Jesus was the Savior of all the world, both Jew and Gentile. Luther's chorale is a free versification of the familiar liturgical *Nunc Dimittis* (TLH, page 29), Simeon's hymn of thanksgiving and prophecy (Luke 2:29-32). In Luther's own orders of the service the *Nunc Dimittis* is not included, but that does not mean that he would have objected to its inclusion in the liturgy. There can be no doubt, however, that he considered a free metric version of Simeon's words more valuable for congregational use than a chant setting. The same attitude called forth some of his other hymns based on liturgical pieces, e.g., "Isaiah, Mighty Seer, in Days of Old" (*Sanctus*). Luther apparently adhered to the principle that a good free versification sung to a sturdy metrical tune is better for congregational use than a prose translation used with the chant originally conceived for Latin words. It is good to remember this in a time when a strong emphasis on liturgical music makes itself felt.

Our hymn is among the first from Luther's pen to appear in print. Together with five Latin hymns and thirty-one other German hymns, twenty-four of which were Luther's own, our chorale was first published in the well known "Geistlich Gesangbuechlein" ("Little Hymnal") of 1524, the first hymnal for which Luther himself wrote the preface. In that hymnal, too, the only tune generally associated with the text and apparently of Luther's own composition was first introduced. Thus our hymn, both text and melody, was born of that first fervor and urge of Reformation

times to furnish spiritual songs for the people to sing in the public worship. That was the year of the first flowering of the activity which Luther had unwittingly foretold in the opening and closing lines of his first song, the ballad on the execution of two martyrs of Christ in Brussels, 1523. The prophetic lines are worth quoting:

*Today we sing a new song  
With the blessing of God our Lord.  
Summer is coming, Winter is gone,  
Flowers are blooming all over.  
He who has begun this work  
Surely will complete it.*

And lest we assume that our modern neglect of this chorale is evidence of the fact that the hymn itself lacks staying qualities and represents a kind of immature success only, we ought to consider that Luther and his contemporaries did not weary of the hymn and that subsequent editors of German hymnals regularly included it in their publications.

It is interesting to note how effectively Luther's melody helps the thoughtful worshiper to interpret the text. The joyous and confident faith which prompted Simeon of old to speak the *Nunc Dimittis* is immediately reflected in the first line of the text and in the assured Dorian mode supporting the text. One cannot help noticing the rightful close proximity and relation between "Peace and joy" and the idea of departure—death. Only to him who through faith in the Christchild has learned to know true eternal values and relations are these terms reconcilable and compatible in one and the same phrase. But even that knowledge may become a mere theological abstraction if we are not emphatically reminded that it finds practical application in individual lives, our lives. That necessary and wholesome reminder is unmistakably present in both text and melody: in the text through the bold use of the pronoun "I," in the music through the sudden, surprising upward leap of the melody to the same pronoun. Universal death is a highly individual and personal matter! But the object is by no means to frighten the believer. Once attention has been called to the pronoun "I," the melody pursues a composed and sure path on the words "now depart." There is in neither text nor melody any notion of fear, regret or uncertainty. Neither can there be, for the future has confidently been entrusted to God himself. Here the calm boldness of faith is admirably pictured in the tune. Unfortunately our version in *The Lutheran Hymnal* does not show the momentary apparent uncertainty suggested by the original melodic wavering (b a b) on the second syllable of the word "disposing" (Luther: *Wille*). It is just that inscrutable will of God, which to us here on earth often (especially in the face of death) seems devious and illogical; it is his "disposing" upon which faith relies. That is the miracle of faith. And so our chorale proceeds to describe the comfort derived from this trust. Note how beautifully the melody interprets the relaxing rest expressed by the words "soft reposing" (Luther: *sanft und stille*). And again the miracle of faith is emphasized, for even in the face of death

the Christian heart proclaims with irrepressible joy, "So the Lord has promised me," and the melody carries this message forward on two positively jubilant motives mounting in intensity and suggesting by their skipping rhythm what Paul Gerhardt wrote a hundred years later:

*My heart for joy is springing  
And can no more be sad,  
Tis full of mirth and singing,  
Sees naught but sunshine glad.  
The Sun that cheers my spirit  
Is Jesus Christ, my King;  
That which I shall inherit  
Makes me rejoice and sing.*

And death? With perfect calm the Christian heart agrees with Simeon, "And death is but a slumber," and on these words the melody, too, calmly and quietly goes to its close.

The remaining three stanzas equally beautifully carry out the rest of Simeon's message, and the whole hymn is a wonderful devotion. Luther realized that this chorale also serves well as a funeral hymn and therefore included it in the collection of funeral hymns which he edited in 1542. If we have deprived ourselves of the use of this splendid chorale by our neglect of the past, let us strive now to recapture this gem. Our hymnal presents it to us in a translation of extraordinary fidelity.

### 3.4 O LORD, LOOK DOWN FROM HEAVEN, BEHOLD

At this time of the year when the Reformation festival and the anniversary of Luther's birth are still fresh in our minds, we shall do well to remind ourselves that Luther's pen provided more than one hymn appropriate to this season. To be sure, the Reformation Festival without the singing of "A Mighty Fortress" would be unthinkable among us; but the exclusion or neglect of Luther's other Reformation Chorales is at least unthinking, for without these we miss a good deal of the spirit which by the grace of God was Luther's and must be ours today if we are to follow in his footsteps. We must remember that Luther was never a self-appointed and self-reliant iconoclast who decided on his own initiative to begin a reform or to organize a protestant church. It was God himself who was at work in Luther's innermost conscience and by his Spirit drove Luther to assume the leadership of the reform movement. And when Luther had once launched his protest, there was no further room for retreat, for the Gospel Truth stirring in his heart was too powerful to lie suppressed longer, it is safe to say that Luther himself had no estimate of the tremendous avalanche he set in motion until quite suddenly, about 1523, he found that a new church had been born, a church which looked to him for leadership. The impact of this realization must have inspired many moments of fear and trepidation in Luther, for if

ever a man was fully conscious of the true meaning of the words, "With might of ours can nought be done, soon were our loss effected," it was Luther. How often he compared himself to David, surrounded by bloodthirsty enemies, and how diligently he studied the Psalms for his own comfort! It is not surprising that some of his best chorales were based on psalms of David. Two of these chorales, both fitting commentaries on the lines of "Ein' feste Burg" quoted above and therefore highly appropriate to the present time, unfortunately are almost entirely unknown in our congregations today. Both are available to us in good English versions, and it remains for us to teach and to learn them again.

Among Luther's chorales based on psalm texts, "From Depths of Woe" and "O Lord, Look Down from Heaven, Behold" form a class by themselves. These differ from the other psalm chorales in their composition; they are metrical paraphrases, while the others might better be called metrical translations of the psalms. Neither inferior nor superior quality but merely a difference in kind is indicated by this distinction. The chorale before us must not be judged by the degree of its adherence to the syntax and diction of Psalm 12, but rather by its faithfulness in reproducing and applying in metrical form the whole message of the psalm. Like the psalm upon which it is based, our hymn is a devout prayer for deliverance from hostile human environment and an assurance that God will save his faithful believers from the oppression of the wicked. A comparison of Psalm 12 and Luther's paraphrase will show how well Luther understood the situation in which David wrote the psalm and how much Luther himself needed the comfort which both psalm and chorale offer. We who freely admit to one another that we are living in the last times have every reason to avail ourselves of the comfort offered by both the psalm and the chorale, but the chorale is doubly dear to us, for we can sing it!

When our chorale first appeared in print (1524), it had no tune of its own but was sung to the tune of "Salvation unto Us Has Come," as were several other psalm chorales of Luther. By the following year either Luther himself or Johann Walther had composed a new tune specifically for this hymn, but this melody was not to remain identified with the hymn for which it was written. Not until 1543 did the tune which eventually would bear the name Ach Gott vom Himmel ("O Lord, Look Down from Heaven") appear. It is another of those fine Reformation melodies with which our congregations are no longer generally familiar. Yet there is every reason to believe that our congregations will again treasure this splendid chorale if they will have the opportunity to learn to sing it again as it was enthusiastically sung by our Lutheran forefathers through three hundred years.

### 3.5 IF GOD HAD NOT BEEN ON OUR SIDE

This chorale is a wonderful complement to the one just considered. Here we have the Christian's grateful acknowledgement of his miraculous deliverance from the snares

of the enemy by the powerful and gracious hand of God. It is that comforting Psalm 124 (q.v.) applied to modern times and circumstances.

Luther was not the first to write a hymn based on this psalm. In a letter to Spalatin dated January 14, 1524, Luther writes, "I am sending you the poem of Provost Justus Jonas," and it seems almost beyond doubt that the reference is to Jonas' excellent hymn *Wo Gott der Herr nicht bei uns haelt* ("If God Had Not Been on Our Side"), based also on Psalm 124. The circumstance that the chorale appeared in print before Luther's by several months indicates that Luther had already seen his friend's hymn before writing his own. If this is true, a comparison of these two hymns is the more interesting, for Luther's great gift of contracting and compressing with high poetic vigor into a few compelling words what often took his learned friends very far afield is admirably demonstrated here. The hymn of Jonas has eight stanzas, as many as the psalm has verses, producing a hymn actually much longer than the psalm. Luther's version has only three stanzas, but it is in no way a condensation of his friend's work. It is an independent piece and reproduces the message, the arrangement and the very word pictures of the psalm more succinctly than the hymn of Jonas does. A single striking comparison will show Luther's poetic genius at its best:

Psalm 124:7: *The snare is broken, and we are escaped.*

Jonas: *He will tear us their snare And overcome their doctrine false.*

Luther: *The snare is broken — we are free!*

This line is perhaps the most effective one in all of Luther's poetry. Nowhere else is our truly miraculous escape from the evil intentions of our enemies brought to our attention with such direct and immediate effect. We stood condemned before our enemies (no matter now whether justly or unjustly), the inescapable noose hung about our neck, the trap was sprung but the noose broke, and we won a wondrous reprieve. No, we did not break the rope by the force of our fall, neither was the cord faulty; it broke because it was cut clean through by our God's miraculous intervention. We need to sing such words often.

On account of long neglect and disuse the melody for this splendid hymn may at first seem strange, but any Christian congregation interested in enriching its spiritual life and intent upon holding fast the Reformation heritage will find that this melody is really not at all difficult or troublesome and that any serious effort to revive this chorale is sure to bring much joy and comfort to our hearts. Both in text and tune this chorale has properties that can make it take a place among our favorites, and like other gold this chorale will grow brighter with use.

## 4 THE GREAT CHORALES OF LUTHER'S CONTEMPORARIES

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# 4

### 4.1 IN THEE, LORD, HAVE I PUT MY TRUST

Following the example and invitation of Luther, many of the Lutheran hymn-writers of the sixteenth century wrote hymns on the texts of the Old Testament psalms. The chorale before us is commonly considered one of the best psalm versifications of the Reformation period. It is based on the first five verses of Psalm 31 and constitutes an almost matchless hymn of comfort in trials and tribulation. The first six stanzas reproduce the thought of the psalm in remarkable detail, and the seventh furnishes the doxology often found in the last stanza of our hymns.

There is a good measure of similarity between this chorale and “A Mighty Fortress,” as indeed there is great similarity between the antecedent psalms of these hymns. Compare, for instance, the following lines:

*A mighty Fortress is our God,  
A trusty Shield and Weapon.  
Thou art my Strength, my Shield, my Rock,  
My Fortress that withstands each shock.  
The old evil Foe / Now means deadly woe.  
For woes and fear / Surround me here.*

In both chorales, as in both psalms (31 and 46), there is constant use of the description of earthly warfare to depict the seriousness, the danger, the anguish, but also the glorious victory involved in the good fight of faith.

This comparison must have been an especially lively one for the author of our hymn, for a brief look at this biography shows us how intimately he was acquainted with warfare of both kinds. Adam Reusner, a Bavarian, came to the University of Wittenberg to study, having been sent there by General Georg von Frundsberg as a companion to his son Melchior. (Frundsberg, incidentally, was the man who is supposed to have stopped Luther on his way into the convention hall of the Diet of Worms to encourage him with the words, “Monk, you are following a path more dangerous than any which it ever has been my lot or that of many another general to follow. If you are right and if you are sure of your case, proceed in the name of the Lord and be of good cheer, God will not forsake you.”) After studies in Wittenberg, where he had met Luther, Reusner returned to Bavaria to become personal secretary to that able warrior who had sent him to Wittenberg. The following years were full of continual danger for our author, for he traveled with the army of his general and even took part in many bitter battles fought in the rugged terrain of Northern Italy. But not only physical warfare was his lot. In his travels with Frundsberg he became acquainted with friends of Caspar Schwenkfeldt and through them became a close

friend also of Schwenkfeldt himself. On account of the spiritual mysticism of his new friend, Reusner had to experience much tribulation and vexation. Eventually he retired to his home town in Bavaria to spend quiet years in the study of the Scriptures. His fine Christian motto, composed by himself as the thought of his given name, was

*Life finds its death through Adam's plight;  
Death finds its life through Jesus' fight.*

Such was the author of our hymn. Certainly he was thoroughly and intimately acquainted with the war of spirit and flesh, and this experience is reflected in the confident and victorious prayer of faith which we have before us. And who of us does not have daily need to pray in the manner of this chorale?

Luther showed his appreciation of this fine chorale by including it in the last hymnal that was printed with his blessing, the Babst Gesangbuch of 1545. We need to make it our own again by learning to sing it anew. The melody is of later composition than the text. Certain striking similarities to Ein' feste Burg are interesting to note. The opening tones are in pitch the reverse of the corresponding tones of Luther's hymn, and the first phrase subsides upward to the tonic while Luther's comes down. The beginning of the fourth phrase shows a melodic ascent just like that over the words, "The old evil Foe." In general, this melody, like Luther's, will be found to inspire the rugged confidence that is born of faith and is so eloquently expressed in our text. We should not continue to deprive ourselves of this great chorale.

#### 4.2 PRAISE GOD, THE LORD, YE SONS OF MEN

With the exception of Luther himself, probably no hymnwriter of the Reformation period wrote so ably for children as did Nikolaus Hermann, the friendly little teacher and cantor in the charming foothill country of Joachimstal in Bohemia. Within a few weeks Christians the world over, both young and old, will again sound forth the happy strains of this teacher's joyous Christmas chorale, the subject of this study, and among all the hymns and carols of the coming Christmas season, none will be found more adequate to express the intimate childlike happiness which belongs to us, the children of God.

A few words about the author and composer of our chorale will add to our appreciation of his composition. Nikolaus Hermann was born three years before Luther and died fifteen years after him. He spent almost his entire lifetime in the little mountain valley of Joachimstal, serving there for forty years as master of the Latin school and as cantor in the church. His finest quality was his devotion to the Christian education of the young, and this special interest of his needs to be considered in a study of any of his 176 hymns. All of his work as poet and musician was calculated to serve educational interests. Thus we have it on his own statement that all of his hymns were written for the children of his school, not for congregational use. We can understand why he should be so explicit in stating that. Being of an age with Luther, he

was by training deeply rooted in the Gregorian tradition. Congregational participation in the public service, especially congregation singing of rhythmic and lyric hymns in the vernacular, must for a long time have seemed a strange impropriety to one who had been trained in the traditional clerical chant which had formerly reduced the congregation to silence. That he should have furnished hymns to break this tradition was more than his original intention. He had written his hymns for the spiritual welfare of his school children. Yet they had always had an intimate connection with the church service, for he had made it his special business week after week to paraphrase in metrical hymns the Scripture lessons and even his pastor's sermons so that he might let his children sing during the week what they had heard in church on Sunday. In all his work he was first and foremost a teacher.

It stands to reason that hymns so conceived should often reveal a pedantic strain. "If you shake the tree hard enough, the unripe fruit will fall, too." Thus Hermann became deeply interested in the work of the Meistersingers and in many of his hymns imitated the formal and stylistic pedantry of those tradesmen-singers. It is to be noted, by the way, that, in spite of the modern glorification of the meistersingers, the familiar jingle concerning one of the most celebrated of them, Hans Sachs was a cobbler—and also a poet,<sup>2</sup> was not entirely slanderous. But in spite of occasional pedantry, Hermann everywhere reveals that he understood the emotions of children and was able to make effective use of this knowledge in his hymns. Certainly he was a man of the people and possessed the common touch to a remarkable degree. It follows that his hymns achieved great popularity within a short time. Three of his best hymns are still in use among us: "That Easter Day with Joy Was Bright" (WS 737), "When My Last Hour Is Close at Hand" (TLH 594), and the hymn under discussion.

In our chorale particularly, one cannot help observing Hermann's keen appreciation of the thoughts and emotions of children. In both text and melody (for he wrote both) there is apparent a straightforward and ingenuous simplicity, a truly homely style, and an unmistakable attention to picturesque detail. All these characteristics captivate the hearts of children, nor are childlike Christians in their adult years insensible to the same charms. Here is a short, lively, and joyous hymn commemorating the miracle of Christmas, showing in simple and graphic detail the evidences of our God's great love and calling upon all to join in praise and thanksgiving for this great gift.

Let us observe the striking contrasts which describe our Lord's coming into the flesh. The first and last stanzas of the chorale emphasize the reopening of the door to Paradise to send the Savior forth into the world and to receive those who have been redeemed by his coming. Now, children understand open doors from which warmth and love and a hearty welcome emanate, for they have made experiments in this matter in their own neighborhood. An open Paradise without forbidding angel or

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<sup>2</sup> *In German: "Hans Sachs war ein Schumacher and Poet dazu."*

inquiring porter is to them and to us all the perfect picture of welcome. The intervening six stanzas present the Savior's mediating humiliation which effectively opened the door of Paradise and wrought this welcome. But unlike our protracted explanations, these stanzas are direct, brief, and immediate in their effect. Quick strokes of the pen present the following vivid scenes: the Son of God born a humble, helpless infant, the Creator become a lowly servant, the Object of the angels' wonder nestling at a human mother's breast, the prophesied Lion of Judah come to claim his kingdom, the majesty of God clothed in our flesh, the child Jesus become a servant in order to make us lords. This series of marvelous contrasts is indeed the source of the wonder and joy that make Christmas a very special festival, and the older we grow and the longer we gaze at the miracle of the Savior's coming, the more our wonder grows until the full grandeur and majesty of it all will burst in upon us at our final entrance to Paradise. All this and inexpressibly more is contained in those simple stanzas. To children and to all whose faith is childlike and whose eyes are not blinded by unbelief this chorale will seem ever new and filled with splendid miracles year after year.

The tune speaks for itself. Its simplicity both as to form and melodic progression, its happy rhythmic gait, its emphasis upon fundamental tones (tonic and dominant), and its repeated last line match the profoundly simple text perfectly.

How did this hymn intended for children become a favorite congregational chorale? The children grew up, but by the grace of God they chose to remain childlike in their appreciation of the miracle of Christmas!

#### 4.3 ALL GLORY BE TO GOD ON HIGH

#### 4.4 LAMB OF GOD, PURE AND HOLY

Nikolaus Decius, like Luther, had been a monk and had risen to the position of provost in his cloister. Already in 1522 he left the monastery and joined the Reformation movement. After a year's service as teacher in St. Catherine's School, Brunswick, a school conducted by another former monk, G. Crusius, Decius went to Stettin to work there as an evangelical preacher together with a certain Paulus von Rhode. But Stettin was still predominantly Catholic, and the preachment of the gospel of the Reformation was coupled with considerable hardships for Decius and Rhode. The Catholic clergy tried repeatedly to convince the duke to exile them or at least to forbid their preaching, but the duke declined though he was Catholic himself. Before long the evangelical preaching had gained so large a following that the two Catholic churches together with all equipment down to vestments and bells had to be granted for use to Decius and Rhode at a stated hour each Sunday. By 1535 these same churches became entirely Lutheran, and Decius and Rhode became the regular pastors of St. Nicholas' and St. James' respectively. When Decius died suddenly in 1541, there was some suspicion and rumor that he had been poisoned by his Catholic opponents, but this charge still lacks confirmation and is probably not true.

Decius is remembered by us today for two of three hymns which he wrote for his congregation in Stettin. Following the suggestions which Luther had set forth in *Deutsche Messe* (1526), he deleted from the Catholic Mass only those items which were contrary to Scriptures. Thus when Decius celebrated mass (they continued to call it that) in the priestly robes of his Catholic opponents in Stettin, he retained a good deal of the Catholic liturgy, particularly such parts as were untouched by Roman abuse. But in his liturgy these traditional parts lost their traditional appearance, for Decius translated them to Low German and prepared them for the use of the congregation. In this manner *Gloria in excelsis*, *Sanctus*, *Agnus Dei* eventually made their way into the High German *Allein Gott in der Hoeh' sei Ehr, Heilig uns Gott der Vater, O Lamm Gottes unschuldig*. The second of these translated versions is no longer in use among us; the other two have for four hundred years remained favorites and have been translated into many languages, even into Hebrew.

The text of "All Glory Be to God on High" is an amplification of the glorious message of the angels on the plains of Bethlehem. This message the Christian Church has always treasured. It is said, for instance, that a form of this *Gloria* was the usual morning song of the early Christians in the days of persecution, when the mere singing of it might well bring martyrdom in its wake and often did.

There are four stanzas in Decius' hymn, the first stanza in praise of the Godhead generally and then one each of the three persons of the Holy Trinity. The hymn does not, however, follow the text of the Latin *Gloria in excelsis* as closely as does Luther's "All Glory Be to God Alone" (TLH 238). Perhaps that is the reason why Luther never included Decius' hymn in any of his hymnals, for it is hardly possible that a man so deeply interested in new hymns as Luther was did not become acquainted with it.

The text of "Lamb of God, Pure and Holy" is based on the exclamation of John the Baptist, "Behold the lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Ever since early Christian times these words have been a part of worship forms. They are present in the early morning hymns of the Eastern Church, and to pray to Jesus as the Lamb of God in connection with the breaking of the bread in Holy Communion was a regular custom both in the East and in the West. In early Christian times already it was ordained specifically regarding the *Agnus Dei* that it should be sung by the celebrant and the people jointly. Thus Luther again reminds us of this and other ancient uses, saying, "Who doubts that these liturgical parts which today only the choir sings were at one time sung by all the people." It was Luther who returned to the people the singing of the *Agnus Dei*, first in the German liturgical version (*Christe, du Lamm Gottes*) and then also in the chorale form of Nikolaus Decius. It is but natural that the verse form should closely resemble the obvious reference to the Holy Trinity already present in the liturgical form, for there can be no doubt that the hymn was conceived as a substitute for the liturgical *Agnus Dei*. Thus we have in our hymn as in the liturgical *Agnus Dei* three identical stanzas with the single variation at the close of the last stanza, "Thy peace be with us, O Jesus!"

It is likely that Decius furnished also the tunes for both of these chorales. Both melodies are said to be based on previous plain chant tunes, and certainly the melismatic flourishes of "Lamb of God, Pure and Holy" on the words "holy" and "lowly" indicate Gregorian antecedents. In "All Glory Be to God on High" the Gregorian ideal of diatonic progression, broken only by a single small skip of a third per phrase, is evident. Obviously both text and melody were conceived liturgically. That both hymns have long since left their liturgical station and have become regular congregational hymns for seasonal or general use is a development observable in many other great chorales.

#### 4.5 WHEN IN THE HOUR OF UTMOST NEED

Although the principal concern of the hymnwriters of the Reformation period seems to have been to furnish congregational hymns for the Sundays and festivals of the church year, Luther and his contemporaries appreciated the need, too, of chorales that were not bound to a particular season but dealt with the trials and problems that beset the Christian at all times. This need was keenly felt particularly by the most prominent hymnwriters of that day because many of them were in the very forefront of the battle for the faith and knew at firsthand how little they could depend upon their own strength and how much they needed the comfort which only God's own assurance could give. Thus that great period of stress and strain brought forth chorales destined to bring the comfort of the Scriptures to millions of hearts in times of cross and tribulation. One of the best of these chorales is the subject of this study.

Certainly this hymn flowed from a background of rich Christian experience. The position of the author, Dr. Paul Eber (1511-1569), among the leaders of the Reformation is impressively delineated on a monument in the Parish Church of Wittenberg. This monument bears a representation of the vineyard of Christ in two pictures: at the left the papists are shown destroying the vineyard, uprooting the plants, breaking down the inclosure and choking the well; at the right one sees Luther and his friends restoring the vineyard—Luther is busy with the hoe, clearing away the rank growth; Melanchthon and Joh. Foerster are restoring the flow of the well. Bugenhagen and Cruciger are driving posts for a new inclosure, and Eber is tying up the tender grapevines.

But the picture does not show the school of Christian experience in which our Lord had trained his servant. A series of misfortunes struck Eber when at the age of twelve years he spent his first term at a Gymnasium away from home; his mother died, he himself became dangerously ill, and on his way home he accidentally sustained an injury that left him a cripple for life. Yet after a year of rest and recuperation Eber resumed his studies at the excellent new Gymnasium in Nuernberg. After completing the course of studies there he entered the University of Wittenberg, where he came into close contact with "the latter day Elias and Elisha," Luther and Melanchthon. "Elisha" took a particular interest in Eber and upon the young man's

graduation secured a teaching position for him at the university and made him his confidential secretary, so that Eber soon became known as "Philippi Repertorium," Melanchthon's treasure-chest. Luther, too, took a special interest in this promising young man. At an informal gathering Luther once prophesied that after his death evil days would descend upon his friends, and he admonished them to pray earnestly and unceasingly after his death. Thereupon he is supposed to have turned to Eber with the words, "Your name is Paul. May you grow into a true Paul and heed the admonition that you, after the manner of Paul, guard and uphold the doctrine transmitted to us by Paul!" In the great lectures on Paul's Epistles given in the university by Eber in subsequent years Luther's admonition bore rich fruit. But Luther's prophecy also came true. The Smalcald War, the pestilence, Eber's succession to the pastorate and superintendency of Bugenhagen and eventually to the theological leadership of Melanchthon, the cloud of cryptocalvinism, the Flacian controversy, all these and much family grief besides made up a severe school of adversity. Death came to Paul Eber as a result of an illness contracted on a journey to an unsuccessful theological discussion.

Our chorale sprang from the midst of these trying experiences. When Wittenberg was threatened during the Smalcald War, most of the members of the university fled the city, but Eber, Bugenhagen, and Cruciger remained in Wittenberg to await the Lord's decision. On Ascension Day, 1547, the order of captive Elector Johann Friedrich was received to the effect that the city be surrendered to the emperor. The citizenry was in a quandary: should they obey the order of their prince even though he was a captive of the enemy? A prayer of Bugenhagen, offered in a special service in those trying days, finds its echo in Eber's chorale, "Forasmuch as we in our day of trouble do not know what we should do, dear Father in heaven, we have recourse to only this that we lift our eyes to Thee. All those things upon which men rely we have had in great abundance, but we have come to nought; and in order that we may not take comfort in any creature, not in any work of man, Thou hast taken from us even our beloved Lord Elector. We thank Thee, dear Father, that Thou hast in mercy through this fatherly chastisement brought us to the realization that we ought to rely upon Thy mercy in Christ Jesus, as Thou didst ordain in the First Commandment. Thou hast thus achieved Thy desire among us; now keep Thy helpless children under the dispensation of Thy grace and send Thy Holy Spirit into the heart of our Prince, that Thou mayest give good counsel and we may be rescued." Upon repeated insistence of the Elector, the city surrendered, but the lives and property of the citizens were saved and even the freedom to preach the evangelical gospel was not denied.

Our hymn may not have been written in this particular crisis, for we do not know the date of its composition, but its message fits well into the circumstances of that incident. The prayer of Bugenhagen and that of the hymn are doubtlessly inspired by the prayer of old King Jehoshaphat of Judah (2 Chron. 20; p.v.). Lest we forget, like Jehoshaphat and like the Lutherans of the 16th century we today stand in need of miraculous deliverance. Our troubles are not necessarily of historical mo-

ment, but they are on that account no less real and dangerous for our souls, and this faithful prayer of our fathers is as timely now as it ever was.

## 5 GREAT CHORALES OF THE 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

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# 5

During the first half of the 17th century the inhabitants of Germany had every reason to believe that all four horsemen of the Apocalypse had come upon them at once, for conquest, war, famine, and death stalked through city and country almost without respite for thirty years. Amid such suffering one would hardly expect to find the arts in a flourishing state, yet it is a fact that poetry generally and hymnwriting particularly showed a remarkable vigor and productivity in this period.

There were two reasons for this surprising condition. First, the cruel hardships of the time led the faithful children of God more than ever to contemplate the one thing needful, and they who in spite of sore trials emerged victorious in faith felt an irresistible urge to sing about their victories in faith and their calm trust in God's promises. Everywhere David arose again to sing new psalms in praise of his Deliverer and in description of the woes from which he had escaped. This fact is stated pointedly by the 19th century literary critic Gervinus, who wrote, "No other circumstance promoted and advanced German religious poetry so much as the Thirty Years' War did, for it brought the sufferings of David home to the individual."

But suffering alone has never bestowed the gifts of poetry nor even an interest in it. We must add another circumstance which helped to bring about the unusual flow of poetry during this time. The interest in every kind of poetry ran very high in Germany during the first half of the 17th century because of the influence of certain newly organized societies of learned men which aimed at the improvement of the German language, particularly the language of poetry.<sup>3</sup> Through the influence of these societies a new enthusiasm for poetry was awakened and an entirely new language of poetry was begotten. In hymn-writing the fiery ordeal of the times fortunately guarded against the excesses of this enthusiasm and so managed to preserve a sense of reality and balance so that truthfulness of perception and expression were not lost. Thus a remarkable degree of sanity and sobriety is apparent in the chorales of this period, a time in which secular poetry indulged in purple artificiality.

### 5.1 ZION MOURNS IN FEAR AND ANGUISH

Perhaps the greatest and the most typical Lutheran hymnwriter of this time was Johann Heermann, the pastor of the little town of Koeben on the Oder River. The devastation of the war came to his door so often, and his whole life was so marked by hardship that one cannot help wondering how he found courage and the time to write four hundred hymns. Once almost all of Koeben was destroyed by fire, in one

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<sup>3</sup> One of the most prominent of these societies, the so-called FRUITSEARING SOCIETY, organized 1617 in Weimar, in existence until 1680, expressed its purpose as follows: "To preserve the character and understanding of the venerable German language in all its beauty and clarity, in speech, prose, and poetry."

year a pestilence took off over five hundred of Heerman's fellow townsmen, five times his town was overrun by roving armies, and each time our poet lost most of his household goods and barely saved his life in flight. At the age of fifty-one Heermann lost his voice and had to conduct his ministry through printed sermons. In almost his last year this faithful Lutheran pastor had to suffer the pain occasioned by his own son's conversion to Catholicism. Through the father's prayers and a series of letters, one of which was signed "Johann Heermann, whose soul is sorrowful unto death," the son was fortunately won back to his faith before the father's death. Such was the life of affliction of Johann Heermann, but in these trials immortal chorales were born, hymns which have since comforted untold millions of suffering children of God.

Of such splendid comfort in the midst of tribulation the hymn before us speaks. This chorale is a paraphrase of Isaiah 49:14-16, where Zion is represented as mourning because she feels that God has forsaken her. God himself speaks to Zion to comfort her and to assure her that he is always near and never forsakes those whom he loves with a love that far exceeds even a mother's love. The group of hymns to which this one belongs Johann Heermann entitled *Thraenenlieder* ("Sung with Tears"). This title is appropriate not only to the text of our hymn but also to the melody. The tune strikingly follows the text's somber mood and the suggestion of wailing, and we can almost see Israel sitting by the waters of Babylon and weeping at the thought of Jerusalem. But the same melody accompanies the change of thought and adequately sings of soothing kindness and understanding that turns hopelessness into glorious comfort.

Originally our hymn was sung to a different tune, one which the discerning ear of Johann Crueger found too light and gay for the mood of the text. Crueger therefore adapted the present melody from a hymn J. Hermann Schein had written for the funeral of his daughter. The new union was so successful that the melody was now always associated with the new text. Thus we have received one of the great chorales of comfort in tribulation, a faithful versification of a favorite Scripture for the afflicted. It is to be regretted that our hymnal omits the fourth stanza of the original hymn, for with it there is lost some of the striking contrast (Is. 49:15b), "Yea, they (i.e., mothers) may forget, yet will I not forget thee!" When all things go wrong and nothing stable seems left to us, when we are prone to cry out, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" then Isaiah 49:14ff. is our hope, and this chorale is our comfort.

## 5.2 O DARKEST WOE

"Doleful funeral hymn concerning the sad burial of Jesus Christ, to be sung on Good Friday." Such was the title under which Johann Rist (1607-1667) published our hymn in 1643. By way of further explanation he attached the following statement, "I came upon the first stanza of this burial hymn and upon its devotional tune quite by accident, and since I could not find further stanzas, I added seven of my own."

These introductory words are revealing. The nonchalance with which Rist refers to his own writing gives some hint of the ease with which he was able to produce such fine forms as the stanzas of this hymn. Rist is the author of 680 hymns! The unusual talent which brought forth this prodigious output showed itself in various ways already in the author's student days. While Rist attended five universities in his pursuit of the study of theology, he managed also to acquire very thorough training in the sciences and in medicine. Returning home from these studies, he brought with him the reputation of being a learned man and a poet of great skill. His intellectual vigor was such that even during his first years as pastor of a small town near Hamburg he carried on a wide correspondence with the important theologians of the day, engaging them in every kind of discussion and sometimes antagonizing them with his denunciations. Decorations and honors for brilliance in several fields came to Rist, and eventually he was raised to the eminence of nobility. Unfortunately this brilliance was accompanied by a streak of vanity, a fact that is borne out by nothing so much as by the organization and the behavior of a society of poets called the Elbe Swan Order. As chief organizer, Rist was, of course, the first president of the organization and as such he assumed all kinds of fanciful mythological titles such as "The Nordic Apollo" and "God of the German Parnassus." But in spite of this weakness of our poet we can appreciate the easy flow of his diction and the facility with which he manages meter and rhyme. A friend of his emphasized this poetic gift by using the letters of Rist's name anagrammatically to form the statement: *Es rinnt ja so* (It just keeps on flowing). And at that volume of production the quality was surprisingly high, for of Rist's 680 hymns 237 are supposed to have been very widely used in Germany. Even today our hymnal still has five of them.

One of the best of Rist's hymns is the Good Friday chorale before us. As Rist's own caption indicates, the first stanza is anonymous. It is this stanza which sets the pattern that is imitated throughout the hymn, and the pattern is so well maintained that one would hardly guess the truth of the hymn's genesis. But the anonymous first stanza fairly cries out a desire to have its incomplete thought carried out to greater length and fuller detail. God's Son—buried! That apparent contradiction needs further elaboration. And so the rest of the hymn shows how the death of God himself brought life again to us, the guilty, the damned; how the vicarious suffering and death of God's Son must surely move all mankind to mourn at the sight and thought of this passion but also to rejoice greatly over the accomplishment of salvation through this miracle. What more fitting close could be added than the last stanza's prayer that we might remain faithful to this Savior unto death?

The tune to which we sing this text is of unknown origin and is said to have been printed first in a Catholic hymnal of 1628. One easily notes the division of the melody into two parts, the first part of three phrases over which in most stanzas words of sadness and mourning are found; the second part, consisting of the last two phrases, which turns the former sorrow into joy and gratitude. The constant interchange be-

tween these two parts of the hymn provide an unusual dramatic feature which helps to impress upon our hearts the salutary tragedy of Calvary.

### 5.3 ON CHRIST'S ASCENSION I NOW BUILD

Like most of his contemporaries Josia Wegelin (1604-1640) suffered much during the Thirty Years' War. His particular hardship had to do with the quarrels over church property that developed in Germany as a result of change from Catholicism to Protestantism. Wegelin had been assistant pastor in the Franciscan Church of Augsburg for only two years when Emperor Ferdinand III, urged by the Benedictines, issued the Edict of Restitution. According to this edict, lands and properties formerly held by Catholic congregations were to be restored to the Catholic Church. Wherever the edict could be enforced by arms, the Protestants were not only ejected from churches and schools but also deprived of the income derived from church owned lands. Since Augsburg changed hands several times during the course of the war, Wegelin alternately fled and was recalled. Eventually he fled to a small town in Hungary where he spent his few remaining years before his untimely death at the age of thirty-six.

What interests us here particularly is the manner in which Wegelin kept in touch with his scattered former parishioners in Augsburg. Since it was quite impossible to make personal visits and since regular communication by letter was at best very difficult, he decided to bring the consolation of the gospel to his people by means of books. He therefore edited a prayer book and a book of devotions for them and into these he sprinkled many hymns of his own composition. Most of these hymns were written for special occasions such as holidays or for special events in the life of Christians. About twenty of them eventually found their way into most German hymnals. All of them were simple and straightforward, some of them even poetically faulty and rather uninspired. The borderline between sturdy, strong verse which deliberately overrides the bounds of poetical smoothness and weaker versification which unwittingly tramples upon these bounds is something very thin. The modern German version of our hymn is a later, improved version of the original, and yet one can find traces of poetic clumsiness in it. But on the other hand there are also present extremely felicitous expressions of such homely vigor that they have all but defied translation.

Of the twenty Wegelin hymns once in use we have retained for our use practically only the hymn before us. It is taken from the prayer book for Lutherans in Augsburg. Think of the great, good comfort which those poor oppressed and persecuted people must have derived from the blessed assurances which this hymn contains. How glorious is the reminder that our Savior's ascension guarantees our ascension after him, for Head and members belong together! And so we too do not seek our rest and comfort here upon earth but confidently look forward to the inheritance incorruptible already assumed by our Lord and prepared for us, for where our

Treasure is, there is our heart also! Sung to the happy tune “Dear Christians, One and All,” these thoughts are a blessed and heartening experience for all Christians. What a splendid reminder of our Lord’s ascension into heaven, whence he is daily dispensing great gifts and whither he will in his good time gather all his members!

#### 5.4 NOW THANK WE ALL OUR GOD

Martin Rinckart’s famous chorale, which in our time has become almost indispensable for Thanksgiving Day, is also the chorale most typical of the period of the Thirty Years’ War. The most romantic and the most widely publicized story connected with this hymn, namely, that it was composed for the celebration of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, is true only in part. Rinckart wrote this chorale in anticipation of the end of the war about 1643 or 1644, years in which Western Europe was buzzing with rumors of armistice and hints concerning peace feelers. Yet the essence of the usual reference to the Thirty Years’ War is certainly in place, for both Rinckart’s own experience and the internal evidence of the hymn point unmistakably to the great war. After about thirty years of war, bloodshed, and pestilence, physical and mental exhaustion was everywhere apparent, and Germany longed for the day of peace as never before. Great was the joy and the thanksgiving in the hearts of God’s people when eventual release from the war and its attendant misery began to be possible, then probable, and finally real.

Certainly Martin Rinckart was in a position to look forward with proper appreciation to the blessings which peace could afford. He is more than a contemporary or a fellow hymnwriter to Johann Heermann; he is above the latter’s fellow-in-misery. The thirty-two years of his ministry in his home town, Eilenburg, almost coincide with the years of the war. The walled city of Eilenburg was a natural haven for refugees and an obvious target of attack. Thus both the actual warfare and the attendant evils of famine and pestilence belonged to the daily experiences of Pastor Rinckart. It is a matter of record that eight thousand people died in Eilenburg in two years, among them all of Rinckart’s coworkers and his first wife. Rinckart’s own record speaks of his burying up to seventy people a day, 4,800 in a single year. In addition to his many pastoral duties, the management of the relief work in the city fell to his care, and the people of Eilenburg looked to him for leadership whenever negotiations between the town council and the generals, who in turn besieged the town, became necessary. Repeatedly Rinckart won unusual concessions in these negotiations. Yet the same town council ungratefully taxed Rinckart’s property out of his hands and permitted him to become destitute himself on account of his charitable distribution of all available food and clothing. But in spite of danger, ingratitude, hunger, and overwork, this pastor managed to find time to exercise his poetic gifts. The years of his ministry were the years of Reformation centennials, and he managed to commemorate many of them with appropriate hymns and dramas.

Our hymn is a versification of a passage found in one of the Apocryphal Books of the Old Testament, Ecclesiasticus or Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sirach, 50:24-26. Both the thanksgiving of the first stanza and the prayer of the second are taken from this source. To this is added a free Trinitarian doxology in the third stanza to complete our most widely used *Te Deum*, a chorale second in importance and popularity only to "A Mighty Fortress."

The simple and lively tune to which this chorale is sung is by that great melodist, the colleague of Paul Gerhardt at St. Nicholas Church in Berlin, Johann Crueger, the composer of a dozen of our best chorale tunes. In his collections the tune appears first in 1648, the year in which both text and melody were used at celebrations for the Peace of Westphalia. Ever since, this chorale has been a favorite at joyous celebrations of thanksgiving.

### 5.5 O LORD, WE WELCOME THEE

The same tune "Now Thank We All Our God" is used for another splendid chorale first published in the year of the Peace of Westphalia, 1648. It is one of the gems of the Christmas season and appropriately follows here upon the discussion of a hymn for Thanksgiving Day.

The author of the hymn, Dr. Caspar Ziegler of Leipzig, was a bit unusual in his poetry, for he did not follow the trend which was then fashionable among the poets of Germany. He did not, for instance, share most of the views of that much honored and much imitated reformer of German poetry, Martin Opitz. In fact, Ziegler did not even believe in the basic tenet of the followers of Opitz, namely, that the German language enjoyed a kind of natural superiority among the other languages because of a greater compatibility with poetic thought and mood. Ziegler frankly preferred Latin and Italian for the pure exercise of poetic talent, and his favorite form was the madrigal. When this poet then wrote German hymns, there could be no suspicion that these represented mere academic pursuits, poetic samplers. To be sure, his "Twenty Elegies concerning the Nativity, Passion, and Resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ" were received with admiration and were much studied by contemporary poets for the smoothness of their form and the felicity of their rhymes, but their really great merit lies in the simple, straightforward declaration of faith, in the childlike forthrightness upon which none of the artificial machinery of poetry is allowed to obtrude itself. So this chorale is as childlike as Christmas itself and completely lacks the pretenses of adulthood. There is no attempt to analyze the miracle of Christmas nor any effort to heighten the effect of the festival with romantic embellishment, but only that which alone can truly charm the soul, the awe and wonder at beholding the majesty of God concealed in the winsome Child of Bethlehem, our Savior, to whom we cling, on whom we depend, to whom we live, in whom we die, with whom we shall reign! To extend a happy welcome to that Child is the burden of our chorale.

## 6 LUTHER'S ADAPTATIONS FROM THE HYMNODY OF THE OLD CHURCH

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# 6

The year 1524 marks the rather sudden appearance in print of the bulk of Luther's hymns (24 of 36). In the four important hymnals of that year no information is given, however, regarding the date of composition or even regarding the chronological sequence of the hymns published. It is for that reason very difficult to trace Luther's own development as a hymnwriter, and questions about the immediate reason for his entry upon this work and regarding his mode of procedure are not easily answered.

The best theory so far advanced is that of W. Lucke,<sup>4</sup> who suggests that Luther was prompted to let his own productions appear in print because of certain publications got out by the fanatic Thomas Muenzer. In 1523 the latter had published a German liturgy and with it a collection of ten old hymns translated to German. Apparently, the quality of these displeased Luther, and the Reformer's criticism of them came to Muenzer's attention. At any rate, in the introduction to a further publication Muenzer tried to defend his former releases against "certain learned people who are jealous of my recent undertaking to publish German hymns and who are seeking to hinder me, charging that I am trying to reestablish papistic masses, matins, and vespers..." There can hardly be any doubt that Luther was the target of this rebuttal. The false charge that Luther's opposition to Muenzer's hymns was based on jealousy or on a suspicion that Muenzer was leaning back toward Catholicism may well have pricked Luther and his friends into action on a venture for which they must have been laying plans for some time. Thus the year 1524 produced the first four important Lutheran hymnals.

One of these hymnals of 1524, perhaps the second in point of order of appearance, the "Erfurt Enchiridion," contains among its twenty-five hymns eighteen of Luther's chorales. This book appeared in several editions in its first year and was intended for the use of congregations in following silently the text sung by the choir, so that, as the preface puts it, "Finally the common Christian assembly may gradually learn to understand what is being sung in church." A number of the hymns appearing in this hymnal were also to be had individually on large broadsheets, the "sheet music" of the sixteenth century. Among the chorales of Luther published here for the first time, two for the Communion Service engage our interest for the present.

### 6.1 JESUS CHRIST, OUR BLESSED SAVIOR

This chorale bears the subtitle *Das Lied S. Johannes Huss gebessert* (Hymn of St. John Huss, improved). It was thought that the original Latin version upon which Luther's work was based was written by the Bohemian martyr. It has since been established,

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<sup>4</sup> *Dr. Martin Luthers Werke, Weimar, 1923, v. 35, pp. 70-78.*

however, that the nine-stanza version contained in the published works of Huss is antedated by a ten-stanza version which does not mention the name of Huss and makes his authorship of the original doubtful. More interesting, however, is the remainder of Luther's title, *gebessert* (improved). A comparison between the old Latin hymn, whether in the Huss version or one of the others, and Luther's "improved" version plainly shows a marked difference of material and purpose. The similarity between the two is restricted to agreement of the general subject (Holy Communion) and of the opening lines. Beyond that the Latin hymn is a dogmatic recital of mystic powers of the host and of worship due the sacred element. The other element, the wine, comes in for only scant treatment in one version and is not so much as mentioned in another. Luther's chorale, on the other hand, is a congregational hymn intended to be sung as an act of worship preparatory to the reception of the Holy Sacrament, and it focuses the attention of the prospective recipient on the meaning of the solemn celebration and on the singular blessings to be derived from worthy participation in the same. Neither does Luther neglect to speak clearly concerning the reception of both the body and the blood of our Lord. Incidentally, our English version reduces the number of stanzas by the omission of stanzas six and ten, but the hymn overall is left undistorted. Thus Luther's *gebessert* means that he has completely remodeled the hymn to adapt it to a new use, preserving little more of the old hymn than the meter, the stanza, and the subject in general.

The melody used for this chorale in the hymnals of 1524 is one that goes back to 1400, but already in the Klug Hymnal of 1535 it was replaced by the melody which our hymnal carries today. The latest Choralbuch from Germany (1950), however, has gone back to the former melody.

## 6.2 O LORD, WE PRAISE THEE

Luther's procedure in adapting this hymn to the use of the Church of the Reformation was somewhat different from that employed for the chorale just described. Here Luther found an entire German stanza complete with melody ready at hand. Upon it he could build a wholesome new chorale of thanksgiving and prayer to be sung after the celebration of Holy Communion. But even that first given stanza had not everywhere been preserved in its original state of purity, and so Luther recommended it in his *Formula Missae* of 1523 with the following reservation, "It will be quite in place to sing the following hymn after communion, 'O Lord, we praise Thee, bless Thee, and adore Thee, etc.,' of course, with the following little omission:

*And the Holy Sacrament  
At our time of death,  
From the hand receiving  
Of th' ordained priest,*

which was added by some worshiper of St. Barbara<sup>5</sup> who, although considering the sacrament of little use during his lifetime, hoped by this good work, without faith, to enter into life, for both meter and musical consideration show these lines to be extra-neous.”

Although originally a hymn for the celebration of Holy Communion, this stanza had by the fifteenth century become more closely associated with the newly revived celebration of the Corpus Christi festival. Luther himself once quoted the stanza as proof for the fact that Holy Communion had been celebrated in both kinds in Germany long before the Reformation, for this traditional stanza plainly speaks of the reception by the laity of both the bread and the wine.<sup>6</sup>

The melody for this chorale which we still use today seems to have been known particularly well by the people of Luther's day, for the first Lutheran hymnals did not consider it necessary to follow the usual custom of printing the melody with the text of this hymn.

Formerly this chorale was regularly used after communion in our services, especially in German, but “Jesus Christ, Our Blessed Savior” was then not very common. Today almost the reverse is true. The latter hymn is now often sung, but “O Lord, We Praise Thee” tends to be neglected. And when we do sing it, we are so often restricted to the first stanza that the other two, Luther's splendid addition, are almost entirely unknown. Unfortunately, we do not miss what we have never seen!

### 6.3 ALL PRAISE TO THEE, ETERNAL GOD

An important source upon which Christians in the late Middle Ages based and built hymns for the people to sing in praise of God were the so-called sequences. The complete history of many individual sequences that survived until the time of the Reformation is still obscure, but all of them developed from a natural desire on the part of individual Christians to embellish and augment the liturgical chant prescribed by the Church. The process began in the earliest times when singers assumed the privilege of extending the last syllable of the liturgical response “Hallelujah” upon a series of tones improvised on the spot and, of course, promptly forgotten. Once the privilege was established and thought of as extending even beyond the limits of a singer's single breath, not only improvisation but planned musical composition over the syllable “-ah” became the rule. But composing long trains of melody was one thing; teaching them to others without benefit of an accurate notational system was quite another. This difficulty of transmission was eventually overcome when

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<sup>5</sup> St. Barbara is presumed to be able to afford protection against lightning and is also the patron saint of pyrotechnists. Does Luther here intend a double meaning—a man playing with “fire” by postponing repentance and one who is guilty of the “barbarism” of the addition to the hymn?

<sup>6</sup> *Luthers Saemtliche Schriften*, St. Louis, XIX, 1277ff.

someone hit upon the mnemonic device of adding a text to his melismatic effusions, a syllable for each tone, the whole text suggesting by its message the particular Sunday or festival for which the sequence was intended. Following as they did upon the Hallelujah of the liturgy, such combinations of melody and text were called *sequentiae*, or sequences. Further inventiveness substituted poetic meter and stanza forms for the prose texts, and eventually full-fledged Latin hymns found their way into a legitimate position in the service which meant to admit only Gregorian music. Such an assertion of individual liberty would, of course, tend to become extremely popular, and thousands of sequences were composed. Most of them, however, perished again for want of real theological and musical worth, but a small number not only survived but enjoyed a wide use and great popularity, especially among the laity, for whom these sequence hymns represented almost the only means of participating actively in the public worship. A final inevitable step in the development was the translation of sequence hymns from Latin into the vernacular.

Luther recognized the value of some of these sequences and sequence hymns. In fact, he found in them a convenient point of departure in building up the hymnody of the Reformation Church. Of the present hymn the first stanza represents the sequence heritage. This stanza must have been in use in German for at least 150 years before the Reformation, for even today a Low German manuscript of 1370 is extant which quotes the stanza as follows (confer stanza one of Hymn 80):

*Lovet sistu ihu crist, dat du hute gheboren bist  
van eyner maghet. Dat is war.  
Des vrow sik alde hemmelsche shar. Kyr.*

This is evidently a translation and verse adaptation of the old Christmas sequence *Grates nunc omnes reddamus*, which, translated, reads, "Let us all now give thanks to the Lord God, who by his birth has delivered us from the devil's power. To him we ought with the angels ever sing: Glory in the highest."

To this traditional stanza Luther added six stanzas of his own composition to produce a hymn of truly marvelous content and structural balance. The framework of this structure is formed by the first and seventh stanzas, which speak respectively of praise and joyous thanksgiving tendered to the Savior of the world. The midpoint between these two stanzas, the fourth stanza, is also the high point of the hymn, for here Luther deals with the real essentials of Christmas, the Eternal Light come into a world of darkness in order to transform children of darkness into children of Light! Here the glory of the Lord suddenly shines round about us! Stanzas two and three prepare us for a proper appreciation of this miracle by presenting to view the scene of Bethlehem: The Lord of the universe a helpless Child in a manger and in the arms of a human mother. On the other hand, stanzas five and six teach us to apply to ourselves the signal blessings and the full significance of the Christmas miracle. We are told that our Savior became a guest upon earth in order to make us heirs of his heav-

only kingdom, that he became poor in order to elevate us to riches unspeakable. Following the statement of these glorious truths the hymn ends as it began upon a note of joyous thanksgiving.

One cannot escape noticing Luther's deep concern for a true and blessed appreciation of the meaning of Christmas, God's merciful purpose to bring salvation to lost mankind through the Child of Bethlehem. In writing this hymn Luther was evidently moved by the same concern that is manifest in one of his Christmas sermons, in which he says, "Everywhere in the Scriptures but one thing is taught, and that is why I have said that one must know how to make the proper use of the birth of Christ?" In the same connection Luther refers to a number of fine Christmas hymns already in use, showing how well the true meaning of Christmas is expressed in them but complaining that "every one in the wide world sings this message, but no one believes it. They even fight against it, so that I am afraid Christ never suffers greater blasphemy than on Christmas Day. Therefore be sure that in your hearts, too, you speak and believe these precious hymns even as you sing them with your lips." With these words Luther laid down the principles which must govern the composition as well as the proper use of a good Christmas hymn, and with the hymn under discussion he furnished a model.

Our English translation fails to preserve the original plan of construction outlined above. It omits stanza two entirely and telescopes stanzas four and six into one. The resulting arrangement, 1,3,5,4-6,7, is, of course, inferior to the original in spite of the introduction of a new principle of unity, that of addressing all stanzas to Christ. But essentially this fine chorale is still available for our use. Let us be thankful for it, sing it, and believe it!

#### 6.4 CHRIST JESUS LAY IN DEATH'S STRONG BANDS

Both text and music of this jubilant Easter chorale are firmly rooted in medieval antecedents, and yet they bear unmistakably the marks of Luther's independence of composition and his inimitable art of corrective adaptation. The germ of this chorale is to be found as early as A.D. 1050 in the Easter sequence *Victimae Paschali laudes*,<sup>7</sup> one of only four, incidentally, which escaped the virtual abolition of sequences ordered by the Council of Trent in the middle of the sixteenth century. The court chaplain and historian of Emperor Henry III, Wipo, is usually given as the author. Soon after its composition this sequence found a place in a very popular Easter play dramatizing the encounter of the women and the angels at the sepulchre of the risen Lord. After the women have heard the direction to go and tell that he is risen, the effect of such telling is immediately introduced, for all Christendom is by this sequence invited "to offer praise to the Paschal Victim." In the sequence itself the dra-

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<sup>7</sup> *The original of the entire sequence is quoted in The Handbook to the Lutheran Hymnal at No. 191. An English version appears in Worship Supplement, 741.*

matic device of dialogue appears when a question addressed to Mary offers her the opportunity to give a glowing account of the resurrection scene and so to evoke from the questioner in turn the advice to all Christians:

*"Mary's report is the truth and is to be preferred to that of the lying Jewish crowd. We know that Christ is risen!"*

But folklike as this sequence was in its dramatic construction, it could not have been sung by the people themselves. Latin was largely Greek to them. Imagine then the enthusiasm with which the German offspring of this sequence was greeted. Now all the people could let that praise resound which the sequence bade them bring as their offering. Now all could join in singing *Christ ist erstanden* (TLH 187), our oldest German chorale (12th Century). With incredible speed this new hymn spread all over Germany. Its popularity can be seen in the familiar manner with which reference was made to it. An Easter hymn, *Du Lenze gut, des Jahres teuerste Quarte* ("O Joyous Spring, Most Precious Season of the Year"), written by Pastor Conrad von Queinfurt (d. 1382), reads in stanza five:

*Give ear, O joyous Christians,  
Let sweetest songs resound;  
All people, choirs and clerics,  
Let hymns of praise abound.  
Now sing: Christ is arisen,  
Today from grave's dark prison.*

By 1481 this chorale appeared as the first and only German hymn regularly printed as part of the order of the Easter service. When Luther incorporated it in the Klug Hymnal of 1535, he added the note, "This bears witness to the existence of pious people before our time, even amid the darkness of false teaching, and shows that in spite of everything there have always been people who have known Christ aright though they were kept in that knowledge only by the miracle of the grace of God." Elsewhere Luther expresses his personal delight in this hymn as follows: "In time one tires of every other song, but *Christ ist erstanden* one must sing again and again."

The surprising fact, however, is that Luther did not include "Christ Is Arisen" in his earliest hymnals but printed instead his own chorale "Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands," and that under the title "A Song of Praise, Christ Is Arisen, Improved"! Scholars have tried in vain to reconcile this apparent piece of temerity of Luther's with his enthusiastic praise for "Christ Is Arisen." A printer's error, one concludes; another suggests that Luther's "improvement" (*gebessert*) extended only to the expansion of the melody. A better explanation seems necessary. There is one passage in the old Latin sequence of which Luther was evidently very fond, and that passage became the focal point in Luther's great chorale while it does not come in for specific treatment in "Christ Is Arisen." Luther's inspiration was obviously kindled at the words: *Mors et vita duello confluxere mirando; dux vitae mortuus regnat*

vivus.<sup>8</sup> He adopted this portion of the sequence at the core and center of his chorale, preparing for this climax in the first three stanzas, then translating with his inimitable directness the Latin passage of the sequence as stanza four and listing in three further stanzas the blessed result of the glorious victory of our Savior. How fond Luther was of the central thought of stanza four (i.e., stanza two in TLH, cf. Handbook), may be seen from a statement of his regarding the Easter sequence itself: "No matter who it was that composed this beautiful song, he must have been endowed with splendid spiritual understanding to be able to paint this picture so charmingly, how Death made its attack upon Life and Satan hacked away at Life." Elsewhere Luther turns to this same subject with these words: "Death is a mighty lord over all the earth; he murders without distinction kings, princes, and all other men. With might and main he tries to conquer Life itself... But Life, being indestructible, even while it was pleased to suffer defeat at the hands of Death, turned on him and conquered and slew Death. Of this wondrous strife all of Christendom, happy and content, sings *Mors et vita con flixere duello mirando*. In Christ both Death and Life fought a strange war... And now Death lies conquered and slain throughout the world, to be and remain through Christ's victory nothing more than a painted Death that has lost his sting. Thus he can no longer harm those who believe in Christ. Hosea 13:14; 1 Corinthians 15:55."

The kinship of the Latin sequence, the Medieval German hymn, and Luther's chorale is close melodically, too. The sequence furnished the germ of the melody in Gregorian chant from which both later hymns developed their tunes. Luther's chorale seems to be influenced more by the sequence melody than by the tune *Christ ist erstanden*, but both sequence and medieval hymn were certainly creatively present when Luther's new melody was formed.

It is a blessed experience to join fellow believers in singing this chorale on Easter morning, but the privilege to do so comes altogether too rarely in our circles today. It is a curious phenomenon that we think of our people today as rather well-equipped musically but refuse to assume that they are capable of singing a melody that has proved itself singable for four hundred years.

## 6.5 COME, HOLY GHOST, GOD AND LORD

The Lutheran hymnals of 1524 contain three Pentecost chorales: "Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest," "We Now Implore God the Holy Ghost," "Come Holy Ghost, God and Lord." All three are based upon text and music already present before the Reformation. The first of these traces its beginning to an old Latin hymn (*Veni Creator Spiritus*) and the second is based upon an old German stanza widely used by congregations long before Luther's day. The third, the hymn under discussion here, was

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<sup>8</sup> *Life and death contended In a combat stupendous; The Prince of life, who died, Reigns forever.*

built upon a pre-Reformation liturgical piece, the antiphon *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, sung in Germany as early as the eleventh century.

In the first centuries of the Christian era the term antiphon denoted any song that was performed by means of alternation between two groups of singers. Subsequently, the name was applied to a particular kind of insertion in the liturgy. Like the sequences following the Alleluia and the tropes attached to the Kyrie Eleison, the antiphon was inserted as a special feature to embellish the chanting of the psalm. The idea of alternation was for some time maintained by singing the antiphon not only before and after the psalm, but also after each verse of the psalm. Eventually, however, the antiphon was sung only to introduce and to conclude the chanting of the psalm. A final step in the development was the emancipation of the antiphon from this auxiliary status to become an independent piece. The English term anthem (derived from antiphon) reminds us of this change.

The antiphon, which is the root of Luther's Pentecost chorale, reads in translation:

*Come, Holy Ghost,  
Fill the hearts of Thy faithful people  
And kindle the fire of Thy love in them,  
Thou who through a multiplicity of tongues  
Hast brought the nations together to the unity of faith.  
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!*<sup>9</sup>

This antiphon had been translated to German long before Luther's time, and we may assume that German versions were current and well-known in the churches of his day, for both prose and poetry versions were in print in the fifteenth century already. Sound principles of pedagogy—he would have called it common sense—prompted Luther to proceed from the known to the unknown and so to use a well-known German version of the antiphon as the foundation for a new chorale. Beside the obvious asset of popularity this German version had in its favor remarkable fidelity to the original Latin antiphon, considerable merit poetically, and a sturdy tune. These qualities attracted Luther's interest, and so another chorale appeared under the familiar subtitle, "Von Dr. Martin Luther gebessert." As usual, this subtitle is an understatement. A proper appreciation of the talent Luther brought to bear upon this chorale is expressed by J. Kulp, who writes:<sup>10</sup>

*Here, too, as in so many of Luther's hymns, there is evidence of consummate mastery. It asserts itself in the ability of the master to absorb the spirit of the ancient hymn so perfectly that no suture between the old and the new is*

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<sup>9</sup> See *The Handbook to the Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 167, for the Latin text but read *accende* for *ascende*.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in *Martin Luther: Ausgewählte Werke*, Muenchen 1950, III 503

*visible—the new hymn is of a single cast; yet the author's work transcends the content of the original hymn by enlarging its scope from the wondrous depths of his own personal faith.*

Luther's own high regard for the traditional German stanza is recorded in the Table Talks,<sup>11</sup> "The Holy Spirit composed this hymn about himself, both as to text and melody." This explains why Luther made no changes, excepting the improvement of several phrases, but adopted the hymn as his first stanza. To it he added two further stanzas, the first of which is an eloquent prayer for the one thing needful, that the Word may by the Holy Spirit shine in our hearts to teach us to know our Father in heaven aright. Included is the prayer for preservation against error. "Let none but Christ our Master be!" Even Catholic circles took note of this stanza, for the Catholic hymnal of Michael Vehe (1537) felt obliged to imitate the hymn in Luther's form but with Catholic bias, though it failed to approximate even the literary excellence of Luther's hymn. The second stanza, a parody of Luther's work, shows this very clearly.

*O holy Light, abide with us,  
Keep us from all blindness.  
Turn us from all evil deeds  
That take us from Your path.  
Protect us from the prophets  
Who falsely teach Your Word,  
Confess the faith with heart and mouth  
And splinter now Your Church.*

With its address, "Thou holy Fire, Comfort true," Luther's third stanza recalls for us the miraculous outpouring of the Spirit of God on the first day of Pentecost and of the wondrous effect of that blessing upon the apostles. There follows the fervent prayer that the Holy Spirit in like manner impart strength to our weakness to make us brave witnesses in his service to the end of our days.

This wonderful prayer is furnished with a sturdy melody originating in the fifteenth century. It has the form typical of sequences in that it consists of two sections of which phrases 1, 2, 3, and 4 match the tune respectively of phrases 5, 6, 7, and 8. An abundance of interesting slurs and the closing hallelujahs point to the same influence.

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<sup>11</sup> *Luthers Werke, Weimar, Bd. 35, 170*

## 7 THE CATECHISM CHORALES OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER

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### 7.1 OUR FATHER, THOU IN HEAVEN ABOVE

Luther was, of course, not the first nor the last to set the Lord's Prayer in verse, but many poets before him and after him have tried their powers and skill without reaching the heights scaled by his muse. So singularly successful, in fact, was Luther's work in his setting of the Lord's Prayer that many have called *Vater unser im Himmelreich* Luther's greatest hymn, surpassing even *Ein feste Burg*.

Circumstances are such that we have the rare opportunity to step behind the scenes, as it were, to watch this chorale grow and mature. We have a manuscript—or rather, a facsimile—of what was almost surely Luther's original copy of our chorale. It is presented in Carl von Winterfeld's monumental edition of Luther's hymns.<sup>12</sup> Here we see Luther composing a chorale, and this is, so far, history's only intimate glimpse into Luther's hymnological workshop. Even a quick glance at the manuscript reveals Luther's genius and his painstaking care. His genius becomes apparent in the very arrangement of the material, and his painstaking care shows itself in the revisions and substantial changes after the first draft.

Our manuscript is now commonly regarded as originating in 1539, the same year in which the chorale was first published. This would imply that the idea of versifying the Lord's Prayer suggested itself to Luther rather late and that he might have been moved to write the hymn because of a desire to complete the cycle of Catechism hymns so that every part of the Catechism might have the advantage of "singing" its way into the hearts of the people.

Now, it is obviously a very delicate undertaking to transfer to the rather rigid requirements of verse forms and text once hallowed in its prose form and so transmitted to the mind and memory of generations. As early as seven hundred years before Luther's time the Saxon poet of the "Heliand" had recast the text of the Lord's Prayer in highly assonant and alliterative verses of epic poetry. Another poet of about the same time, Otfried, had tried to paraphrase the same text under the uncomfortable duress of a difficult rhyme scheme. Succeeding centuries had brought with them new poetic versions of the Lord's Prayer, and Luther himself must have known more than a few of these. All of them were handicapped by the basic fault that they were hemmed in by an unyielding sacred text and by inflexible rules of poetry and could not do justice to both.

Luther's genius found the way out of this dilemma. He did not try simply to pour our Lord's words of the Prayer into a new rhyme and rhythm scheme. His chorale is, in fact, not primarily a versification of the Lord's Prayer; it is rather a hymn of

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<sup>12</sup>*Dr. Martin Luthers deutsche Geistliche Lieder, Leipzig, 1840, Anhang.*

the Catechism's "What-does-this-mean?" of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer. Yet the seven petitions themselves are there, one in the first line of each stanza and all of them worded very much like the original prose. Likewise, the Address stands at the head of the first stanza and the Amen at the head of the last. The doxology "For Thine is the kingdom, etc," is omitted as in Luke 11. To appreciate the success and felicity with which the Prayer itself is incorporated in this chorale, one need only to read successively the first lines of the nine stanzas. This feature is, incidentally, also preserved nicely in our English translation.

Yet these lines are, as it were, headings only of the successive stanzas, and as one reads them, one feels as if Luther means almost to apologize for subordinating the original prose to the exigencies of rhyme and rhythm at all. The justification for doing it lies in the occasion thus afforded to follow up with an explanation of each part of the Prayer in the remaining five lines of each stanza, and with each explanation comes also the blessed opportunity to pray thoughtfully and to avoid the "vain repetitions" of formalism which Jesus mentioned when he composed his Prayer for us. Here, then, is the Lord's Prayer together with the explanations of the Catechism, all of it brought together in a practical worship form, the chorale.

But our manuscript not only shows us Luther's original text complete with deletions, rearrangements, and insertions; it also lets us look into that department of his workshop where melodies were forged. Not only a genius was here at work, we soon discover, but also a painstaking craftsman. The same careful revision and criticism which was lavished upon the text was also applied to the music. Our manuscript preserves an original melody written down by Luther, the composer, and then rejected and crossed out by Luther, the critic, in favor of a further melody and, to be sure, a better one. This second tune has been compared to a Gothic arch, for like such an arch it rises from a firm foundation, soars higher and higher, and upon reaching the apex, subsides in opposite direction to seek again its sure resting place. This melodic path suggests simple dignity, eternal values that transcend what appears on the surface, strength that reaches beyond what is earthly, personal, and individual. Could any other melody be better suited for this prayer of prayers? Which other chorale melody adapts itself so naturally and successfully to each stanza of this hymn and to many other hymns besides? It never becomes commonplace; its riches are inexhaustible. No wonder that Wilhelm Nelle exclaims, "How impoverished is the musical worship life of the congregation that does not have this melody!"

## 7.2 TO JORDAN CAME OUR LORD THE CHRIST

To round out our series of articles on the Catechism chorales of Luther we shall have to discuss a chorale which is, unfortunately, now not generally available to most of us. The usual reference to the number in The Lutheran Hymnal is lacking for an obvious reason.

Our study will concern itself with Luther's baptismal hymn *Christ, unser Herr, zum Jordan kam*. This is one of Luther's last chorales, published first on a single broadsheet in 1541 and in hymnals from 1543 onward. Apparently it was composed in order to complete the cycle of hymns for the Catechism so that Baptism, like the other chief parts, might also be presented in hymn form. For this presentation Luther chose the popular ballad stanza which he had used in his very first song in 1523, the ballad "Concerning the Two Martyrs for Christ in Brussels." As in the Catechism itself, Luther here, too, strives to appeal directly to the people in both form and content so that they might be prompted to hear and learn for their souls' salvation.

The original title of this chorale reads: "A Spiritual Song concerning Our Holy Baptism, in Which Is Comprehended What It Is, Who Ordained It, What It Profits, etc." This already indicates the content of the seven stanzas outlined as follows:

*Institution and purpose of Holy Baptism (st. 1-2)*

*Cooperation of the Holy Trinity in Baptism (st. 3-4)*

*The great commission to preach forgiveness of sin through faith and Baptism (st. 5-6)*

*Faith's comprehension of the baptismal blessing (st. 7)*

Thus we have here a short sermon in verse setting forth the comforting blessings of Holy Baptism. As we should expect, our chorale closely follows the exposition of the Small Catechism, but many of the terms and expressions also remind us of the longer discussion of Luther's Large Catechism, in which particular stress is laid on the dignity, the purpose, and the power of Holy Baptism. Especially the central picture of our Lord's own Baptism in Jordan recalls the Large Catechism's reference to this event:

*"...He himself has honored this Sacrament both by words and deeds; moreover, confirmed it with miracles from heaven. For do you think it was a jest that, when Christ was baptized, the heavens opened and the Holy Ghost descended visibly, and everything was divine glory and majesty?"<sup>13</sup>*

One wonders why this fine hymn on Holy Baptism did not find a place in the Lutheran Hymnal, particularly because we lack the blessing of another baptismal hymn of the same lofty style. Moreover, an acceptable English translation of the whole hymn has been available since 1854, when Richard Massie included our chorale in his translations entitled "Martin Luther's Spiritual Songs." Recent reprints of this translation are found in "Faith-Life II," 6:1 and XIV, 7. The German text is given in our, Wisconsin Synod Gesangbuch, number 282.

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<sup>13</sup> cf. Tappert, *The Book of Concord*, p. 439.

The melody<sup>14</sup> of our chorale was present already in Johann Walther's hymnal of 1524, where it was used with Luther's Mission chorale *Es wollt uns Gott genaedig sein* ("May God Bestow on Us His Grace," TLH 500). Within two years a newer melody gained favor, however, and the original tune for *Es wollt uns Gott* was later joined to our chorale. It has persisted in this use wherever *Christ, unser Herr* is still sung.

*To Jordan came our Lord the Christ,  
To do God's pleasure willing,  
And there was by Saint John baptized,  
All righteousness fulfilling;  
There did He consecrate a bath  
To wash away transgression,  
And quench the bitterness of death  
By His own blood and passion;  
He would a new life give us.*

*So hear ye all and well perceive  
What God doth call Baptism,  
And what a Christian should believe  
Who error shuns and schism:  
That we should water use, the Lord  
Declareth it His pleasure;  
Not simple water, but the Word  
And Spirit without measure;  
He is the true Baptizer.*

*To show us this, He hath His Word  
With signs and symbols given;  
On Jordan's banks was plainly heard  
The Father's voice from heaven:  
This is my well-beloved Son,  
In whom my soul delighteth;  
Hear Him: Yea, hear Him, every one  
Whom He Himself inviteth,  
Hear and obey His teaching.*

*In tender manhood Jesus straight  
To holy Jordan wendeth;  
The Holy Ghost from heaven's gate  
In dove-like shape descendeth;  
That thus the truth be not denied,  
Nor should our faith e'er waver,*

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<sup>14</sup> *Choralbuch, Layriz-Hoelte, St. Louis, 1886, Number 45*

*That the Three Persons all preside  
At Baptism's holy laver,  
And dwell with the believer.*

*Thus Jesus His disciples sent:  
Go, teach ye every nation  
That lost in sin they must repent,  
And flee from condemnation:  
He that believes and is baptized  
Obtains a mighty blessing:  
A new-born man, no more he dies,  
Eternal life possessing,  
A joyful heir of heaven.*

*Who in His mercy hath not faith  
Nor aught therein discerneth,  
Is yet in sin, condemned to death  
And fire that ever burneth;  
His holiness avails him not,  
Nor aught which he is doing;  
His inborn sin brings all to naught  
And maketh sure his ruin.  
Himself he cannot succor.*

*The eye of sense alone is dim  
And nothing sees but water;  
Faith sees Christ Jesus and in Him  
The Lamb ordained for slaughter;  
She sees the cleansing fountain red  
With the dear blood of Jesus,  
Which from the sins inherited  
From fallen Adam frees us,  
And from our own misdoings.*

It seems proper that the complete cycle of Catechism hymns of Dr. Martin Luther ought to be made available in English to modern Lutheran Christians. Our new Catechism suggests itself as a likely medium for bringing these wonderful chorales to our attention again. If they could be included there, each together with the chief part to which it belongs, much would be gained every way. Memorization, explanation, and discussion of the Catechism's doctrines would certainly be aided considerably if our people could be given the opportunity also to sing the glorious Truth.

## 7.3 GOD THE FATHER, BE OUR STAY

This hymn of prayer to the Holy Trinity is another of the pre-Reformation hymns adapted by Luther for use in the new church. It is interesting to observe the manner in which Luther's work on this chorale is described in the early hymnals. Johann Walther's *Gesangk Buchleyn* (Hymnal) of 1524 describes the chorale as *christlich gebessert* (improved according to the Christian faith), while the hymnals of 1526 say *gebessert und christlich korrigiert* (improved and corrected according to Christian faith). If we may take the version of Michael Vehe's Catholic hymnal of 1537 as typical still of pre-Reformation versions, we readily see that Luther's hymn is indeed not merely a revision but also a correction of former versions. In Luther's version the chorale has three stanzas, and these are identical except for the words of address at the head of each stanza. The old pre-Reformation versions had as many as fifteen stanzas, the last ten being repetitions, too, except for changes of address from angels to patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and so forth. In the same versions the fourth stanza was addressed to "Maria Gottesmutter" (Mary Mother of God) and pleaded with Mary to use her "influence" to help procure salvation for the petitioner. All these stanzas after the third were discarded by Luther because they sought salvation from those who could not bestow it. About all that was worth rescuing in these stanzas was the final single line of poetry: "So singen wir Hallelujah!" This Luther transplanted to his revision of the first stanza.

Our chorale is a prayer to the Holy Trinity for protection in our fight against sin and for perseverance in faith. Its plea is based on promises like that of John 14:23, "... we will come unto him and make our abode with him," and upon the Lord's direction, Eph, 6:16, "...taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." This prayer is cast in the form of a litany, a solemn formal supplication characterized by repetition and usually sung responsively by pastor and congregation. Our church is no longer accustomed to singing litanies, and for that reason we may at first be disturbed by the repetitiousness of this hymn, especially since the body of the text for all three stanzas is printed only once in our hymnal. But this repetition is purposeful. In it lies something monumental. Here is the doctrine of the Trinity and Unity of our God applied to our lives. Here we pray for rescue from sin and for perseverance in faith—vital issues indeed—to him who is Three-in-One. To repeat our prayer to each Person of the Trinity should not tend toward empty monotony but produce the heightened effect associated with a number of familiar repetitious liturgical songs (e.g., *Kyrie*, *Gloria in excelsis*, *Agnus Dei*) and certain other chorales (e.g., *Lamb of God*; *All Glory, Laud, and Honor*). Still, the notion of monotony in this chorale was not always suppressed successfully in the past, for there are versions in which all three stanzas have lines entirely individual and delineating in all too dogmatic fashion the spheres of influence of the several Persons of the Trinity. Such versions deal a dreadful and fatal blow to the power and simplicity of the original Lutheran version.

Underneath this very simplicity, however, lies an interesting and even intricate verse pattern. There are fourteen lines, rhymed abab/cddd/ceee/cf. Four sections of lines are clearly marked off by the repeated rhyme “c” (One, on, done), and both thought and tune range themselves around the pattern dominated by the lines so rhymed. Secondary themes are stated by these “c” lines (5, 9, 13), and the tune for them is always the same: do, re, mi, mi, do, re, mi—the basic ingredient of many folk rounds and melodies. Upon each of these themes follows an expository set of phrases carrying out to greater detail what the theme has announced. These are joined by a uniform rhyme and rhythm scheme and seek out their final cadence as they diminish in intensity. Stating these formal features makes them seem too much a matter of calculation, however; their effect does not depend upon analysis, it is direct and immediate.

The melody is an old spiritual folk tune that appeared with the text of this hymn as early as 1480. Johann Walther’s (or Luther’s?) version of 1524 differs somewhat from the older one, but the difference represents a marked improvement over the older version. The melody of 1524 must have been an immediate success, for not long after that year a number of hymnals already omitted printing the tune with the text for this chorale. This suggests that it was known well enough to warrant the omission. Would it were so today! Our song treasury would be enriched, and we should no longer confuse this melody with another that begins on similar notes: “In the Midst of Earthly Life.”

It is unfortunate that the second period of Lutheran hymnwriting, extending from 1562 to 1618, has been thought of only as a period of decline. The usual historical descriptions speak of this period as showing a gradual cooling of the former ardor for the cause of the Reformation. Controversies and quarrels between divisions and factions of the Protestants themselves, it is thought, forced hymnwriting into decline because they offered little opportunity for enthusiastic new composition but required that all talent and energy be spent upon the preparation of learned didactic treatises concerning constantly new points of controversy. It is, of course, true that in this period some time and effort were spent upon uninspired rhymes and tired meters. A typical poetical blossom which illustrates this point is an opus of 1573 entitled, "The Psalms of the Royal Prophet David Translated to Clear German Poetry, Set to French Melodies, and Rhymed by Ambrosius Lobwasser, Doctor of Laws and Counsellor to the Duke of Prussia."<sup>15</sup> But to criticize this period severely on account of a specimen like Lobwasser's is to forget that Luther, too, had found it necessary to issue a warning against incompetent hymnwriters of his time:

*Many so-called masters Are writing songs today.  
Be on your guard and learn To judge a well-turned lay.*<sup>16</sup>

Lobwasser's kind represents only one side of the picture of this second half of the Reformation century. The old poetic vigor and the simple, straightforward diction of Luther's time were still to be found, for not only tolerable and usable chorales were still being written, but even chorales of great distinction. In fact, the very "King of Chorales"<sup>17</sup> was written in this period. While the trials and troubles of the times may have kept some capable poets and musicians from producing new hymns for the Church, they certainly impelled at least one great hymnwriter of this period to sing unto the Lord. That was Philipp Nicolai. Like many of his contemporaries, Nicolai had to suffer much because of his staunch confession of the Truth both against the Roman Church and against the Reformed Church. But it was suffering of another kind that was more intimately connected with hymnwriting. During the second year of Nicolai's pastorate in Unna, Westphalia, a dreadful pestilence broke out. About

<sup>15</sup> An example of Lobwasser's poetry, Ps. 87:1-2:

*God His dwelling and his habitacle (sic),  
Has established on the holy hill.  
God He loves Mount Zion even more  
Than the tent of Jacob or his tabernacle.*

*The over blown title and the insipid "psalms" drew the following pun from a contemporary critic (Lobwasser = praise of water), "Let people sing the praise of water, I'll raise my glass of wine."*

<sup>16</sup> *Babst Gesangbuch, 1545, Preface.*

<sup>17</sup> *Christian Palmer seems to have invented this title in 1833.*

1400 lives were lost in Unna as a result of the plague, and Nicolai witnessed up to 30 burials per day in his churchyard. In those sad days he wrote a treatise which he entitled, "Mirror of Joy." In this tract we find the message: "O Jesus, how I wish that I might speak of Thee in shouts of joy like those of the choirs of angels! O how happy I should be to use my thoughts and talents in the service of Thy praise. How devoutly I should sing angelic hymns with heavenly melodies in the midst of the Christian congregation to Thy glory and honor forever!" And sing in the midst of the congregation he did and still does to this day in two great chorales which he added in the appendix of his "Mirror of Joy," "Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying" and "How Lovely Shines the Morning Star."

### 8.1 WAKE, AWAKE, FOR NIGHT IS FLYING

In the situation already described Philipp Nicolai found nothing else so comforting as a contemplation of eternal life. Accordingly, he searched the Scriptures and even read St Augustine's *de civitate Dei* (City of God) on this subject. He determined to put in writing the wonderful comfort which he found and thus to bequeath it to posterity if he should also die in the plague. On the other hand, if he should be spared, he hoped by means of his tract to be of service to others who should find themselves suddenly bereaved as he himself was. It was his expressed purpose to help as many as he could reach to turn their thoughts away from the earth to the Lord and to the eternal Fatherland.

Eventually these thoughts crystallized not only in the treatise but also in a special way in the watchman's hymn, "Wake, Awake!" This chorale is a composite picture drawn from a number of Scripture passages. The Church is presented in the picture of the wise virgins of the parable (Matt. 25:1-13) and in the picture of the marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19:6-9). The watchmen who announce the coming of the bridegroom are the faithful teachers of the Church (Eze. 3:17-21). The dramatic scene opens with the cry of the faithful watchmen, "Wake, awake, for the Bridegroom is at hand!" This announcement is received with great rejoicing by the Church, the Bride of Christ, for her Lord is about to take her to his glorious abode. Thus we approach the great hall for the marriage feast, and as we do so, we hear the music of adoration sung by angels and by all the saints who have gone before us. As we come still nearer, seeing is added to hearing, and the dazzling sight of the pearly gates and the throne room comes into view. Finally, we enter to join the heavenly choir in eternal praise.

This exciting picture is wonderfully supported by the splendid tune associated with the text and composed by Nicolai himself. With its fanfare-like beginning this melody suggests royalty from the very start. In the second phrase the bugling becomes more insistent and it rises in intensity and pitch. Once hearers have been roused to attention, the watchmen's message cascades down upon the city; our melody follows the text closely with an accompaniment of descending steps reaching to the very foundation tone of the scale.

In contrast to the excitement of the bugling first section with its characteristic progressions in skips of thirds and fourths, the second part of the chorale begins with a calm presentation of the details of the message. This is achieved in the melody by an appropriately formal pattern of descending diatonic tones repeated. The message heard, there follows an utterly simple, an awestruck, hushed, and yet formal and liturgical response, "Hallelujah!" And then the excitement mounts again, the trumpets are heard once more, and the second part ends exactly as the first did, with a flourish. It is as if the dramatic scene closed with the stage direction "exeunt omnes, with a flourish." The emphasis in this chorale is not upon departure, however, but upon arrival, and so the direction should rather read "ineunt omnes ad cenam!" (They all enter, for the feast).

## 8.2 HOW LOVELY SHINES THE MORNING STAR

The "king" of chorales and the present "queen" made their original appearance together in the appendix to Philipp Nicolai's "Mirror of Joy," a booklet or tract in which the author set down thoughts of comfort and joy in anticipation of departure from this world to gain the bliss of heaven. Both chorales offered to believing souls the only true escape from the fear, the sickness, and the sadness that were apparent everywhere that year, 1599, for in the midst of pestilence and persecution the clarion voice of the watchman's song "Wake, Awake" was joined by the tender hymn of joyous praise to the Morning Star, bringing light to darkness and joy to sadness. Both chorales have ever since their first publication remained among the favorites of the Lutheran Church and have gained wide circulation in other churches as well.

The original heading of our chorale read, "A spiritual bridal song of the believing soul concerning its heavenly bridegroom Jesus Christ, based on Psalm 45 of the prophet David." But beside Psalm 45 many other Scriptural phrases and pictures are apparent throughout the hymn. The "Morning Star" itself points to Rev. 22:16, the "Root of Jesse" (translated "the light in Judah shining") refers to Isaiah 11:10, and so throughout the seven stanzas, line for line, the singer is reminded of one Scripture passage after another, all applying to the glorious Bridegroom Jesus Christ, all singing the praise of him who called us out of darkness to his marvelous light. Rightly -therefore has this chorale been called "...a song of high degree, one that should really be sung in three tongues, that of faith, that of love, and that of hope." The friendliness, the loveliness, and the glory of the heavenly Bridegroom are here set forth, and that is proper preparation for the other chorale which bids us heed the call of this glorious Bridegroom to the wedding feast.

Because of the wealth of comfort and assurance found in our hymn, this chorale has been called into use at various occasions. It has been used as a Communion hymn (especially stanzas 2 and 4), a funeral hymn (stanza 7), a wedding hymn, but most of all as THE hymn of the Church for Epiphany. Yet it is more than a de-tempore song, i.e., one associated primarily with one definite season of the church

year; it is versatile in its application and has always been a favorite for many occasions. The very way in which devout Christians refer to this chorale in German is a witness to its versatility. They call it familiarly “der Morgenstern” (Morningstar). A telling description of the use of the hymn is the following statement made in 1659: “Because of its content and its lovely melody this hymn is in very common use among us. People sing it and play it in church and in their shops at home. They let it resound from the church towers and use it both in joy and in sorrow.”

But this queen of chorales is regal not only in blood but in her bearing, too, that is, in melody and rhythm. The melody matches that of the “king” singularly well. Both make striking use of the elemental musical progression 1-3-5 in the repeated first part, and both traverse the full scale downward to bring the first section to a majestic conclusion on the keynote. After a repetition of this stately first part there is a sudden shift to a contrasting second section, a gay and lively interlude produced by rhyming words cradled upon repeated tones, particularly upon the lilting, bell-like minor thirds, as “Sing out, Ring out” (stanza 6), and then upon the dancing repetitions returning again and again over such words as (stanza 6) “Triumph glorious, O victorious, Chosen nation.” With a single bold stroke that adds the keynote to the last repetition, this buoyant interlude is brought to a close. Immediately the stately bearing of the first part is resumed, and the chorale closes with a brief statement of praise or promise. The finality and simple dignity of this last sentence is symbolized musically by the diatonic descent of the melody over a whole octave.

Here is one of the great chorales of all time, much loved, quoted, criticized, and imitated. Among many imitations is the following parody in praise of the author:

*How lovely shines, in heaven's realms,  
Like rays of glorious sunshine,  
Beloved Philipp Nicolai.  
He lived upon this earth,  
A learned man, a Doctor,  
A member of the Church of Christ.  
Peaceful, friendly, Good and honest,  
Honorable in all his life.  
Rich in gifts from God,  
He was noble, —He, the Lord's beloved.*

*Zach. Schaffer, 1625*

## 9 THE CHORALES OF PAUL GERHARDT

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### 9.1 I WILL SING MY MAKER'S PRAISES

One of the best hymns of Paul Gerhardt, and certainly the one most characteristic of his spirit, is the one about which one critic wrote, "...it makes the heart of the attentive singer happy and content even in the midst of cross and tribulation, it duly impresses upon him the merciful acts of God, and it reminds him of the love he owes to God in return." While this description fits many of Gerhardt's hymns, it is especially suited to the hymn which, though it was not the author's first, may be called the prelude to all of his hymnwriting.

The very first line of our chorale is characteristic of Paul Gerhardt, but one can recognize and evaluate that spirit properly only against the background of the author's experience. His resolve to sing his Maker's praises is one of our Lord's own miracles, for we should imagine that the poet's unusually difficult life of adversity would tend to make him weep and wail rather than sing. And if singing were his only mode of expression, we should expect tearful dirges and plaintive laments to come from his pen. His joyful songs seem entirely out of keeping with his, experiences in life, yet here lies the peculiar greatness and the gripping effectiveness of Paul Gerhardt's chorales; they were born in depths of woe, but they rise to sing of all-conquering mercy, a joyous theme welcome to the ears of all who look for deliverance.

Of such miracles of mercy on our behalf our hymn sings to us. This chorale is a soul-stirring song of praise to celebrate our Lord's many acts of lovingkindness according to the three articles of the Creed. A 17th century description of the hymn reads, "Here you have a whole catalog of God's benefits, both physical and spiritual, a daily reminder of the omnipotence of your creation, of the wondrous grace of your preservation, and especially of the high price of your redemption and of your sanctification through the Holy Ghost." This catalog is cut back rather drastically by the fact that our hymnal contains only one half of the original twelve stanzas (1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12). The arbitrary skip along the odd numbered stanzas is unfortunate, for a part of the author's pattern is thus destroyed. After the introductory and summarizing first stanza we miss the emphasis of stanza two upon the particular benefits wrought by God the Father and of stanza four upon the blessed work of the Holy Spirit. Stanzas five to seven deal with God's kind interest in his children and in their very surroundings. From stanza eight to stanza eleven cross and tribulation are dealt with. The eyes of faith see in these afflictions the tender hand of the Father

*Chastening frailty with His rod,  
Not in vengeance, with His terrors.*

Stanza eleven should never have been omitted in our translation. It provides a helpful introduction for the confident prayer of the last stanza and states more fully what the refrain of every stanza has put very briefly so far. A translation of this stanza is properly included here.

*This I know, I'll not forget it,  
 Nothing will my hope remove!  
 Comes the cross, God will not let it  
 Separate me from His love.  
 When the winter snows have left us,  
 Summer comes with warmth and life.  
 Thus with trials and with strife,  
 God relieves us; we're victorious!  
 All things else have but their day,  
 God's great love abides for aye.*

A fitting sequel to all this is the last stanza. Here the child of God comes before the throne of God in complete boldness and confidence to pray for continued grace and mercy and for the gift to love, trust, and obey his Lord here in time and hereafter in eternity.

The text of this chorale has stirred the heart and genius of many a composer. The melody provided in our hymnal is one among about twenty different tunes used at various times for our hymn, many of which were composed specifically for this text. Like the text, the tune exhibits a staunch faith. It begins with daring leaps and an immediate cadence, which suggests confidence and directness. It runs up-against the deviousness of many modulations and fearlessly disposes of them; the vicissitudes of life are similarly dealt with in the text. The text of the refrain is particularly well illustrated by the music. "All things else have but their day" is accompanied by a rising progression which suggests that something of no mean importance is rearing its head. Yet this melodic rise is moderate, subdued, and even faltering in its upward step. That is life with its apparent advances and certain regressions. But the music for the glorious conclusion, "God's, great love abides for aye," ranges high above that of earth's climaxes and it climbs to its apex with unfaltering confidence. All true appreciation of the intended effect of this splendid refrain will inspire even us poor basses to breathe deeply and to reach out for that glorious high "F" of the latter half of the refrain. That nightwatchman of the 17th century who made it his practice to sing this refrain each time after crying out the hour of the night had the right idea. What a wonderful comment upon passing time this refrain and the whole chorale are!

## 9.2 O SACRED HEAD, NOW WOUNDED

It is an inspired translator rather than a hymnwriter whom we meet in the chorale before us. Paul Gerhardt, usually thought of as the genius of new composition, here

exercised his talents in translating a hymn which has been described as showing an imperishable vitality in passing from the Latin into German, and from German into English, and proclaiming in three tongues and in the name of three confessions the dying love of our Savior and our boundless indebtedness to him.

The originator of the Latin hymn may have been Bernard of Clairvaux, that intrepid monk of the twelfth century, the man whose wisdom kings, bishops, cardinals, and even popes sought, who was repeatedly nominated to high episcopal rank and who repeatedly refused such honors, preferring, it has been said, to rule the world from the little abbey of Clairvaux—a remarkable man indeed, about whom even Luther is moved to say, “If ever there was a truly God-fearing and pious monk, it was St. Bernard. Him I regard more highly than all other monks and popes on the face of the earth, for I have never seen or heard of his equal.”

The Latin hymn in question is a Passion hymn beginning with the salutation *salve mundi salutare* (Hail, Salvation of the World!) and addressing, in seven sections, various members of the suffering body of Christ as it hangs upon the cross. One can fairly see the monk addressing the effigy of Christ upon the crucifix in his cell. It is the last section of this long (350 lines) hymn which interests us especially, the section which begins *salve caput cruentatum* (Hail, wounded Head!) and is addressed to the bleeding head and distorted face of the Savior.

Paul Gerhardt translated the entire Passion Hymn of the ancient monk, producing seven individual German hymns for the Lenten season. The translation is very free and a genuine improvement over the rather mystic contemplation of the original Latin hymn. Though Gerhardt was not the only German poet attracted by this material (Johann Rist and several other hymnwriters recast the whole poem into German), yet his work alone has endured. But even of his translation only one of the seven hymns remains in our use today. *O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden* (“O Sacred Head, Now Wounded”) has thus proved its right to be described as more powerful and profound than the original Latin version, redrawn as it was from the deeper springs of evangelical Lutheran spiritual knowledge and fervency of faith.

This great Passion chorale makes blessed reading. The believer views the head and face of Jesus on the cross, sees there all the hideous marks of suffering, and yet welcomes the sight! He carries on an intimate conversation with his Savior in which he acknowledges his sin, pleads for grace as he reminds Jesus of his shepherd-love, offers in return to love the crucified and to remain faithful to him until death, gives thanks to Jesus for providing comfort in death by his death, and prays that the crucified Savior be present in his dying hour.

Some of the finest and most comforting lines in the chorale are not a product of translation. One looks in vain for their equivalent in the old Latin hymn. These are the gift of Paul Gerhardt the hymnwriter rather than the translator. There is even a touch of Luther’s genius present, for it is said that the words with which the chorale

closes, “Wer so stirbt, der stirbt wohl!” (“Who dieth thus dies well!”) were first spoken by Luther at the death of his daughter Magdalena at the age of thirteen.

The melody for our chorale was originally composed for a love song by the great German organist and composer Hans Leo Hassler. Very soon, however, the tune was transferred to sacred use. Among the various texts for which it was used before being associated with our Passion chorale, *Herzlich tut mich verlangen* seems to have persisted the longest and hence provided the name for the melody. It is exactly three hundred years ago now (1956) that this melody first appeared with the text of “O Sacred Head, Now Wounded,” and who can doubt that this text and melody will continue united to the end of time? This union was helped along in no small way by the frequent use to which J.S. Bach put the chorale in his music. His “St. Matthew Passion” alone contains no less than five harmonizations of this music, and it is abundantly apparent in what high regard the Lutheran Church and its foremost composer have always held this great chorale.

### 9.3 AWAKE, MY HEART, WITH GLADNESS

Once a person has become acquainted with a representative number and choice of Paul Gerhardt’s hymns, he cannot fail to recognize their characteristic cheerfulness. There can be no question about it: for this author the life of faith is a life of joy and happiness. Perhaps this view is best summarized in that lilting last stanza of Gerhardt’s “If God Himself Be for me”:

*My heart for joy is springing  
And can no more be sad.  
Tis full of mirth and singing,  
Sees naught but sunshine glad.  
The Sun that cheers my spirit  
Is Jesus Christ, my King;  
That which I shall inherit  
Makes me rejoice and sing.*

Particularly in the poet’s two great chorales for Christmas and Easter—“All My Heart This Night Rejoices” and “Awake, My Heart, With Gladness”—this cheerfulness finds full enthusiastic expression.

Other Easter chorales emphasize the glory of Christ’s victory over death and enumerate the blessings which we derive from his resurrection, but no other chorale presents so effectively the unquenchable spark of joy which our Lord’s victory brings to the believer’s heart. This hymn vividly relives the joyous conquest, the sure victory, the defiance of the devil and all his works, and it inspires childlike reliance upon our victorious Champion. The language and imagery of Paul Gerhardt approach Luther’s more closely here than anywhere else.

But the joy which this chorale excites within us to this day is not only of Paul Gerhardt's making. It belongs to Johann Crueger, the composer of the melody, as well. It is a rare combination of talents that we meet here. Gerhardt and Crueger were for eight years associated as colleagues in the St. Nicolai Church in Berlin. They shared the tribulation and sorrows of war and pestilence, of death and destruction, and even of disappointment and grief arising from the struggle for the truth within the Church. But in neither of these two men was the joy wrought by faith destroyed or even dimmed by troubles and trials. They also shared a deep indestructible happiness of soul that was born of faith. This invincible Christian cheerfulness is evident in every line of the poetry and in every phrase of the music.

Paul Gerhardt himself never published any of his hymns. He was content to wait until able musicians would supply them with suitable tunes and so sent them forth into the world on wings of melody. It is as if he anticipated Goethe's direction regarding some of his poems:

*Please don't read it! You must sing it!  
Then the page is yours to keep.*

And Gerhardt was singularly fortunate in attracting composers to clothe his hymns in adequate melodies. Among them the most successful were his two colleagues in Berlin, Johann Crueger and Johann Ebeling.

Our chorale is an especially fine example of Johann Crueger's ability to capture the spirit of joy emanating from Gerhardt's text and to weave about it a texture of melody which not only preserves but even heightens the effect of the poet's message. The meter of strongly accented three-quarters time, the lilting dotted quarters with following eighths suggesting the skipping gait of a carefree child, the increase in frequency of this rhythmic pattern as the melody swings to its lofty climax in the last line, the free range over an entire octave, all these illustrate the joy that sings:

*My heart from care is free.  
No trouble troubles me.*

And yet there is restraint. The skipping gait is repeatedly exchanged for a normal walk in measures which at the same time break up any temptation to waltz thoughtlessly. Thus the spondaic text at the beginning of the fifth and sixth lines is matched with a succession of rhythmically neutral quarter notes which allow the singer to think and to shift the accent as the text requires. And then the lilting tune swings, as if in garlands, higher and higher until the summit of the last note is reached. There is no better melodic interpretation of lyric words anywhere. A line from the hymn itself best characterizes both text and tune:

*A real song of joy!*

## 9.4 ALL MY HEART THIS NIGHT REJOICES

For those who have learned to love the sparkling gem of Lutheran hymnody which we have before us there can hardly be a real Christmas celebration without it. To them this chorale is as indispensable to Christmas as Gerhardt's "Awake, My Heart, With Gladness" is to Easter. Yes, they would not exchange it for a dozen of the other popular hymns and carols heard at Christmas, for they find in this extraordinary chorale a combination of features that makes for especially effective Christian song. This is a simple, direct, clear, and emphatic presentation of the real message of Christmas, that "Christ Jesus came into-the-world to save sinners; of whom I am chief!"

Judged by modern standards and compared with many folk carols, this chorale is indeed long, and one may safely say that it is no accident that it is exactly of the same length as Dr. Martin Luther's "From Heaven Above." But when there is much to say, volume should not be criticized. Now, both Luther and Gerhardt have much to say, for both want to present as forcefully as they can the practical blessings brought to man through the miracle of Christmas. Luther achieved this purpose in "From Heaven Above" through the illusion of dramatic realism, presenting angels, shepherds, and other believers like actors in a drama and letting them preach the gospel of the incarnate Son of God, come to set all men free from all their sins. Gerhardt imitated this dramatic idea, changing only so much as seems in keeping with his own time and person. In his version it is the contemplative believer who does the speaking and who reports about angels, about a still, small voice from the manger, and about the blessings announced by these. Luther lets us hear the actual speech of the participants in the nativity scene; Gerhardt presents a discussion of what was said and describes a believer's reaction to that message. Luther's speaking parts are conceived with naive but faithful realism; those of Gerhardt's hymn are more abstract and dramatically less likely, e.g., he quotes the Babe in the manger! Still other comparisons between the styles of Luther and Gerhardt might be made, but in spite of all differences in manner and style the two versions agree perfectly in their general arrangement and in their aim to present in a very vivid way, not only the Christmas story, but the Christmas gospel.

Our chorale begins with a splendid fanfare announcing the fact of Christ's birth and setting the tone for the whole series of fifteen stanzas, a fitting tone of happiness and rejoicing. From the very beginning, too, the relation between the angels' hymn and the joy on earth is kept in the foreground. It is the text of the angels, not their manner of singing, that matters. "God is man, man to deliver," they sing, and therefore there is boundless joy and optimism among the children of God, now the very blood brothers of the Son of God! So amazing, in fact, is the love of God which has prompted these blessings that the thoughtful believer must pinch himself, so to speak, with a number of searching questions to ascertain whether these things can really be true. Can there be any doubt about God's will to save us when we know

that he has here given us his dearest Treasure? And will he not freely with his Son also give us all things? He who has given himself, should he withhold any other gift? Reassured, the believing soul hears, as it were, Christ himself in the manger invite all the weary and afflicted to find peace and rest in him. This call from the manger is the call to faith. It is the announcement of grace and pardon to all:

*Brethren, from all ills that grieve you  
You are freed!*

We should note the change which this mighty proclamation of the still, small voice works in him who hears and believes. He no longer only looks, hears, believes, and rejoices; no, he in turn invites others to rejoice with him, to forget all care and sorrow, and to turn to him who is mighty to save. So the Child of Bethlehem makes and calls his own ambassadors and missionaries, people whose joy knows no bounds and who cannot but speak to others of the things which they have seen and heard. These are Bethlehem's shepherds again "making known abroad the saying which was told them concerning the child." Yes, like one of the shepherds—though he does not arrogate to himself that dramatic label—the author of our hymn also returns, glorifying and praising God for all the things that he has heard and seen. More than that, like Mary he ponders all these things in his heart and in times of stress comforts himself with the gifts which he knows are his for Christ's sake: freedom from guilt, the love of Christ, contentment, and joy. Finally, even love in return is possible with him who has first been loved by God. Therefore Paul Gerhardt invites us to join him in the bold promise of stanza fifteen:

*Dearest Lord, Thee will I cherish.  
Though my breath Fail in death, Yet I shall not perish,  
But with thee abide forever  
There on high, In that joy Which can vanish never.*

## 9.5 ALL YE WHO ON THIS EARTH DO DWELL

Because our hymn was first published in the year 1648—the year of the Peace of Westphalia, which brought to an end the oppressive Thirty Years' War in central Europe—and because it contains an abundance of references to deliverance from suffering and a prayer for the blessings of peace, it has been supposed that Paul Gerhardt composed this hymn either in anticipation of the peace treaty or in celebration of it. But even if Paul Gerhardt did not intend to dedicate his song to a commemoration of the historical event itself, certainly the thoughts uppermost in the minds of all Germans during the closing year of the awful war are reflected in it. Like Martin Rinckart's "Now Thank We All Our God," another hymn that has always been closely associated with the Peace of Westphalia, our hymn is based on a passage taken from the apocryphal "Wisdom of Ecclesiasticus." To show how faithfully both

Rinckart and Gerhardt reproduced this passage in their hymns, the Authorized Version's translation of this fourth-century text may be set down here.

*Now therefore bless ye the God of all, which only doeth wondrous things everywhere, which exalteth our days from the womb, and dealeth with us according to his mercy. He grant us joyfulness of heart, and that peace may be in our days forever: that He would confirm his mercy with us, and deliver us at this time! (50:24-26)*

For any time of life both hymns, as well as the text upon which they are based, constitute a wonderful exhortation to praise God's gracious protection and to pray for his continued help. Yet all three seem especially appropriate to the deliverance in 1648 from the destruction and death of the Thirty Years' War. Even if Gerhardt and Rinckart did not have this particular day of grace in mind, both hymns gain in strength and fervor when held up against the background of the suffering of the middle of the seventeenth century and when they look either forward to the Peace of Westphalia or back upon it. All the gifts for which this hymn gives thanks or prays—life, health, happiness, peace, mercy, and deliverance—all of them must have seemed discouragingly distant after thirty long years of "blood, sweat, and tears," with pestilences and famines raging uncontrolled. But so much more welcome and miraculous must have been the fulfillment of the desires of all when the sudden peace showed promise of rescue and deliverance. This was indeed a time for praise and thanksgiving! This was one of those great moments in history when entire nations are overwhelmed with the sudden prospect of the blessings of peace, but only the humble Christian soul finds the simple words adequate for the situation, words of praise and prayer to him "who maketh wars to cease."

Upon Paul Gerhardt himself the Peace of Westphalia or the prospect of any treaty of peace must have had a profound effect. He was a boy of eleven when the war started, and now at forty-one he still had no settled position, was not married as yet, but continued to serve as the private tutor to the Berthold family in Berlin. Life was uncertain and held little promise for the future until the political and economic situation that Gerhardt had known since childhood should change. That change seemed about to be inaugurated by the Peace of Westphalia. Here, then, our hymnwriter had a very personal reason for enthusiastic gratitude for the promises held by the coming of a new era.

It was Paul Gerhardt's colleague of later years, the distinguished cantor of St. Nicholas Church in Berlin, Johann Crueger, who first published our hymn. Already in 1648, nine years before Gerhardt joined him at St. Nicholas Church, Crueger presented many of Gerhardt's hymns to the world, supplying some of the tunes that have remained in use ever since that time. Undoubtedly many more of his melodies would have come into standard use if there had not been previous popular hymn tunes for which some of the texts were written. In spite of that handicap a number of

Crueger's melodies supplanted older tunes and have remained in use to our own day.

## 9.6 UPON THE CROSS EXTENDED

No other season of the Christian year is graced with such an abundance of hymns as the season of Lent. This is true in spite of the fact that Luther and his immediate associates did not lead the way in this direction, yes, in spite of the fact that they even omitted providing a single hymn of this special kind.<sup>18</sup> An increasing number of these Lenten hymns began to be supplied as the Christian Church gradually drew away from its Lenten emphasis upon the progress its candidates for Easter baptism and confirmation were making and concentrated upon a contemplation of the suffering and death of the Savior, eventually adding to its Sunday services also the special midweek Lenten worship. These changes, of course, made a larger collection of hymns based specifically on the passion of our Lord desirable and useful and so stimulated their composition. For these reasons the longest of the festival seasons and the one which calls for the largest number of special services also saw its hymn requirements met with a suitably large list of hymns. Our rather conservative Lutheran Hymnal lists forty-seven Lenten hymns as compared with thirty-four for Christmas and twenty-five for Easter.

Again, no other season of the Church year is quite to the same degree subject to the temptation to present its message through an appeal to human emotions as the season of Lent is. The Biblical story of our Lord's suffering is itself intensely dramatic, but it may become a mere humanitarian exercise when either sermons or hymns dwell unduly upon the revolting aspects and hideous details of that suffering. The result must be that the worshiper either refuses to take seriously and disregards the lurid pictures drawn or succumbs to the power of literary suggestion to the point of disconsolate tears only to find in the end that his supposed religious edification has been a purely emotional experience. Every Lenten hymn walks the tight rope between these two extremes, and we should expect a kind of monotonous sameness in all of them, both as to the sad details of their message and the accompanying doleful minor melody.

But a hymnal containing a careful choice of Lenten chorales can easily demonstrate that good Lenten hymns are not necessarily doleful, unduly sentimental, or monotonous, no, not even in those instances in which we have a number of such hymns from the pen of a single author. As for the frequency of the minor key, one is surprised to find that about sixty percent of our Lenten melodies are in major tonal-

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<sup>18</sup> *The early hymnwriters of the Reformation did not, however, neglect making abundant reference to the suffering and death of our Lord in their hymns. Consider, for instance, Luther's lines: "Christ Jesus lay in Death's strong bands" (Easter) and "Here the true Paschal Lamb we see" (Easter); similarly in every division of the hymnal the Cross of Christ remains very clearly the center of all evangelical hymnwrit- ing.*

ity. Even rhythmic features are found in surprising variety. While the single message of the fact of the Cross of Christ is common to all, the wealth of variety of treatment brings constantly new facets of this jewel to our attention as we sing our way through the Lenten section of our hymnal. Paul Gerhardt has contributed three chorales to this section—an unusually high density—and it is difficult to judge which is the best.

The chorale before us is an example of a very common type of Lenten hymn so far as its arrangement goes. It asks the whole world to behold the Savior hanging upon the cross, to inquire about the reason for this terrible agony, and to confess, “I caused Thy grief and sighing” and “’Tis I who should be smitten!” But we are not asked to revel in grief or despair in sorrow over the suffering which our sin has made necessary. We are to realize with joy and gratitude that the suffering which we see before us was willingly entered upon by the Son of God because of his great love for us sinners and that his atoning passion has wiped away all our guilt. Here is joy, for here is the pledge of our salvation! But here is also reason for gratitude, for nothing can awaken thankfulness as such a guarantee of eternal joy can. To direct this joy and gratitude into God-pleasing channels is the burden of the remaining stanzas of our hymn.

Even though this arrangement of material is not uncommon and can be found in a number of other Lenten chorales, its presentation here is nevertheless interesting, refreshing, and truly wholesome for the children of God, for the invitation to receive the blessings of the Cross of Christ is immediate, genuine, and attractive; it makes us want to behold, receive, and be blessed. In Lent, too, we find Paul Gerhardt, that man of many sorrows, dispensing joy and Christian assurance as he sings to his Savior:

*My healing in Thy wounds is found!*

## 9.7 COMMIT WHATEVER GRIEVES THEE

The chorales of Paul Gerhardt may conveniently be divided into two groups: those connected with the festival cycle of the Christian Church Year and those associated with the experience of Christian living generally. In both groups Gerhardt has furnished hymns in sufficient number to make up complete collections, and it has been pointed out repeatedly that a full hymnal might be assembled using only his 123 hymns, so rich and varied are they in their contents. Such a hymnal would lack specific hymns for Epiphany and Ascension in one section and for The Word and The Church in the other, but in the remaining sections it could boast of our best chorales two and three deep. Certainly the Christmas, Lent, and Easter sections would be richly blessed with the objective confessionalism of chorales like “All My Heart This Night Rejoices,” “A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth,” and “Awake, My Heart, With Gladness.” Yes, every section of such a Paul Gerhardt hymnal would contain individual stanzas and even whole chorales that we should name among the best in their

class in all of Christian hymnody. But in the section headed Cross and Comfort we should find Paul Gerhardt especially prolific and effective. We shall do well to close our present series of Paul Gerhardt studies with a discussion of one of the best examples from the section.

Comparisons between Paul Gerhardt's hymn writing and that of the sixteenth century writers, notably Luther's, have usually been somewhat unfair. It is too easy an appraisal of Gerhardt and Luther to say that Gerhardt is subjective and Luther is objective; that a hymn of Luther's is a confession, one of Gerhardt's a testimonial; that Luther writes in the first person plural and speaks for all of Christianity, while Gerhardt emphasizes the first person singular and the individual experience. There is truth in this but it is not the whole truth, and it tends to underestimate the theology as well as the unshakable faith of Paul Gerhardt. There can be no doubt that both Luther and Gerhardt were moved by the selfsame gratitude and joy awakened in their hearts by the gospel of free salvation through the merit of Jesus Christ. Justification by faith was the central theme in which all the hymns of both writers found their inspiration. Two men never agreed better theologically, and when they spoke in chorales about God's great acts of salvation, e.g., the Incarnation and the Resurrection, their language was, in spite of the years that separated them, remarkably similar. Yet each had its specialty. Luther's was the quick, heroic thrust of the Word of power; Gerhardt's, the soothing Word of encouragement and comfort amid trial and distress. We should not want to do without the latter any more than without the former, for both are precious gifts of God to the Church.

One of the most controversial of Gerhardt's many excellent hymns of consolation is "Commit Whatever Grieves Thee." Like a number of his other chorales this one has occasionally been criticized as being restricted to the message of the First Article of our Creed and consequently as neglecting Redemption and Sanctification. Such neglect is hardly thinkable unless one insists on treating this chorale in complete isolation from Gerhardt's other poetry. Certainly our poet neither meant to hint at nor pretended to know any other way to the Father than by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. In fact, it is his reliance upon justification before God through Jesus Christ, and no other relation or access, that permits him to speak freely of the Father without everywhere making specific mention of him who brought him to the Father. The very name "Father" implies and recalls all that.

Only when one sings this chorale with proper attention to the various ways in which Gerhardt refers to the Lord can one get at a full appreciation of the comfort provided here, When our chorale speaks of "gracious hands," "Thy children," "His promise," "His consolation," and "thy Deliverer," we cannot but be reminded of the true and only reason why our Lord and Father is willing and ready to promise and provide signal blessings for his children, namely, for the sake of his Only-Begotten, in whose work of Redemption he was "well pleased." In the light of that fact the words

of Gerhardt's hymn are indeed precious to us and can bear us up with renewed faith and trust even in the darkest hours.

The original German version of this chorale linked its stanzas together by the artificial acrostic device of beginning each stanza with a word of Psalm 37:5. Though this external device is lost in translation, the original outline and the reference by sections to the same passage is very evident. Thus the child of God is invited, "Commit thy way unto the Lord" (stanzas 1-5), admonished, "Trust also in Him," (6-8), and assured, "He will bring it to pass" (9-11). Stanza twelve closes the chorale with a fitting prayer for endurance in faith to the end of life and the beginning of eternal bliss.

## 9.8 NOW REST BENEATH NIGHT'S SHADOWS

The first hymns of Paul Gerhardt to be published appeared in the 1648 edition of Johann Crueger's *Praxis Pietatis Melica*. The title of this hymnal points not only to a species of hymns characteristic of Paul Gerhardt but to a use of hymnals that was characteristic of the whole seventeenth century, for the title means Practice of Godliness in Song. Now, "practice of godliness" was almost a technical term in Gerhardt's century and it referred to a new emphasis upon sanctification as it was initiated especially by Johann Arndt's devotional books entitled *Wahres Christentum* (True Christendom). When, therefore, Johann Crueger entitled his hymnal "Practice of Godliness in Song," he meant to suggest that this hymnal was to promote true godliness by way of Christian song just as the other devotional literature of that time was doing it through prepared meditations and prayers. Into this picture the hymns of Paul Gerhardt found their way quite naturally, yet with a difference. His eloquent emphasis upon endurance in joyful Christian faith in the midst of the sorrow of earthly life did not carry with it the usual hint that Lutheran orthodoxy was getting a bit too learned, theoretical, and detached and hence needed revitalization. Gerhardt's own confessional stand would not allow that, and he never thought of his hymns as anything but Scriptural and orthodox preaching. Accordingly he wrote:

*In the face of cross and pain and evil  
There is nothing better than the Bible.*

And these lines he wrote in a poem recommending, not the Bible, but the Scriptural hymns of his friend Michael Schirmer (e.g., O Holy Spirit, Enter In, TLH 235)! It is clear, then, that Paul Gerhardt considered such hymns to be Scriptural in every detail. In them he was doing the work of an evangelical pastor, instructing, encouraging, and consoling the afflicted Christian.

Our chorale is a typical example of Paul Gerhardt's particular kind of hymn evangelism. It is simple and naively dramatic, and yet we find in it a wealth of skillful comparisons and contrasts devised with extraordinary literary charm. The rural peace of evening is contrasted with the heart's busy activity in praise and adoration of the Creator. The setting sun suggests that the Light of the World shines brightly at

all times, even in the darkness of night. The shining jewels of heaven remind the child of God that he, too, will one day shine like the stars of the firmament. While putting off clothes presents a sad picture, that of mortality, yet we rejoice, for we are reminded of the robe of righteousness which Christ has given us. Weary bodies happily going to rest help us to look forward to final relief from all experience of weariness. The mystery of sleep itself suggests our complete and safe reliance upon him who neither slumbers nor sleeps. Upon these comparisons and contrasts follows that completely tender and childlike plea that God spread his protecting wings over his little chick and ward off the assaults of Satan. The hymn closes with a devout prayer that angels attend the sleep of all the loved ones.

In our time it will surely not be necessary to convince anyone of the effectiveness of this hymn. It is found in most of the Protestant hymnals. But it was not always so. In the eighteenth century particularly this chorale was in some quarters scorned as "foolish and stupid stuff" because it seemed to conflict with scientific thinking regarding the universe. The chorale has long since won the victory over such criticism and has for centuries been among the favorite hymns in a number of languages. To it applies with special force what an erring child of God once said regarding the hymns of Gerhardt generally, "These hymns went with me through tens of years in which I fancied myself estranged forever from the doctrine and the church of Jesus Christ. Even then their appeal to the soul moved me, sometimes even to tears. It was the hymns of Paul Gerhardt which quietly took me by the hand and led me back even before passages of Scripture had really come alive again. If, therefore, today I cannot produce anything but praise and thanksgiving for them, I must simply say with Luther, 'I cannot do otherwise.'"

#### 9.9 O LORD, HOW SHALL I MEET THEE

Georg Gottfried Gervinus, a penetrating literary historian and music critic of the nineteenth century has evaluated Paul Gerhardt's work in about the following words: "Like no one else, Gerhardt went back to Luther's style of hymnwriting, introducing only such modifications as the circumstances of his time seemed to require. Luther's era derived its joyful confidence from its faith in the grace of God and in his reconciliation with man, in the redemption, which burst open the gates of hell; Paul Gerhardt found it in the love of God. In Luther's view the wrathful countenance of the Catholic God turned into a look of heavenly grace and mercy; Gerhardt saw the merciful God of Righteousness as a mild and loving man with whom he could converse in cordial tones. Always cheerful, he is natural and never seems strained in his devoutness; the bliss of faith makes him kind in his approach, agreeable in diction, and naive and comforting in his way of thinking."

This cheerful simplicity of Gerhardt's faith reveals itself in the hymn before us. We are transported to the scene of our Savior's entry into Jerusalem and we stand among them "that went before and that followed, cried, saying, 'Hosanna to the Son

of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!" Joined to that throng which should so soon prove fickle and turn this welcome into a repudiation, we despair of our ability to meet our Savior with a better and more enduring reception. Yet in the depths of humility born of our consciousness of sin and weakness we are buoyed up with the poet's infectious cheerfulness and confident hope that we may yet be made fit to welcome our Savior aright. In fact, we have the childlike courage and boldness to come before our Lord himself to ask the very Light of the world to kindle in us the lamp of faith and understanding in order that we may receive him and honor him properly.

This time Paul Gerhardt certainly dispenses all doubt concerning the Christocentricity of his hymns. All those who accuse him of being a hymnist exclusively of the First Article of our Creed and who charge him with slighting our Savior because of a superficial and altogether too general religiosity ("such as might even suit the anti-Christian Jew") ought to take note here of our poet's positive appeal to the Savior Son. The confessional high points of Gerhardt's life, incidentally, should leave this matter out of doubt in the first place.

Beginning at stanza two the poet outlines his plans for a proper welcome for his Savior. In place of palms there shall be songs and psalms of joy; instead of green boughs, a heart alive and ready to exercise itself in praise of God.

So praise of God begins forthwith, but in an unexpected way. A series of contrasts setting forth our abject need and our Lord's rich blessings is the first form in which this praise appears. A prisoner of sin set free by Christ, a man disgraced by the shame of transgression honored by the Savior, a slave to the transitory riches of this world blessed with the everlasting splendor of heaven: in the full realization of the depths from which we have been delivered Paul Gerhardt has caught the essentials that lead us to praise God!

Upon this solid foundation rises the acknowledgement of the efficacious work wrought by "love, all love excelling." The address of thanksgiving to God suddenly seems very short, amazingly so for all that has been said in preparation of it. Yet the thanksgiving does not cease. It merely takes on a different form now. Beginning at stanza five our hymn no longer addresses the Savior directly but proclaims the gospel to all men instead. The "love beyond all telling" must yet be told, for one cannot but tell! "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh!" Thus our hymn now turns to praising God before all men by urging them to leave their sadness, fear, useless toil, and anguish and to cling to him who comes to help and cheer them. The fearful burden of sin this Savior will remove, and the peace that comes with forgiveness of sin he will secure for all the sons of God. Every foe, even the craftiest and strongest, he will overthrow and put to rout, for he is the King most glorious! To him is given all power in heaven and on earth! He will come to judge all nations, bringing

terror to all who oppose him and blessed consolation to all who love his appearing!  
Great expectations, these!

Paul Gerhardt closes with the enthusiastic prayer:

*O Glorious Sun, now come.  
Send forth Thy beams so cheering  
And guide us safely home."*

#### 9.10 A LAMB GOES UNCOMPLAINING FORTH

It is probably true that hymnwriting usually succeeds best when text and melody are composed by the same person. We can point to some truly great chorales as witnesses: "A Mighty Fortress;" "How Lovely Shines the Morning Star;" "Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying;" "Praise God the Lord, Ye Sons of Men;" "All Glory Be to God on High." Paul Gerhardt composed no chorale melodies at all, and yet among his best hymns are those set to music by his musical alter ego, as it were, his friend and colleague, Johann Crueger. But in spite of these examples pointing to a close kinship between poet and melodist, Paul Gerhardt has provided at least one example of a complete reversal of this ideal, the hymn under discussion here. In it Gerhardt fitted his text to a tune already over a hundred years old in his time, a tune originally associated with an entirely different text by its composer. That such a new union should succeed to the point of making the older text obsolete and relegating it to oblivion is indeed unusual and points to extraordinary sensitivity and skill.

The original text, which after four hundred years lends no more than its fossilized initial words as a name to the tune, is a paraphrase of Psalm 137 and speaks of the humiliation and suffering of the people of God in Babylonian bondage. Its originator is one Wolfgang Dachstein, a former monk who in 1524 left his position as organist in the Catholic Cathedral of Strassburg and accepted a similar position in the evangelical St. Thomas Church in the same city. As late as 1545

Luther still included this hymn in the Bapst hymnal. The text is worth quoting here because it is difficult to find. A translation follows; the original is in the footnote.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *An Wasserfluessen Babylon,  
Da sassen wir mit Schmerzen;  
Als wir gedachten an Zion,  
Da weinten wir von Herzen.  
Wir hingerz auf mit schwerern Mut  
Die Orgeln und die Harfen gut  
An ihren Baeum and Weiden,  
Die drinnen sind in ihrem Land,  
Da mussten wir vie! Schmach and Schand  
Taeglich von ihnen leiden.*

*At riverside in Babylon  
 We sat in sorrow, mourning,  
 Rememb'ring Zion, overrun  
 By foes, destroyed and burning.  
 We could not play the pipes of joy,  
 Our harp and lyre would not employ  
 Nor sing like God's creation.  
 With taunts the foe assailed us sore.  
 Thus at our captors' hands we bore  
 Scorn and humiliation.*

One obvious reason why Paul Gerhardt's hymn superseded Dachstein's verse is that Gerhardt's poetry is superior. Based on John 1:29, "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," and taking some of its imagery from Isaiah 53, this hymn follows what has become a fairly familiar pattern in Passion hymns. In this pattern a contemplation of the suffering of Christ leads to one of two questions. Either the poet asks, "Who is it that hath bruised Thee?" (cf. TLH 171), inquiring about the cause of the suffering and eventually answering, "I caused Thy grief and sighing"; or he contemplates the effect of an appreciation of this suffering upon the believing soul by asking, as in our hymn, "Sweet Lamb, to Thee what can I give. . .?" and by answering with reference to various aspects of our life of sanctification, "From morn till eve my theme shall be Thy mercy's wondrous measure." This pattern is somewhat distorted in our hymnal by the omission of four stanzas which have suffered a little in translation. Yet, there is an essential completeness, and we should rank the hymn among the best in its field.

Especially effective, however, are the first three stanzas. Here we have a very lively presentation, complete with *dramatis personae* and dialogue, of the love of God operative in the sacrifice of his Only-Begotten in behalf of the sins of the world. As one probes into these stanzas, one is impressed first of all by the effective climaxes and by the total picture of intense suffering. But greater than these features is the real theme in the last line of stanza one: "Willing all this I suffer!" Paul Gerhardt is not engaged in emotional sympathy-stirring, but his theme is the love of God willingly descending to bitter depths to achieve the one blessed purpose of his love: to "free men from the fear of death, from guilt and condemnation."

These thoughts put into proper balance all that seems at first to lend the greater emphasis to suffering *per se*. Shame, stripes, wounds, death (the original German shows an even longer and stronger series), all these are terrible and tend to shift the emphasis to the awful details of suffering and dying and to make us wish with Peter, "Be it far from Thee, Lord; this shall not be unto Thee." Add to that the melodic stress given to the word *suffer* by means of a long five-note slur at the end of the stanza, and everything seems to point to sadness and suffering. Yet this slur is not sadness-music. A quick glance at the subject and text of the hymn "Hail to the Lord's

Anointed" (TLH 59) will show that almost the identical musical phrase has become gladness-music there. The text of the lines involved reads, "The angels in the heavens / Sing sweetest melodies" (cf. last line of Hymn 59).

If these considerations still leave the matter in doubt, stanzas two and three plainly show and dramatically amplify the real theme of this hymn and, incidentally, of the whole Lenten season today. Here is the good news of God's good and gracious will to send his own dear Son to suffer and die for the sins of mankind and of the Son's eager acceptance of this commission. An unusual immediacy and sense of participation and presence is given to the message by the dramatic treatment. We hear God himself and his Son plan our eternal salvation! Now we know what Lent is about and we exclaim, "O Love, how strong Thou art to save!"

#### 9.11 OH, ENTER, LORD, THY TEMPLE

It has been pointed out again and again that the 123 hymns of Paul Gerhardt would furnish material for an entire hymnal, so diversified are they in mood and content. It is interesting to observe that even the twenty-one hymns of his that we have in The Lutheran Hymnal are scattered over almost every section of the book and fail to be represented in only one larger area (Nos. 350-500). They appear in the greatest density in that section of our hymnal which deals with the festivals of the church year. From Advent to Pentecost Paul Gerhardt furnishes many of the finest hymns in common use among us. "O Lord, How Shall I Meet Thee," "All My Heart This Night Rejoices," "A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth," "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded," and "Awake, My Heart, With Gladness" have come to be almost indispensable milestones on our annual journey through the church year. Not so well known as yet, but worthy of joining this illustrious company is Paul Gerhardt's hymn for Pentecost, "Oh, Enter, Lord, Thy Temple."

Though this chorale was not published until 1653, it was obviously written during the woes of the Thirty Years' War and for some time closely associated with that calamity. When it did eventually emancipate itself from its close connection with the war, it did so only with the loss of a number of stanzas containing references to the heartache, pain, and bloodshed of the war. So the original sixteen boiled down to thirteen, twelve, or even fewer stanzas. Today it is difficult to find even a German hymnal<sup>20</sup> which contains the complete hymn, for also a number of stanzas not referring to war and peace have dropped away. Stanza three, for instance, referring to the grafting in of Gentiles (Rom. 11:17) and beginning

*A vine, despised and dying,  
O Lord, You grafted me,*

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<sup>20</sup> *Christlicher Liederschatz, Berlin, 1832, has it at No. 1995.*

is a real loss. We should be grateful if this stanza, as well as those which pray for piety, wisdom, and good government, could be restored to our English version.

Yet, in spite of losses, precious thoughts have been retained, and the basic plan of Paul Gerhardt's original hymn has not been changed. Here is another eloquent prayer pleading, like all our great hymns for Pentecost, "Come, Holy Ghost!" Like all the others it breathes the confident faith based on the promise of the Word of the Lord to Ezekiel (36:27), "I will put my spirit within you," and on our Savior's repeated pledge (John 16:7), "I will send the Comforter unto you." For this Spirit of God we pray and him we welcome with that full assurance for which Paul Gerhardt and his poetry are at every turn renowned.

The intimate communion which we see established by the Spirit of the Lord between himself and us immediately prompts us to ask for further blessings in evidence of the gifts of the Comforter. We ask the Holy Spirit to drive out our sin in order that we may fittingly honor our Lord in thought, word, and deed. May he, like anointing oil, set us apart for special service to Christ! May he who knows best how to pray effectually teach us the prayer that never fails to be heard! May he, the very Spirit of joy, enlighten us and so awaken us to true happiness that will know no end! May he, the Spirit of love, banish from us sinful strife, wrath, and discord, and cultivate within our hearts the power of his love. Finally, may all our doing and life be brought into agreement with the good and gracious will of our Comforter, and may he lead us safely through life on earth to life eternal on high.

All this Paul Gerhardt leads us to see, appreciate, and make our own through the good offices of the Spirit. Yes, he helps us to say our prayers better than we alone could do. And if we will permit it, that great and good friend of Paul Gerhardt, Johann Crueger, will also contribute to our joy and confidence through the very special tune which he created for this text. Having then learned to appreciate both text and melody we shall experience the thrill described in an old Latin adage: *Bis orat qui cantat* – "He prays doubly well who sings his prayer!"

## 10 THE CHORALES OF LUTHER'S FRIENDS

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### 10.1 THE BRIDEGROOM SOON WILL CALL US

In the summer of 1552 a new broadsheet was printed and offered for sale in Wittenberg. It contained a hymn of thirty-three stanzas beginning:

*My heart with song is soaring  
In summer's sunny sky,  
For God is now preparing  
All things for heaven on high.*

The German title of this hymn is *Herzlich tut mich erfreuen*. A subtitle describes this long hymn as "A most beautiful new spiritual and Christian miners' song concerning Judgment Day and Eternal Life, written by Johann Walther." If we had come by the printing establishment that June day, two considerations might have prompted us to buy this new release. We should have recognized the author as the former cantor of the Elector Frederick of Saxony at Torgau and as the close friend and musical adviser of Luther in the twenties. Because of the outstanding service he had rendered in helping Luther with the musical problems connected with the earliest Lutheran hymnals and liturgies we should have trusted his newest contribution to Lutheran hymnody enough to buy it or at least to have the salesman sing a few sample stanzas for us. We might also have been attracted by the circumstance that this new sacred song was called a miners' song.

Miners' songs or *Bergkreyen* were a very popular type of song in the early sixteenth century. The name suggests that they were originally round-dance songs of the mining communities, but the definition had long since come to include ballads, love songs, and even drinking songs. A collection published in 1531 bears the title, "A number of Miners' Songs, Spiritual and Secular." The most important characteristic of these songs seems to be an improvisational technique such as is somehow associated with the singing of mining district folk in other places, too, notably today in Wales. When therefore a collection of such songs could be described as possessing "Bergmanieren" or as being in the miners' style, this was the signal that they were in every way (rhythmically, harmonically, and melodically) full of folk vigor and interest. Their appeal seems to have been equally strong whether they were sacred or secular in text and spirit, and for this reason a transition from secular to sacred song by the popular process of contrafaction was easily effected.

In the development of our chorale the original miners' song was a love song of spring such as might be sung at picnics on the village green. It extolled the beauties and charms of the early summer when life in nature is at its healthiest and best and when, amid the freshness of nature, young folks meet and play. A final stanza once

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more states the singer's delight in the activities of this time of year and abruptly closes with the jocose threat:

*And if you tire of singing, May you fall on your nose!*

This pithy little song of May Johann Walther used as the framework for his spring song concerning "The Last Day and Eternal Life." The first twenty-five stanzas pictorialize eternal life on the basis of material taken from the Book of Revelation, while the stanzas 26-33 apply to the sorrows of this present time the comfort and joy derived from these pictures. Because of various selections and combinations of these stanzas, however, the original plan of Walther was soon lost and a number of shorter hymns were formed. The most popular form was the Advent chorale composed of seven stanzas and beginning with that which was originally stanza 31: "The Bridegroom soon will call us."

This is the chorale before us. Here we have another of our Lord's clarion calls for the preparedness to meet the Bridegroom at his coming, to anticipate the blessings that lie in store for those who are waiting for his appearance, and to make waiting itself a blessed experience through the constant reflection upon the glorious things to come. Thus our chorale bids us look forward to meeting all the noble men of God personally: patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs. But our own kind, too, our family members, will be there and are even now waiting to greet us. And amid the ceremonial distribution of crowns all the glorious company of heaven will lift their voices and sing songs such as ear has never heard! This chorale is indeed a worthy forerunner for "Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying" (TLH 609) and "Jerusalem, Thou City Fair and High" (TLH 619), and its influence upon them is unmistakable.

Melchior Franck (1575-1639), the composer of the tune for "Jerusalem, Thou City Fair and High," was very fond of our chorale and wrote several melodies for it. His best is the one we now use though it was first written for a different text. One cannot help noticing the fanfare-like royal salute with which the tune announces the coming of the Bridegroom. The obvious bustle of high excitement and of preparation, as well as the joyful pace of the melody never ceases to invite us to participate in this Advent experience.

## 10.2 ALL MANKIND FELL IN ADAM'S FALL

Luther's own time produced no Lenten hymns. The external reason for this was the circumstance that the Reformation Church followed the tradition characterizing the pre-Easter season as a time of fasting in preparation for the Easter Festival, but without particular concentration upon the Passion Story. The history of the Passion was reserved for the special observances of Holy Week. Under these circumstances there was no call for a special Lenten type of chorale. As a result there was no temptation either to separate the story of our Lord's suffering and death from the incarnation and resurrection stories and to ponder it as a subject apart. There was no need either

for admonitions such as that of Johann Albrecht Bengel, who two hundred years later wrote: "We sometimes indulge the habit of feasting our eyes upon the suffering and death of our Lord. The trouble is that we commonly stop there, while we ought to make just as much (yes, even more) of the resurrection and eternal life of the Lord Jesus. These belong together. Disgrace and suffering was the way to bliss and glorification! These two things we ought always to keep together in our meditations, prayers, and hymns of praise and thanksgiving... He who speaks of the death of Christ without reference to his resurrection, speaks incorrectly. It was not enough for God to smite the Shepherd, but he also raised him from the dead."

The chorale before us is a Passion hymn of the type current in Luther's day. It is not listed under LENT in our hymnal, but under FAITH AND JUSTIFICATION. Our German hymnals formerly listed it in a still more general classification entitled SIN AND REDEMPTION. But "Sin and Redemption" are the chief topics, not only of the whole Church Year, but also specifically of Lent. Besides, these topics lay at the very core and center of the whole Reformation movement. Perversion of the Scriptural truths regarding sin and redemption had made the Reformation necessary. It should not surprise us therefore that even a Lenten chorale of Luther's day should emphasize the truths fought for in his time.

How deeply the author of our hymn was involved in the issues of his time a few facts will show. Lazarus Spengler, since 1507 City Clerk in Nuernberg, was one of the first supporters of the Reformation in his home city and already in 1519 issued an apology in defense of the "Christian teaching" of Dr. Martin Luther, a pamphlet which ran to five editions in its first year. In it Spengler confesses: "This I know beyond a doubt that in my life no doctrine or preachment has made so profound an impression upon my mind, and I have never been able to comprehend any other man's teaching and direction so well as Luther's. May God give me grace to act in accordance with these precepts. . . . Through them I have increasingly gained the sure hope that I may appear acceptable before God." Spengler's name was, of course, included in the bulls of excommunication directed against Luther and his followers. But when special copies of these documents were sent to the City of Nuernberg as a warning, the faithful city council answered by sending Lazarus Spengler as its representative to the Diet of Worms. In 1530 Spengler also represented Nuernberg at the signing of the Augsburg Confession. To show his esteem of this stalwart witness of the faith, Luther presented him with his complete translation of the Scriptures. Spengler earned the respect of his fellow townsmen in Nuernberg and the high regard of Protestants everywhere through his wisdom, faithfulness, and courage. Though vilified and persecuted, he steadfastly clung to his Savior and continued to confess and defend his faith before all men. Luther wrote the following testimony regarding this friend: "...like a true Christian he took God's Word seriously in his lifetime, heartily believed the same, accomplished much by it, and at his death confessed it and confirmed it. His example may console and strengthen all weak Christians who now suffer all manner of offense and persecution."

When Luther therefore, in 1523, looked about among his friends for such as might try their skill at providing hymns for Lutheran congregations, Spengler was apparently among the first to respond, for the chorale before us appeared in one of the first collections of hymns edited under Luther's guidance, the *Geystliche Gesangk Buchleyn* ("Little Hymnal") of 1524. Spengler's contribution very quickly became one of the standard chorales to appear in all the early hymnals and almost rose to the importance of a Lutheran confessional document. Indeed, it is referred to in the "Formula of Concord" (Epitome I,3) as a well known hymn ("As the Church Sings"), setting forth the Biblical truth regarding original sin. A Strassburg hymnal of 1560 describes our chorale as "A beautiful Scriptural hymn concerning the fall of Adam, the redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the blessed comfort which all Christians have in him, but also concerning the awful everlasting ruin of those who look for other comfort beside him and his Word."

The original hymn has nine stanzas arranged according to the following plan: The fall of man (stanzas 1-2), the restoration of fallen man through Christ (3-7), and the prayer and witness of the restored (8-9). It is a real joy to see how Spengler (not a theologian by profession) has brought together references to some of the finest passages of Scripture in this hymn, and all these are held together by the thought of Romans 5:19: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."

Up to the time of Pietism this chorale maintained a secure position in the hymnody of the Lutheran Church. But then its star began to wane. In its didactic and confessional nature pietists saw a threat of dead orthodoxy and, under a series of pretenses, dropped it from their hymnals. Rationalism thought no better of the chorale, and even the restoration of the nineteenth century wrestled hard and long before the chorale gained entrance to Lutheran hymnals again. It was always contended that, while Spengler's hymn was suitable for a time when dogmatic correctness was in favor and a thirst for the doctrine of Justification was keenly felt, it was outmoded in a time when such doctrine was freely disseminated through sermons and the catechism. A church, an age, and a hymnal only pronounce judgment upon themselves when they admit that they can no longer tolerate doctrine and have no thirst for it.

While we do not as yet have the original verse or tune of our chorale in our present hymnal, we at least have a brief free translation. Though the meter, the stanza form, and the tune of the original are for the time being lost to us, the general outline and the truth of the chorale are happily still with us. We shall do well to use it diligently even while we look forward to a time when a good, full translation complete with its own tune may again grace the pages of our hymnal.

## 10.3 SALVATION UNTO US HAS COME

After twelve weeks' imprisonment on bread and water in a dungeon in Moravia, Paul Speratus came forth, not to burn at the stake, as his Catholic enemies had planned, but to send out on wings of song one of the most influential confessional hymns of the Lutheran Reformation.

Born a year after Luther and, like Luther, a Catholic priest, Speratus joined the Reformation movement already in 1519, but in a unique way. He simply began to preach the Reformation doctrine in his churches in Bavaria. By 1520 he had been removed successively from a number of pulpits, and we find him taking the degree of Doctor of Divinity at the University of Vienna. He was to take over a parish near Vienna but was barred because of his excommunication, which followed upon a sermon on marriage delivered by him at St. Stephen's Cathedral in answer to a monk's violent denunciation of marriage at another church in the city. This sermon attracted a good deal of attention and raised considerable excitement, partly because it had the reputation of being the only Evangelical sermon ever to be preached in the cathedral, and partly because the preacher was one of the first married priests himself. The sermon outlined the case against enforced celibacy and set forth the doctrine of justification by faith. Leaving Vienna, Speratus moved north and sojourned a while in Iglau, Moravia. Unknown there, he was appointed preacher. In his quiet way Speratus again went about preaching the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith and soon won the hearts of his parishioners. When the church authorities somewhat later tried to remove him from office again, the members of the church paid no attention to the orders of bishop and government and kept their priest. But when the king threatened reprisals against the people, Speratus left Iglau. He was arrested, however, and put into prison, and only the intervention of certain influential citizens prevented his being burned at the stake.

During the imprisonment a copy of Luther's hymn "Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice" came into the possession of Speratus. Forthwith he composed a companion piece, using Luther's stanza form with the additional feature of rhyming in pairs of stanzas Luther's unrhymed last lines. In six such double stanzas he set forth a Reformation doctrinal confession and in a seventh pair of stanzas he concluded the hymn with a doxological paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer. (Unfortunately, though unavoidably, some of this detail, and therefore some of the original force, is lost in our cut version of the hymn. But see *Ev. Luth. Gesangbuch* (Wisconsin), No. 372.)

Released from prison with the strict injunction never to be seen in Bohemia and Moravia again, Speratus went directly to Wittenberg, arriving there about the end of 1523. Luther was just then in the midst of his earlier work in behalf of the new church service. He welcomed the aid which Speratus could give him in providing both hymns and liturgies for the Reformation church. When early in 1524 the first Lutheran hymnal, *Etlich cristlich Lider Lobgesang un Psalm* ("Some Psalms and Chris-

tian Songs of Praise"), appeared, it offered four hymns by Luther, three by Speratus, and one anonymous hymn. In this basic set our chorale was included as one of the earliest and most popular of Lutheran chorales.

What is it like? The hymnal in which it was first printed described it as follows: "A hymn of Law and Faith, powerfully furnished with God's Word." Later editions supplied for each stanza a wealth of specific Scripture passages alluded to, explaining that this was a set of "References upon which the whole hymn is based, upon which our case may safely rest." Every subsequent hymnal supplied its own heading. A Strassburg hymnal of 1541 has "a very evangelical and artistic hymn about the grace of God, the salvation of our power, and fruit of true faith in Christ."

In 1638 our hymn is referred to as "a very evangelical hymn concerning the difference between the Law and the Gospel and concerning justification by grace through faith and about its fruit." The chorale has been called the poetic counterpart of Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. An evaluation more typical of modern times is that of Julian's Dictionary of Hymnology: "It is a Scriptural ballad, setting forth, in what was, for the time, excellent verse, the characteristic teachings of the German Reformers and is indeed of considerable historical importance. But for present day use, it is too long, somewhat harsh in style, and too much a compend of doctrinal theology." As if to anticipate Julian, however, Professor Cosack wrote in 1861: "This hymn is no relic; its fountain of life did not flow in the past, it flows now. We cannot admit that this is a mere didactic poem with a dogmatic character strange to the song of the church... In this hymn we have no schoolmaster teaching, but a soul singing, a soul filled with the peace of the Gospel, the newly rediscovered fundamental truth of Christianity."

What success the chorale enjoyed can be ascertained best by a look at the manner in which the Catholic side tried to discredit it. When the usual device of simply forbidding its use could not achieve desired results, parody verses were invented in an effort to belittle the "heretical hymn." A sample (1636) is the following stanza:

*May heresy us not befall  
With doctrines false and clever:  
That only faith can rescue all;  
Believe! You're saved forever.*

*Forget good works! Discard! Destroy!  
Take faith alone without alloy  
And you'll be saved forever.<sup>21</sup>*

The tune has the same joyful, springing gait as that of Luther's "Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice." As one sings this hymn and thinks of the exciting and indispensable truth set forth in it, both text and melody certainly ward off anything approaching stifling boredom and dogmatic pedantry. This is a chorale for rejoicing!

#### 10.4 TO GOD THE ANTHEM RAISING

It is almost the definition of a Christian that he is a living expression of gratitude for all the wondrous gifts which the Lord has bestowed upon him through Jesus Christ. Among the words of praise continually in his mouth must be the daily exclamation, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!" Grant him the gift of poetry, and he will teach generations and centuries to praise the Lord in worthy strains.

Among the friends and associates of Martin Luther there were gifted poets who responded to the Reformer's call, "We are looking around for hymnwriters everywhere." Such a man was the personal secretary and intimate friend of Philip Melancthon, Dr. Paul Eber. They used to call him *Philippi repertorium*, Philip's Card Catalog, so intimately acquainted was he with every word and thought that engaged Melancthon's facile mind, and so indispensable was he whenever Melancthon took to the pen.

In Wittenberg from 1532 on, first as a student at the university, then as tutor, later as professor successively of Latin, physics, and Hebrew, and eventually as court and city preacher, Eber lived on intimate terms with the great men and the important theological issues of his time. Both Luther and Melancthon considered him a special protege of theirs. Addressing a number of guests, including Melancthon and Eber, Luther is supposed to have said, "So long as I am alive, please God, there will be no danger, and Germany will stay at peace; but after my death, then pray. For then there will be need of prayer, and our children will have to take spear in hand... The Council of Trent is very angry with us and intends evil. Therefore pray earnestly after my death." Turning to Eber at this point Luther is reported to have continued, "Your name is Paul. Well, then be like Paul, and let me admonish you that you may, like

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<sup>21</sup> *The original German stanza reads:*

*Ach Gott, das tut die Ketzerei,  
davon die Lehr geboren,  
dass nichts, nur Glaub vonnoeten sei,  
wer glaubt, sei ausgekoren;  
Werk hin, Werk her, Werk auf, Werk ab,  
wer nur den blossen Glauben hab,  
der koenn nicht sein verloren.*

Paul, steadfastly maintain and defend the doctrine which Paul has transmitted to us." This confidence and hope was not misplaced, for Paul Eber proved to be one of the most courageous and evangelical defenders of the Truth in Wittenberg during the stormy years that followed upon the death of Luther.

Eber's entire life was an expression of gratitude to God for many evidences of divine favor received and appreciated in childlike fashion. Similarly his poetry speaks in disarmingly simple and positive ways about the great, good gifts of our gracious God. Even Death itself is listed among the assets of this trusting child of God and receives due thanks for ushering in the true Life (Confer TLH 585).

This characteristic attitude of thankfulness receives an especially full treatment in our hymn for New Year's Eve, in which Eber calls upon all children of God to join in singing the praises of their gracious God.

*Behold how God this year,  
Which now is safely ended,  
Hath in His love befriended  
His children far and near.*

Children were near and dear to Eber himself, and the beginning lines of this hymn were addressed to children in the original version:

*To God the anthem raising,  
Come, children, let us sing!*

Eber had fourteen children of his own, ten of whom preceded him in death! While this hymn was not published until after Eber's own death and while we do not know exactly when he wrote it, it does seem as if it might have been composed when he still had a large happy family about him. We can see him gathering his brood about him on New Year's Eve to teach them how they should joyfully and gratefully count their blessings. As if conducting a New Year's Eve catechesis among his children, the poet marshals under the general topics "mercies" and "manifold gifts" a series of concrete evidences of the Lord's bounties almost as imposing as that in Luther's Explanation to the First Article or as that which we bring before the Lord in our General Prayer. This specific detail is good pedagogy, too, for it is calculated to

*Let thankfulness recall How God this year hath led us...*

All this culminates in a prayer of thanksgiving and in a childlike and confident boldness to approach anew this good and gracious Lord who has given so much and in the name of Jesus to ask him for still more blessings in the coming year. The catechesis has made its point skillfully and effectively, and there is happiness and thankfulness all around.

Such a poet deserves the epitaph, recorded here in translation:<sup>22</sup>

*Paul Eber's body, beneath this stone,  
Rests calm and quietly—alone.  
Gave help to all, he labored long,  
Upheld the Truth with faith so strong.*

Another fitting monument is found in the City Church at Wittenberg. It is a double picture showing on the left the papists at work, destroying the Lord's vineyard, pulling up the vines, breaking down the fence, and ruining the well, but depicting at the right the faithful reformers building the vineyard again: Luther hoeing down the weeds, Melanchthon and Foerster drawing water from the restored well, Bugenhagen and Cruciger mending the fence, and Paul Eber tying up the grapevines.

### 10.5 WHEN IN THE HOUR OF UTMOST NEED

In 1580 St. Catharine's Church in Alt Brandenburg, Germany, suffered severe damage during a storm combined with an earthquake. Within two years the tower of the church had sagged three inches away from the building proper, and Herr Stadtpfeifer Martin Nering and his family were prevailed upon to vacate their tower apartment because of the danger of a collapse. But the tower music every three hours around the clock was not interrupted, for the three assistants of Master Nering continued their residence in the dangerous tower and saw to the music. The story goes that on the very night after Nering had moved out one of the assistants played the tune of the chorale "When in the Hour of Utmost Need" at nine o'clock in the evening and "If God Had Not Been on Our Side" at three in the morning. He had just rejoined his companions in their common bedroom when the whole tower crashed down into the adjacent graveyard, carrying with it the three young musicians. Finding themselves miraculously spared and thinking that they had been thrown to the church roof, they warned one another to lie still lest they come to harm by walking off the roof. Morning revealed that they were lying, beds and all, amid the rubble of the tower on the ground below. About the same time the report came in that just before dawn fishermen far out on the river had seen three fiery torches burn brightly in the sky over the city. These were interpreted to have been the fiery vapor trails of angels sent to protect the three associates of Kapellmeister Nering. Then first was the shock of the experience dispelled, and men came to realize what miraculous blessings had followed upon the musicians' prayers of the night.

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<sup>22</sup> *The original epitaph reads:*

*Pauli Eberi Koerper klein  
Ruhet sanft unter diesem Stein;  
Bei Leben war die Arbeit sein,  
Jedermann Gut's tun, lehren rein.*

The prayer of our chorale has been a quiet witness to many an untold and forgotten miracle wrought by the mighty hand of God in behalf of his children. But the Bible itself preserves the story of the miracle and the prayer which gave rise to this gem of Reformation Era hymnwriting. Paul Eber, it is true, based his original German text on a Latin hymn composed by his former teacher, Joachim Camerarius, but the ultimate source of both is the prayer of King Jehoshaphat (II Chron. 20), and one loses something of the complete trust and confidence of Eber's hymn if one does not occasionally get another look at the depth of human inadequacy such as the situation of Jehoshaphat reveals. On the other hand, to appreciate the full potential of this cry for rescue, one cannot do better than to reread in the same chapter the strange utterance of the Holy Spirit by the mouth of Jahaziel and the marvelous fulfillment of this prophecy.

Once you have renewed your acquaintance with this splendid Old Testament example of help for the helpless, you can take heart with Paul Eber and sing a song of confidence in spite of yourself and all that threatens you. This hymn is not a dirge and a lament as the first line seems to indicate, but it is a song in praise of a mighty deed that surpasses even such stupendous acts as the preservation of the ark in the flood, the passage through the Red Sea, yes, creation itself, for our hymn sings of the miracle of miracles:

*That we may meet before Thy throne  
And cry, O faithful God, to Thee  
For rescue from our misery!*

This is the whole gospel in a nutshell, the mightiest of miracles and the deepest theological tenet stated and appropriated without pretense by a simple child:

*...Thou hast promised  
Through Him whose name alone is great!  
And thus we come, O God, today  
And all our woes before Thee lay.  
Ah, hide not... Thy face.  
Absolve us... Be with us... Free us...*

Has ever a child pleaded with a deeper consciousness of need and at the same time with higher confidence in the Helper addressed? Has anyone ever approached God with a more childlike and yet God-pleasing reasonableness? Why should God graciously hear this plea?

*That so with all our hearts we may  
To Thee our glad thanksgiving pay!*

Here is a chorale that is always in season. We can sing it at every occasion, for in this life our real troubles—our sins—are ever before us, and yet, for Jesus' sake we

cry with confidence: Abba, Father! This is our cry out of the depths, but, in spite of that, a prayer that raises us to heights of ecstasy. If we don't sing it often, it must be that we have never looked beyond the forbidding title line.

#### 10.6 WE THANK THEE, JESUS, DEAREST FRIEND

Taking up the Psalm refrain "Oh, give thanks unto the Lord," a surprisingly large number of sixteenth century hymns began with the identical opening line "Wir danken dir, Herr Jesu Christ" ("Our thanks to Thee, Lord Jesus Christ"). One hymn continues with "dass du fuer uns gestorben bist" ("That you have died for us"), another with "dass du vom Tod erstanden bist" ("That You have risen from the dead"), and our chorale with "dass du gen Himmel g'fahren bist" ("That you have ascended to heaven above"). The pioneer stanza in this style seems to have been the second example quoted, the closing stanza of Nicolaus Herman's chorale on the Gospel for Easter Sunday, "Early on the Sabbath / Three Mary's went their way." The author of our hymn seems to have been especially fond of this opening line, for we have still another hymn of his which begins "O faithful God, thanks be to Thee / Who dost forgive iniquity" (TLH 321).

The Ascension hymn before us is indeed a welcome sequel to the other "We thank Thee" hymns. We who have in the Lenten and Easter Season sung hymns of thanksgiving in praise of our Lord's passion and resurrection now rejoice in the privilege of seeing his further promise fulfilled: "I go to prepare a place for you." Our hymn gives expression to the confidence that he has gone to plead in our interest before the throne of God, and yet has done so without breaking his Word: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." We have not lost his presence while we reap the blessings of his departure and his mediation in heaven between sinful man and the righteous God.

*Hid from our sight, yet always nigh;  
He rules and reigns at God's right hand . . .*

This fulfillment bids us look forward with joyful anticipation to the day of ultimate fulfillment when Christ will redeem his Word: "I will come again and receive you unto myself." This consideration gives rise to the rejoicing of the last two stanzas and to the final prayer of our hymn:

*...O Brother Christ, extend Thine aid  
That we may firmly trust in Thee  
And through Thee live eternally.*

Nicolaus Selnecker must have comforted himself often with the thought of Christ, his ascended Lord, at the right hand of God. How often he needed such comfort! Because he was a favorite student of Melanchthon while at the University of Wittenberg, he was branded a crypto-Calvinist, and when he openly showed himself

an adherent to strict Lutheranism, he was put out of office by Calvinists. Violent attacks were made upon him again when he collaborated in the preparation of the "Formula of Concord." It is not surprising that Selnecker should in one of his hymns burst forth in the cry, "Ah Lord, to whom shall I lament / In anguish, pain, and sorrow?" It is characteristic, nevertheless, that the author finds comfort in the knowledge that Jesus sits on the right hand of the Father and that all is well. Therefore he sings in a later stanza of the very same hymn:

*I'm filled with joy today,  
For heaven is now my home.  
With thanks I sing a lay,  
Salvation now has come.  
His Son became my flesh and blood;  
He rules with God in heaven,  
My Treasure and eternal Good.<sup>23</sup>*

We cannot be absolutely sure that Selnecker is the author of our chorale, yet his authorship seems likely because the hymn is first found published together with his exposition of Psalm 68 ("Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive..." v. 18). Only four stanzas are recorded in this document, however, while a publication of thirty-five years later quotes the same hymn in thirteen stanzas. One of the better stanzas omitted in our hymnal's cento is the twelfth:

*Come, blessed Lord, to Judgment come  
And take us to our glorious home  
That all our woes on earth may cease  
And we may dwell in heavenly peace.*

For this hymn Selnecker appropriated not only the style and the initial phrases from the genial cantor of Joachimsthal, Nicolaus Herman, but also one of his best melodies. We should, of course, expect him to make a good choice in this matter, for he was extraordinary gifted in music. At the tender age of twelve he already served as organist in the Castle Church in Nuernberg, and it was about this same time that his father barely managed to thwart the designs of Emperor Ferdinand I to have the boy kidnapped and trained for musical service at the royal court. Much later, during a few comparatively peaceful years in Leipzig, Selnecker, the pastor of the St. Tho-

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<sup>23</sup> The German stanza reads:

*"Ich geh daher in Spruengen,  
Der Himmel ist ganz mein,  
Mit Freuden tu ich singen,  
Got will mir gnaedig sein.  
Sein Sohn ist ja mein Fleisch und Blut,  
Und sitzt zu's Vaters Rechten,  
Mein Hort und ewges Gut."*

mas Church, was active in building up the Motet Choir which Bach was to conduct 150 years later.

Incidentally, we owe Selnecker a debt of gratitude for his choice of tune for our chorale, for since it must apparently be so that we do not as yet have an adequate translation of that splendid Easter chorale of Herman's "That Easter Day with Joy Was Bright," we may at least enjoy its happy and sturdy tune with this joyful and confident Ascension text.

## 11 NON-GERMAN CHORALES

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### 11.1 THE SUN ARISES NOW

In Denmark the Reformation began about 1520, and by 1536 the Lutheran church was established as the state church. As early as 1527 papists began to preach against “the sacrilegious custom of roaring Danish ballads at the church service,” and the first Danish hymnal, a very popular booklet containing ten hymns and a splendid liturgy, was published in 1528.

But the very speed with which the floodgates of sacred song were opened indicates that Danish enthusiasm for poetry and song does not have its origin in the century of the Reformation. The honored social station and the popularity of the ancient Scandinavian skald points to a native love of these arts which antedated the coming of Christianity by centuries. Denmark, like many another country of northern Europe, was ripe for Christian song in the sixteenth century because of its ancient tradition of poetry and song and because of the enforced suppression of these arts through seven hundred years of Catholic domination.

The first Danish hymns were, of course, translations of earlier hymns or, like the German macaronic *In dulci jubilo* / *Nun singet und seid froh*, consisted of alternating lines of Latin and the vernacular, thus suggesting responsive performance. Such pre-Reformation hymns seem to have been as common and as popular in the northern countries as they were in Germany. The best and most enduring of these were those associated with high festivals of the church year. In less than fifty years the Danish church produced *Den Danske Psalme-Bog* (The Danish Psalter), Hans Thomisson’s hymnal of 268 entries with suitable tunes, which was to serve the church for 150 years. It contained translations and adaptations of pre-Reformation materials, but there were also a number of original Danish hymns by Thomisson and others. Only Hans Chrestensen Sthen added further worthy original contributions to the hymnody of Denmark in the Reformation century (e.g., “Lord Jesus Christ, My Savior Blest,” TLH 353).

The first of the later great Danish hymnwriters, Thomas Hansen Kingo (1634-1703), brought again to the field of hymnwriting the ancient and hardy Nordic spirit of the Vikings. His grandfather had, in fact, immigrated to Denmark from Scotland, and so the poet’s talents were later described as representing a revival of an ancestral gift brought about through the return of his family to its original home and by a new infusion of Northern blood. This is a way of accounting for the “robust realism” of Kingo’s writing, a characteristic hardly in tune with the style of his time. Even his interest in the Danish language was a bit unusual, for young cultured gentlemen in his time are spoken of as “writing Latin to their friends, addressing ladies in French, calling their dogs in German, and using Danish only for abusing the servants.”

# 11

Kingo, however, defended his predilection for his native tongue with words like these in a foreward to his first volume of hymns, "Spiritual Song-Choir," 1673: "The Danish spirit is assuredly neither so weak nor so poor that it cannot fly as high toward heaven as that of other peoples without being borne upon strange and foreign wings."

Though sometimes betrayed into excessive picturesqueness by his love for realistic Danish diction (e.g., "frothing wrath of God" and "oozy slime of sin"), Kingo is not often caught in a mere literary pose. Usually his realism is the reflection of genuine truth. Most characteristic of all his imagery is his favorite symbol, the morning sun. This was to him the sign of rebirth, of victory over death, of reconsecration, of opportunity, of preparation, and of invigorating happiness ("Upon my roof its rays now laugh!").

The hymn before us is typical of Kingo's joyous vigor and serious reflection. Here the poet is working with his favorite subject — the Christian's joyous sunrise song of thanksgiving, prayer, and trust. It is as fresh as the dew at dawn, and for crispness and depth it is to be compared with Paul Gerhardt's *Die gueldne Sonne* ("The Golden Sun"). And like the latter, this hymn also has a morning-glory tune which grows and grows as one becomes familiar with it. We ought to learn to sing it, for then we shall want to teach it.

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| Our Father, Thou in Heaven Above         | 458 | 410     | 34   |
| Praise God, the Lord, Ye Sons of Men     | 105 | 41      | 16   |
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| <b>HERMAN, NIKOLAUS (1480 - 1561)</b>      |      |         |       |
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