

Hymnology Survey- Class 2

Hymns for Discussion- November 15

Introductory Comments...

Many hymns of the Early Church were written in Greek, and this continued. Under influence of Ambrose of Milan (c. 340-397), Latin hymns began to be written

The earliest hymns have a very attractive simplicity

Medieval hymns become quite imaginative as they portray the Passion, as well as longings for a better world to come where the saints enjoy their eternal Sabbath.

160: Shepherd of Tender Youth

Clement of Alexandria, ca 200 AD

Words: Titus Flavius Clemens, called Clement of Alexandria (b. *circa* 170; d. *circa* 220)

Music: *Italian Hymn*, by Felice de Giardini (b. Apr. 12, 1716; d. June 8:1796)

This hymn's title, and its first line, are sometimes rendered *Shepherd of Eager Youth*. ***Clement produced the original around A.D. 200, making it the earliest hymn we have from the post-apostolic era.***

This text is one of the earliest Christian writings in use as a hymn outside the of the New Testament itself...It is certainly the oldest one to date whose author is believed to be known.

The fact is that like sheep we often go astray. Therefore, we need to look for guidance from Him who is our "Shepherd of Tender Youth.

Henry Dexter (1821-1890) made a literal translation of Clement's work, then versified his English translation. The Cyber Hymnal lists a number of tunes used with the hymn, including *Italian Hymn*, to which we also sing, *Come, Thou Almighty King*.

Titus Flavius Clemens (Clement) was a convert from paganism. Ordained a presbyter, he became head of the catechetical school of Alexandria. Origen was one of his pupils.

Though this hymn is often found in our hymnals under “Children’s Hymns,” the song was written to instruct new converts, who perhaps were not all preteens. It does, however, make a fine hymn for children.

Clement reported vividly of the hymn singing of the early church, showing just how much sacred music played a part in not only the formal worship but the daily lives of Christians at that time....

“We cultivate our fields, praising; we sail the sea, hymning.... [The believer’s] whole life is a holy festival. His sacrifices are prayers and praises, and Scripture readings before meals, psalms and hymns during meals and before bed, and prayer again during night. By these he unites himself to the heavenly choir.”

Notes from Roff, *Let Us Sing...*

This hymn contains metaphorical descriptions of Christ that would have been very helpful to the new convert.

Notes from WordWiseHymns

The present hymn centers on the Lord Jesus Christ, and His work on our behalf in the past (at Calvary), and the present (cf. Eph. 5:25-27).

I. Stanza 1 calls Christ our Shepherd

Shepherd of tender youth,
Guiding in love and truth
Through winding ways:
Christ, ***our triumphant King***,
We come thy name to sing;
Here we our children bring,
To shout thy praise.

A. It was prophesied that the Messiah would be as a Shepherd: Isa. 40:11

B. Godly parents will want to bring their children to Jesus, by raising them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, just as did certain ones in Christ’s day: Matt. 19:13-15

C. Many modern editors do not like the phrase, “To shout Thy praise;” it has been altered to read, “To join Thy praise” or “Tributes of praise,” but the idea seems to come from the day of Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem, where the children were “crying [shouting] out in the temple and saying, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’”: Matt. 21:15-16

II. Stanza 2 calls Christ our Lord

Thou art *our holy Lord*,
The all-subduing Word,
Healer of strife:
Thou did thyself abase,
That from sin’s dev disgrace,
Thou mightest save our race,
And give us life.

- A. Peter proclaimed that God had made Jesus both Lord and Christ: Acts 2:36
- B. He is also identified as the “Word”: Jn. 1:1
- C. Yet, though Lord and Word, He abased or emptied Himself by coming in the likeness of men to be obedient to the point of death that He might save our race: Phil. 2:5-8

III. Stanza 3 calls Christ our High Priest

Thou art *the Great High Priest*,
Thou hast prepared the feast
Of heav'nly love:
While in our mortal pain,
None calls on thee in vain:
Help thou dost not disdain,
Help from above.

- A. Jesus is a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek: Heb. 5:5-6
- B. He has prepared for us the feast of heavenly love: 1 Cor. 5:7-8
- C. Therefore, we can come boldly before His throne and He has promised grace to help in time of need: Heb. 4:14-16

As our High Priest, Christ is there to intercede for us (Heb. 7:25), and serve as our heavenly Advocate (I Jn. 2:1-2).

IV. Stanza 4 calls Christ our Guide

Ever be thou *our Guide*,
Our Shepherd and *our Pride*,
Our Staff and Song:
Jesus, thou Christ of God,
By thy perennial Word,
Lead us where thou hast trod;
Make our faith strong.

A. We must look to Jesus to guide or lead us as a shepherd guides or leads his flock: Rev. 7:17

B. The means by which He does this is His perennial word; the term “perennial” has apparently given some hymnbook editors trouble because various ones have change it to “eternal” or “enduring.” But “perennial” simply means “lasting or active throughout the whole year, continuing for a long time, becoming active again and again, perpetual,” and that certainly describes the word of God which “lives and abides forever”: 1 Pet. 1:23-25

C. As our guide, He leads us in the way that He has trod, having left us an example that we should follow in His steps: 1 Pet. 2:21-23

Christ is ever-present with us (Matt. 28:20), guiding and directing us as our loving Shepherd (Ps. 23:1-6).

V. Stanza 5 calls Christ our King

So now, and till we die,
Sound we Thy praises high,
And joyful sing;
Let all the holy throng
Who to Thy church belong
Unite to swell the song
To Christ our King!

A. Jesus Christ is worthy of the praises that we show to Him: 1 Pet. 2:9

B. The original of lines 4 and 5 read, “Infants, and the glad throng Who to Thy church belong.” Some have suggested that this hymn was intended (perhaps by Clement, and quite likely by Dexter) to accompany the “dedication” of children.

C. The reason for this is that Christ is our King: Rev. 19:11-16

In summary, this hymn offers praise to Christ as our Lord and King while it asks Him to be our Shepherd and Guide.

193: Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

Liturgy of St. James, 5th Century

Words: Early Greek hymn (probably from the 4th century), the *Cherubic Hymn*, in the *Liturgy of St. James of Jerusalem*; paraphrased by Gerard Moultrie (b. Sept. 16, 1829; d. Apr. 25, 1885)

Music: Traditional 17th century French melody; harmonized by Ralph Vaughn Williams, and becoming the hymn tune *Picardy*.

There were some who believed this hymn was written by the James who was the early leader of the church at Jerusalem, and who gave us the epistle that bears his name. However, the hymn likely came from a time later than that, around AD 350. Even so, that makes it one of the earliest Christian hymns still in use.

The opening summons of this great hymn, is adapted from the book of Habakkuk, where it comes at the conclusion of a stern series of condemning “woes” from the Lord, upon Chaldea (or Babylon) the enemy of His people Israel (Hab. 3:5-20). Babylon was a rising power, and an invasion of the southern kingdom of Judah was threatening. The prophet was aware of the sins of his own people, and concerned about that, but he couldn’t understand how God could make use of a heathen power to chasten them. The Lord’s answer was that those who were in a right relationship with Him should continue to live by faith (Hab. 2:4).

Though Jehovah may sovereignly choose to use Babylon to discipline His wayward people, He is fully aware of the sins of that godless nation, and Babylon will be punished. “Woe to him who increases what is not his” (vs. 6); “woe to him who covets evil gain for his house” (vs. 9); “woe to him who builds a town with bloodshed” (vs. 12); “woe to him who gives drink to his neighbour (tempting him to drunkenness)” (vs. 15); “woe to him who says to wood, ‘Awake!’ (that is, who engages in idol worship)” (vs. 19).

In contrast to the latter terrible sin of idolatry: “The Lord is in (and ruling from) His holy temple (His heavenly sanctuary, cf. Ps. 11:4). Let all the earth (all mortal flesh) keep silence (hush) before Him” (vs. 20).

The idols of the heathen will never “awake” and speak to them. They will remain silent. And that is what those who make them and bow to them need to do. To hush, and hear the voice of Almighty God, speaking through His prophet. There ought to be an awed silence before the sovereign Lord of the universe, because He is about to act in judgment on the sins of His people, and ultimately on that nation He will use for the purpose.

Though Habakkuk 2:20 is used, not only in the present hymn but, in some churches, as a brief *Introit*, inviting the people of God to a meditative silence prior to the service, or prior to the sermon, it's important to see it in its context in Scripture. A holy God is calling sinners to account (cf. 1:12).

This hymn would be fitting for the Christmas season, but it was used in ancient times in connection with the Communion Service, or Lord's Supper. It emphasized the solemnity of that occasion. Think of who it is that came to die for our sins.

He is not only fully Man, but fully God. He is "Lord of lords, in human vesture" (Stanza 2), and demands "our full homage" (Stanza 1).

Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
And with fear and trembling stand;
Ponder nothing earthly minded,
For with blessing in His hand,
Christ our God to earth descendeth,
Our full homage to demand.

King of kings, yet born of Mary,
as of old on earth he stood;
Lord of lords, in human vesture,
in the body and the blood.
He will give to all the faithful
his own self for heav'nly food.

The fact that He is attended by the angels of heaven at once shows His superiority to them (cf. Heb. 1:4-14), and shows the great importance of the incarnation and what followed it. Two particular ranks of the holy angels are singled out for mention.

1) **The seraphim**—worshiping angels. (The "im" at the end of the word makes "seraph" plural in Hebrew.) Isaiah tells us of a heavenly vision he had of seraphim hovering around the throne of God. Their work seems to be to exalt and glorify God (Isa. 6:1-3).

2) **The cherubim**—guardian angels. Cherubim (more than one) were assigned to guard the entrance to the garden of Eden, after the fall, preventing Adam and Eve from returning (Gen. 3:24). But their main duties seem to be associated with the throne of God, as guardians there (Isa. 37:16).

That is why, when the Lord prepared to reveal His presence in the holy of holies of the tabernacle, the images of two golden cherubim were placed above the mercy seat (Heb. 9:5).

The hymn writer pictures these heavenly beings as part of a heavenly procession when Christ descends to this earth. We do know that the angels “desire to look into” the great thing the Lord has done to purchase our salvation (I Pet. 1:12).

Rank on rank the host of heaven
Spreads its vanguard on the way,
As the Light of light descendeth
From the realms of endless day,
That the powers of hell may vanish
As the darkness clears away.

At His feet the six wingèd seraph,
Cherubim with sleepless eye,
Veil their faces to the Presence,
As with ceaseless voice they cry:
Alleluia, Alleluia
Alleluia, Lord Most High!

Jesus the Very Thought of Thee

Bernard of Clairvaux 1091-1153

Words: Bernard of Clairvaux (b. 1091; d. Aug. 21, 1153)

Music: *St. Agnes*, by John Bacchus Dykes (b. Mar. 10, 1823; d. Jan. 22, 1876)

This hymn, translated from Latin by Edward Caswell, is traditionally attributed to Bernard, a brilliant preacher and theologian of the twelfth century.

The four or five stanzas used for the hymn begin a long Latin poem of forty-eight stanzas called Jesu Dulcis Memoria (“Sweet Memory of Jesus”). (The Cyber Hymnal gives us fifteen stanzas of the poem.) O Jesus, King Most Wonderful (also translated by Edward Caswell) and Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts (translated by Ray Palmer) are also drawn from the Latin poem.

Historian Philip Schaff called the present hymn “the sweetest and most evangelical hymn of the Middle Ages.” It is said the Latin original was sung by knights guarding the holy sepulchre in Jerusalem. John Dykes’ tune, *St. Agnes*, was written for the English version of the song. Agnes when a girl of thirteen, was martyred in Rome for her faith in Christ, in A.D. 304.

Let’s assume that Bernard is indeed the author of this hymn, or could be. It is in keeping with his strong focus on the person of Christ.

In an age when many were singing and praying to angels and dead saints, this was unusual. It led Martin Luther to proclaim him, four centuries later, the greatest monk who ever lived.

Bernard said:

If thou writest, nothing therein has savour to me unless I read Jesus in it. If thou discoursest, nothing therein is agreeable to me unless in it also Jesus resounds. Jesus is honey to the mouth, melody to the ear, a song of jubilee in the heart.

These sentiments, and the first and second stanzas of the hymn, are reminiscent of John Newton's beautiful How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds. A person's name represents him, and thus all that he is...When the Bible says of the Lord "how excellent is Your name in all the earth" (Ps. 8:9), we know it speaks of the Person of God, His nature and character, and of how He is worshiped the world over.

The name of Jesus, when it represents Christ, is precious to us because of His saving work on the cross. That is why He is called "Jesus" (Matt. 1:21). "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). "This is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment" (I Jn. 3:23).

No wonder Paul declares to the Corinthian church, "I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2). In the coming kingdom, "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11).

Jesus, the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills the breast;
But sweeter far Thy face to see,
And in Thy presence rest.

Nor voice can sing, nor heart can frame,
Nor can the memory find
A sweeter sound than Thy blest name,
O Saviour of mankind!

O Hope of ev'ry contrite heart,
O Joy of all the meek,
To those who fall, how kind thou art!
How good to those who seek!

Jesus, our only joy be Thou,
As Thou our prize will be;
Jesus, be Thou our glory now,
And through eternity.

646: Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts
Bernard of Clairvaux 1091-1153

Jesus, thou Joy of loving hearts,
Thou Fount of life, thou Light of men,
From the best bliss that earth imparts
We turn unfilled to thee again.

Thy truth unchanged hath ever stood;
Thou savest those that on thee call;
To them that seek thee thou art good,
To them that find thee all in all.

We taste thee, O thou living Bread,
And long to feast upon thee still;
We drink of thee, the Fountainhead,
And thirst our souls from thee to fill.

Our restless spirits yearn for thee,
Where'er our changeful lot is cast;
Glad when thy gracious smile we see,
Blest when our faith can hold thee fast.

O Jesus, ever with us stay,
Make all our moments calm and bright;
Chase the dark night of sin away,
Shed o'er the world thy holy light.

247: O Sacred Head, Now Wounded

Bernard of Clairvaux 1091-1153

O sacred Head, now wounded,
With grief and shame weighed down;
Now scornfully surrounded
With thorns, thine only crown;
O sacred Head, what glory,
What bliss till now was thine!
Yet, though despised and gory,
I joy to call thee mine.

What thou, my Lord, hast suffered
Was all for sinners' gain:
Mine, mine was the transgression,
But thine the deadly pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Saviour!
'Tis I deserve thy place;
Look on me with thy favor,
Vouchsafe to me thy grace.

What language shall I borrow
To thank thee, dearest Friend,
For this thy dying sorrow,
Thy pity without end?
O make me thine for ever;
And should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never
Outlive my love to thee.