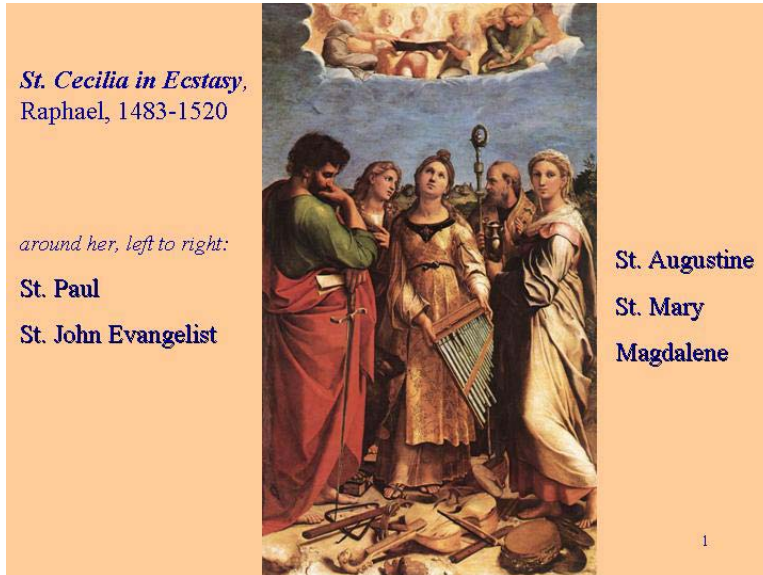


***“The High, the Deep and the Domestic”  
Anglican Verse and the Voice of God’s People***

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Wycliffe College  
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We begin by considering the well-known depiction of the patron saint of music, St. Cecilia, as pictured by Raphael in ecstasy, surrounded by the Saints. There she stands, in the midst of a worship scene, clutching her instrument, though interrupted in the

playing of it. Indeed, she is heedless of the few pipes now slipping out of their lashings, and other instruments lie strewn at her feet. Up she gazes, in rapture, at the scene of the worshipping heavenly beings. Who are the saints who surround her? St. Paul and St. Mary Magdalene, to her extreme right and left, we readily recognize. St. Paul, apostle of the Spirit’s sword looks down, his weapon at rest, Bible at his feet, in an attitude of deep contemplation; St. Mary, ointment in hand, stands to the left of St. Cecilia, and looks straight ahead, as befits the Apostle to the apostles. Some have said that she is looking at us, but I don’t believe so. Rather, she is wholly absorbed, as though seeing and adoring the very One to whom the worship is directed.

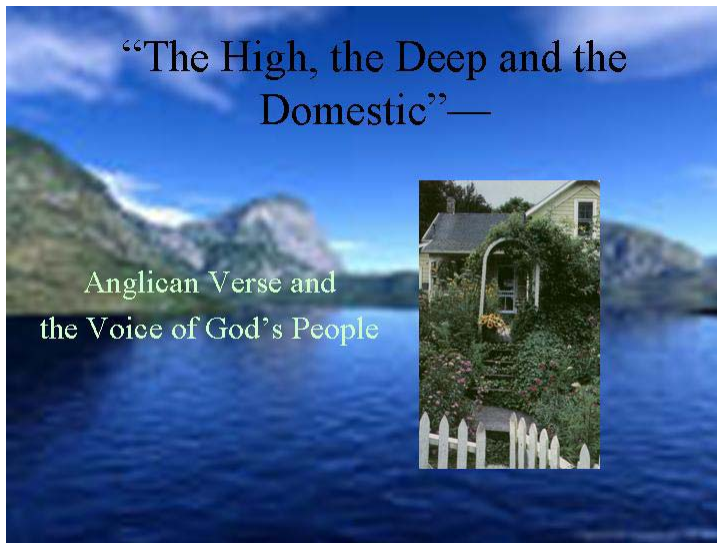
Some say that the two figures slightly behind St. Cecilia are St. John the evangelist and St. Augustine. If so, this is a strange scene. The worship of heaven proceeds, three angels sharing one book, one angel indicating to another where they are in the score: St. Cecilia is enraptured by their domestic homage. St. Paul theologizes throughout the

event; Mary sees, though we do not. And what do John and Augustine do? They exchange knowing glances, behind Cecilia's back. Here is John, the beloved apostle who saw the Lord with physical eyes, communing with Augustine, that wistful recorder of the intellectual vision, that confidential confessor who yearned for the beatific vision. Is the evangelist quoting from his own final pages to the father of the personal *Confessions*, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed?" Could it be that John is indicating to that great western theologian of the intellect that, through worship and music, Augustine may *indeed* become a God-seer? Perhaps just as Augustine's mother Monica was his mentor in the ascent of the intellect, Cecilia is being invoked as the mentor of true flight in the spirit.

True to Raphael's style, the painting is no icon: that is, it is not a transparent window through which we can see God. As a faithful work of art, it *is* significant, but is marked by just a touch of romanticism. It instructs, yet also leaves us smiling at the sentiments, causing us to objectify the painting -- do angels really use manuscript music? Do they need coaching? Would celestial worship, once glimpsed, kindle deep theological questions? Have the worshippers forsaken the human-made instruments in favour of the celestial voices? Does the scene of (slightly cherubic) worshipping angels serve as a distraction? Well, the painting might not be an avenue to ecstasy for us, its viewers, but it is indeed human. Here, it seems, is a typical snapshot of human liturgy caught in a moment, on canvas—complete with worshippers all in different attitudes, and a glance at the heavenly sanctuary to which our feeble efforts are joined. Here is the high, the deep and the domestic, all in a jumble together.

The painting may well reflect our usual experience of worship, but it is not, as we could say, "in order." After all, St. Cecilia takes centre-stage, so that hymnody itself is immortalized in the painting, rather than the Lord of the Music. Only Mary, it seems, "gets it." Her straight gaze is remarkable, indeed, out of sync with the sentiment, the distraction all around. In contrast to the attention of the others, she is "caught out" like a child in a class photo, with her gaze out of line. Yet it is not this Christ-seer, this woman who was apostle to the apostles, who is actually wayward, but all the others in the

painting. Even their undisciplined actions and stances are instructive, however. The glance of Cecilia towards the heavenly angels, the unspoken communication of John and Augustine, the rapt contemplation of Paul – all these actions, in their human quality, do have the potential to lead us beyond the busy scene to the One who is praised.



Could we take, for the next few moments, a breather from the pressing debates of the day, from the turmoil of our communion? For now, let's lay aside our urgent issues -- the uniqueness of Christ in a postmodern environment; the Biblical teaching of human sexuality in an indulgent,

disjointed and confused world; the nature of the Church in a time when Christians cannot agree on what is fundamental; the crisis regarding provision for episcopal oversight in ecclesial provinces that are ignoring the worldwide communion; and the merits and weaknesses of the Windsor Report, or the Primates' response to it. Instead, let's consider a positive aspect of our birthright as Christians and Anglicans, and turn our minds and hearts to the wholesome topic of sacred verse and hymnody. I offer this hour to us as a kind of Sabbath, a brief respite, in which we might think together about the great gift of music and poetry that has been an ornament and balm to our communion, from its very inception. While we are all-too-aware of our weaknesses and failures, we may yet rejoice over the Anglican heritage of song and verse—a heritage that encompasses the whole of human experience, from the high, to the deep, to the characteristically domestic.

Why the high, the deep and the domestic? In their liturgy, some communions give themselves wholly to the sacred chant, convinced that it is only by means of this *high*

road that the human community can truly worship, as we “lay aside all earthly care” and heed the unearthly sounds of the heavenly hosts. Here is the “high.” Others of reformed mind argue that in worship we are instructed, and so look exclusively for hymns packed with theological content. Here is the “deep.” Still others expect sacred music to form a seamless fabric with our lives, and are pleased when lyrics are “relevant” and tunes cohere with “today’s voice.” Here is the “domestic.” Ever ready to be charitable, Anglican verse and song has, for good and ill, run all three courses – the high, the deep and the domestic. Sometimes, indeed, we find all three aspects in the writings of one poet, or even surprisingly juxtaposed in a single verse. As with the painting of St. Cecilia, the ecstatic, the dogmatic and the domestic all make their mark upon our common worship.

Let’s consider together the musical and lyrical gifts of several Anglicans who have followed in St. Cecilia’s train, and enjoy again the richness that they have brought us. Here is a time to look over the family albums, to listen again to the old records, to be whisked away by the snatches of a well-beloved strain. For a bit, let us stop identifying ourselves in relation to our challenges: let us set our faces towards something characteristically Anglican and wholesome that God has given for our good. Indeed, even in following this course of action, we do battle for the beautiful, for we bring to mind a musical heritage that continues to resist what Thomas L. Mowbray has called “the uninformed, awkward, unpoetic, and unmusical age in which we live.”<sup>1</sup>

### ***Anglican hymnody’s roots in the Historic Church***

One of the greatest strengths of our communion is our refusal to be idiosyncratic, or navel-gazing, as we think about our identity. Many denominations, when they seek to fortify themselves against the drift of society, look to their “distinctives,” going back to their founders and their foundational confessional documents. Usually this history is only at best a few hundred years old, when some reformer or other tried to clarify a “new, improved version” of Christianity over against the evils of his or her day and his or her

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<sup>1</sup> Mowbray, “Why do we sing the songs?”  
[http://mowbraypublishing.homestead.com/files/PSALMS\\_essay.htm](http://mowbraypublishing.homestead.com/files/PSALMS_essay.htm)

society. But for Anglicans, there has always been something of the attitude of C. S. Lewis among us – we are seeking “mere Christianity.” Several of us have indeed stumbled upon this communion in the search for the historic church, for something that is not anchored to the 20<sup>th</sup>, the 19<sup>th</sup> or even the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but that has its roots way back in the time of the apostles. So with our hymnody! Anglican poets through the centuries have brought into the English language the verses of the Church before it was divided.

**Mediaeval lyrics**  
-attributed to St. Theodulph, Bishop of Orleans, 9<sup>th</sup> c  
- translated by Bishop John Mason Neale, 19<sup>th</sup> c.

All glory, laud and honour  
to Thee, Redeemer, King,  
To whom the lips of children  
made sweet hosannas ring.

Thou art the King of Israel,  
Thou David's royal Son,  
Who in the Lord's name comest,  
the King and blessed One.

...

[Be thou, O Lord, the Rider,  
and we the little ass;  
That to God's Holy City  
Together we may pass.]

3

We begin with a hymn, *Gloria, laus et honor*, ascribed, with strong reason, to St. Theodulph, a ninth century nobleman who was Bishop of Orléans, France, but who was imprisoned in the year 818 for political reasons in Angiers, where he is believed to have written this Palm Sunday hymn. Here are a few of the verses that English worshippers sing, based on the original Latin hymn:

All glory, laud and honour  
To Thee, Redeemer, King,  
To whom the lips of children  
Made sweet hosannas ring.

Thou art the King of Israel,  
Thou David's royal Son,  
Who in the Lord's name comest,  
the King and blessed One.

Here, we find, in content co- company, the high, the deep and the domestic. We hear an echo of the Eucharistic preface: "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." (The high.) We touch upon salvation history, and the deep mystery of Jesus' identity: "King of Israel, David's royal Son, Redeemer, Blessed One." (The deep.) And of course, there are the lips of children singing sweetly. (The domestic). So it looks as though this mixture of modes is to be found in the ancient hymnodists as well!

We must acknowledge, however, that we know the hymn through the translation of the priest and scholar John Mason Neale, who in the 19<sup>th</sup> c. revived for Anglicans many hymns from early Eastern and Western Christianity. Thus, some of the domestic touches are quintessentially 19<sup>th</sup> century – for example, the use of the word "sweet." Nevertheless, Neale has not utterly mistaken the tone of the original Latin, which also has a touch of the domestic. In fact, Theodulph ended his poem with a homey image: we, God's people, are pictured as the donkey upon which Jesus rode, while Jesus is the one "ascending" Mount Zion to "capture it."<sup>2</sup> The conceit may not have seemed so peculiar in his own time, when allegorical and anagogical interpretations of the Biblical text were common, and when singers might have readily re-interpreted the images in terms of our blessed hope of entering the heavenly Jerusalem, rather than balking at the prospect of being donkeys. This stanza Neale *did* originally translate<sup>3</sup>, but then re-considered as "too quaint" to retain in ongoing editions of hymnals:

Be thou, O Lord, the Rider  
and we the little ass;  
That to God's Holy City  
Together we may pass.

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<sup>2</sup> Latin, "*ascensor...capiat.*" The hymn is entitled "For the Palm Sunday Procession," in *The Oxford Book of Mediaeval Latin Verse*, ed. F. J. E. Raby, Oxford University Press, 1959, 109.

<sup>3</sup> *The Historical Companion to Hymns Ancient and Modern*, ed. Maurice Frost, (London: Clowes and Sons, 1962) 451.

Well, perhaps that's just a little *too* domestic. But the hymn's commingling of angels, mortal men, children and donkeys brilliantly captures the colourful riot of God's creation, matches the ambiguous atmosphere of Passion Sunday, which is both bright and dark, and looks forward to the new creation, which will include within it all the "wealth of the nations" (Rev. 21).

Neale sought to make English-speaking congregations aware of the centuries-old tradition of Latin, Greek, Russian, and Syrian hymns, because to incorporate the ancient hymns had *theological* implications for the Church. As he lamented,

Among the most pressing of the inconveniences consequent on the adoption of the vernacular language in the office-books of the Reformation, must be reckoned the immediate disuse of all the [ancient] hymns of the ... Church. That treasury, into which the saints of every age and country had poured their contributions, delighting, each in his generation, to express their hopes and fears, their joys and sorrows, in language which would be the heritage of their Holy Mother [i.e. the Church] until the end of time--those noble hymns, which had solaced anchorets on their mountains, monks in their cells, priests in bearing up against the burden and heat of the day, missionaries in girding themselves for martyrdom--henceforth became as a sealed book and as a dead letter.

Neale has been feared by some because of his high Sacramentalism, and supposed connections with the Roman-loving Tractarians. Yet he was an unashamed Anglican, a biblical Reformer who saw the need of the liturgy in the tongue of the people, and a small "c" catholic with a passion for the entire Church, east and west, past and present. His ministry to the church was to unseal the worship treasury of the past. This he did in a characteristically English fashion, bold in his move towards inculturation. He did not fear losing the gospel as he translated these songs for his day, because God has shown, through the incarnation, resurrection and ascension, that humanity and the entire human world can well be tinged with divine glory. It is meet for us to give our thanks and praise. And so Neale translates another, even more ancient hymn, "The Day of Resurrection," giving voice to every part of creation:

*The Day of Resurrection*  
*seventh century*  
*attributed to St. John Damascene,*  
*translated Bishop Neale*

**Now let the heavens be joyful  
And earth her song begin,  
The round world keep high triumph,  
And all that is therein;  
Let all things seen and unseen  
Their notes of gladness blend,  
For Christ the Lord hath risen,  
Our Joy that has no end**



Now let the heavens be joyful  
And earth her song begin,  
The round world keep high triumph,  
And all that is therein;  
Let all things seen and unseen  
Their notes of gladness blend,  
For Christ the Lord hath risen,  
Our Joy that has no end.

This translation is, I think, a little more sedate than its authentically ancient version, which has come down through the Eastern Church:

“Let the heavens be joyful, let the earth be glad.  
For the Lord has shown strength with his arm.  
He has trampled down death by death;  
He is the firstborn from the dead.  
He has opened the prisons of hell  
And has given to the world Great Mercy!”

Perhaps Neale’s English translation of the ancient Greek is a little less graphic in its exposition of the resurrection – I personally miss the “He has trampled down death by

death.” Yet, Neale’s version of the hymn, stresses the mysterious celebration of the whole of creation, in the reference to “the round world” and those things “seen and unseen.” When we sing this hymn, let us remember that this is our own parallel to ancient hymn still sung around the world in different cultures: so we join the ancient and worldwide Church in her celebration of the Easter victory! Surely our continued use of this hymn, originally written by St. John Damascene in the seventh century, confirms the insight of Father Arnold Klukas: “The Anglican Communion is a part of the mainstream of Christian faith. Its understanding of the value and purpose of music is not uniquely its own. Anglicanism merely calls attention to the fact that the Christian doctrines of creation, incarnation, and sanctification constitute the essence of sacred music.”<sup>4</sup>

### ***The Seventeenth Century***

#### *John Cosin: Catholic and Reformed*

Indeed, Neale was not the first Anglican to translate ancient verse for our use. English translators go back at least as far as the 1600s. In that century, we find the enigmatic Bishop John Cosin, who, among many offerings, memorialized an ancient hymn of the church. Cosin makes company with the inimitable George Herbert, whose lyrics have been aptly put to song, and the obscure Samuel Crossman, whose “Love Unknown” has become a song well known. One can hardly imagine contemporaries whose genius and work are more varied, but intriguingly complementary.

Bishop John Cosin, 1594-1672, was a high church English divine, whose liturgical practices were catholic, but whose theology was reformed. He was key in the 1661 revision of the Prayerbook, and after a season of disfavour was restored to the see of Durham.

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<sup>4</sup> [http://sacredmusicamerica.com/harmony/ang\\_intro.html](http://sacredmusicamerica.com/harmony/ang_intro.html)



*Bishop John Cosin, 1594-1672*  
*His translation of Veni Creator Spiritus,*  
Attributed to Rabanus Maurus (776-856)

Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire and lighten with celestial fire;  
Thou the anointing Spirit art, who dost thy sev'nfold gifts impart.

Thy blessed unction from above is comfort, life and fire of love;  
Enable with perpetual light the dullness of our blinded sight.

Anoint and cheer our soiled face with the abundance of thy grace:  
Keep far our foes, give peace at home; where thou art Guide no ill can  
come.

Teach us to know the Father, Son, and Thee, of Both, to be but One;  
That through the ages all along this may be our endless song,  
Praise to thy eternal merit, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

His well-known rendering of *Veni Creator Spiritus* (the Latin hymn attributed to Rabanus Maurus (776-856) is, I would argue, of higher quality than the later and more flowery translation of the renowned John Dryden. The Bishop's verses capture the sparse profundity of the Latin, and suit well the ancient plainsong melody to which they are put: so they continue to find an apt place in high points of Anglican liturgy. These words, sung as consecration, are a constant reminder of that true mystery of unction – anointing by the Spirit, who both enriches and enlightens his people.

Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire and lighten with celestial fire;  
Thou the anointing Spirit art, who dost thy sev'nfold gifts impart.

Thy blessed unction from above is comfort, life and fire of love;  
Enable with perpetual light the dullness of our blinded sight.

Anoint and cheer our soiled face with the abundance of thy grace:  
Keep far our foes, give peace at home; where thou art Guide no ill can come.

Teach us to know the Father, Son, and Thee, of Both, to be but One;  
That through the ages all along this may be our endless song,  
Praise to thy eternal merit, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The song has at once a “high” and down-to-earth quality. It invokes the “sevenfold gifts and celestial fire,” but also marks our practical need for peace and protection: “Keep far our foes, give peace at home.” Here is a hymn that holds in tension what the philosopher/musician Jeremie Begbie describes as the “un-grasp-ability” and the “attraction” of mystery. The mystery of our God both attracts, and is beyond us. The poet understands this, and places both what we know and what we do not know in the context of the creed: “Praise to thy eternal merit, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” Mystery is not played off *against* theology, as though propositional statements about God were beside the point! Some theologians may play this game today, but this hymn refuses that path, allowing what we do not know and what we do know to settle together as we sing praise to God.

Perhaps the translation’s one flaw is its inexplicable omission of the resurrection, originally in a final strophe of the Latin, which may be translated as follows:

Now to the Father and the Son,  
Who rose from death, be glory given,  
with Thou, O Holy Comforter,  
henceforth by all in earth and heaven.

It may be that Cosin thought enough had been accomplished in the hymn by focusing upon the Spirit in connection with our lives and with the Trinity. Perhaps he preferred to leave the resurrection to another moment. Yet, the ancient poet, Maurus, was right in his instincts to combine singing about the the Spirit with the celebration of the resurrection. It is in the resurrection, we are told by Paul, that Jesus the Christ became the first one to have a body completely invigorated by the life-giving Spirit (1 Corinthians 15). Without the Resurrection there can be no Ascension, and no Pentecost.

*George Herbert: poet-laureate*

The Bishop’s consecration hymn for corporate worship is well matched by the “utmost art” of the poet-laureate, George Herbert. Though often personal in the extreme, Herbert’s lyrics are by no means individualistic.

*George Herbert, 1593-1633*

King of glory, King of peace,  
I will love thee;  
And that love may never cease,  
I will move thee.  
Thou hast granted my request,  
Thou hast heard me.  
Thou didst note my working breast,  
Thou hast spared me.

Wherefore with my utmost art  
I will sing thee,  
And the cream of all my heart,  
I will bring thee.  
Though my sins against me cried,  
Thou didst clear me;  
And alone, when they replied,  
Thou didst hear me.



Seven whole days, not one in seven,  
I will praise thee;  
In my heart, though not in heaven,  
I can raise thee.  
Small it is, in this poor sort  
To enroll thee;  
E'en eternity's too short  
To extol thee.

6

King of glory, King of peace,  
I will love thee;  
And that love may never cease,  
I will move thee.  
Thou hast granted my request,  
Thou hast heard me.  
Thou didst note my working breast,  
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And alone, when they replied,  
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Seven whole days, not one in seven,  
I will praise thee;  
In my heart, though not in heaven,  
I can raise thee.  
Small it is, in this poor sort

To enroll thee;  
E'en eternity's too short  
To extol thee.]

This, perhaps his best-known sung poem, focuses upon King of Glory, beginning and ending with our great Monarch in view:

King of glory, King of peace,  
I will love thee.... (the first two lines)

Even eternity's too short  
To extol thee. (the last two lines)

Between these bookends of adoration, Herbert runs the gamut of human approaches, from aspiration: "that love may never cease" (line 3)

to petition: "I will move thee" (line 4)

to anxiety: "my working breast" (line 7)

to guilt: "my sins against me cried" (stanza 2, line 5)

to thanksgiving for divine response:

Wherefore with my utmost art (stanza 2)  
I will sing thee,  
And the cream of all my heart,  
I will bring thee.

to resolve: Seven whole days, not one in seven, I will praise thee; (stanza 3, line 1)

and finally to wonder: "even eternity's too short too extol thee!" (last line).

Here, not in a jumble, but in an organic and natural unfolding, we see the wonder of the high, the deep and the domestic. As poet and worshipper, Herbert exemplifies what St. Paul referred to as "this treasure in earthen vessels:" so the hymn brings home to us the astonishing situation in which we find ourselves. By virtue of God's glory and intimacy, we are healed and given voices to participate, even now, even in our present lives, in the worship of the ages. We have been caught up, by the divine Playwright, and the divine Actor, into that great drama which gives meaning to all things.

*Samuel Crossman, 1623-1683, Poet in time of Conflict:*

Perhaps we tend to envision drama in the Christian era as remote from England, contextualized in the theatres of Rome, when that early group of Christian martyrs braved the lions, or in the streets of Alexandria, when ordinary Christian citizens rioted over the iota—whether Jesus was *homoousios* with God or only *homoiousios*. But of late we have learned that turmoil comes in various forms! The English church of the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century had its share of unrest. As a young man, Samuel Crossman ministered both at All Saints, Sudbury, and in a Puritan church. He found himself in difficulty because of his Puritan sympathies, and joined the 2000-odd ministers expelled from the Church in 1662 after an attempted concord failed. A few years later he was able to regain his identity in the Anglican communion, was ordained, and went on to become the Dean of Bristol Cathedral. I have no doubt that his greatest gift to us, “My song is love unknown,” comes to us out of the pain and patience endured by this priest and poet in a time of conflict. As we sing the hymn, let its story draw you in. Place yourself, in prayer, before the wonder of the Incarnate One, in the midst of “his own” who would not receive him. Recall the ambiguity of Palm Sunday and the darkness of the fateful Thursday evening in Pilate’s palace. Place yourself in the midst of the weeping women on the Via Dolorosa, and with John and the Marys at the foot of the cross.

*Samuel Crossman, 1623-1683*

**My song is love unknown,  
My Savior's love to me;  
Love to the loveless shown,  
That they might lovely be.  
O who am I, that for my sake  
My Lord should take, frail flesh and die?**

**He came from His blest throne  
Salvation to bestow;  
But men made strange, and none  
The longed for Christ would know:  
But O! my Friend, my Friend indeed,  
Who at my need His life did spend.**

7

My song is love unknown,  
My Savior's love to me;  
Love to the loveless shown,  
That they might lovely be.  
O who am I, that for my sake  
My Lord should take, frail flesh and die?

He came from His blest throne  
Salvation to bestow;  
But men made strange, and none  
The longed for Christ would know:  
But O! my Friend, my Friend indeed,  
Who at my need His life did spend.

Sometimes they strew His way,  
And His sweet praises sing;  
Resounding all the day  
Hosannas to their King:  
Then “Crucify!” is all their breath,  
And for His death they thirst and cry.

Why, what hath my Lord done?  
What makes this rage and spite?  
He made the lame to run,  
He gave the blind their sight,  
Sweet injuries! Yet they at these  
Themselves displease, and 'gainst Him rise. 8

Sometimes they strew His way,  
And His sweet praises sing;  
Resounding all the day  
Hosannas to their King:  
Then “Crucify!” is all their breath,  
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Why, what hath my Lord done?  
What makes this rage and spite?  
He made the lame to run,  
He gave the blind their sight,  
Sweet injuries! Yet they at these  
Themselves displease, and 'gainst Him rise.

They rise and needs will have  
My dear Lord made away;  
A murderer they saved,  
The Prince of life they slay,  
Yet cheerful He to suffering goes,  
That He His foes from thence might free.

In life, no house, no home  
My Lord on earth might have;  
In death no friendly tomb  
But what a stranger gave.  
What may I say? Heav'n was His home;  
But mine the tomb wherein He lay.

9

They rise and needs will have  
My dear Lord made away;  
A murderer they saved,  
The Prince of life they slay,  
Yet cheerful He to suffering goes,  
That He His foes from thence might free.

In life, no house, no home  
My Lord on earth might have;  
In death no friendly tomb  
But what a stranger gave.  
What may I say? Heav'n was His home;  
But mine the tomb wherein He lay.



Here might I stay and sing,  
No story so divine;  
Never was love, dear King!  
Never was grief like Thine.  
This is my Friend, in Whose sweet praise  
I all my days could gladly spend.

10

Here might I stay and sing,  
No story so divine;  
Never was love, dear King!  
Never was grief like Thine.  
This is my Friend, in Whose sweet praise  
I all my days could gladly spend.

This is my Friend! Much ink has been spilt in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century regarding the importance of naming Jesus “Friend.”

Contemporary theologians prefer “friend,” of course, to “King” or “Lord” and urge this term upon us as a *substitute* for more traditional language. They even try to co-opt the Holy Trinity and the communion between Father, Son and Spirit, insisting that as the three Holy Persons are equal, so equality and friendship should characterize our stance before God. How much more poignant, more mysterious, more real, is Crossman’s humble song, which does not swallow up worship in cheap friendship, but staggers in wonder at the great Monarch who has MADE of us His friends!!! Crossman’s song may not qualify as “high” in any ordinary sense: yet here we find the domestic at the pleasing

service of the Lord Most High, so that we are moved, without manipulation, to meditate upon the deep mysteries of God's love for us, and then to be silent...or to sing. With all this before us, what may we say?

*Eighteenth Century*

As we move into the 18<sup>th</sup> century, we greet the great luminary John Newton (1725-1807), who is known for his remarkable conversion:

His epitaph tells it all:

JOHN NEWTON, Clerk  
Once an infidel and libertine  
A servant of slaves in Africa,  
Was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour  
JESUS CHRIST,  
restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach  
the Gospel which he had long laboured to destroy.  
He ministered,  
Near sixteen years in Olney, in Bucks,  
And twenty-eight years in this Church.

Newton is also celebrated for his collaboration with Cowper in the composition of the "Olney Hymns," the most famous of which is, of course, *Amazing Grace*. No doubt Newton's work gains its depth from his wide experience, his refusal to be parochial: in his hymns we can see influences as diverse as the Catholicism of Thomas à Kempis and the Methodism of Wesley.

## John Newton (1725-1807 )

Glorious things of thee are spoken,  
Zion, city of our God!  
He, Whose Word cannot be broken,  
Formed thee for His own abode.  
On the Rock of Ages founded,  
What can shake thy sure repose?  
With salvation's walls surrounded,  
Thou may'st smile at all thy foes.



Saviour, if of Zion's city,  
I through grace a member am,  
Let the world deride or pity,  
I will glory in Thy Name.  
Fading is the worldling's pleasure,  
All his boasted pomp and show;  
Solid joys and lasting treasure  
None but Zion's children know.

11

His classic, "Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken," echoes the certitude of the closing verses of Hebrews, that we are "receiving an kingdom that cannot be shaken." Ageless in its look to our hope, it continues to strengthen the Church in times of confusion.

Glorious things of thee are spoken,  
Zion, city of our God!  
He, Whose Word cannot be broken,  
Formed thee for His own abode.  
On the Rock of Ages founded,  
What can shake thy sure repose?  
With salvation's walls surrounded,  
Thou may'st smile at all thy foes.

Consider all that this hymn brings together from the Scriptures in its first verse: the Psalms of *ascent to Zion*; Jesus' own words about the *unbreakable Scriptures*; the prologue of John's Gospel where we meet the *Incarnate Word*; the wonder of the Incarnation and Pentecost, by which God has come to *abide with us* forever; and the mystery that, even though a battle continues, Christians who make up the New Zion have gained God's Sabbath *repose*, because *He* is protecting us. Would that there were time to

show the intricacies of all the verses, and the deep theology that they yield, even while they retain a down-to-earth quality! The last verse must suffice:

Saviour, if of Zion's city,  
I through grace a member am,  
Let the world deride or pity,  
I will glory in Thy Name.  
Fading is the worldling's pleasure,  
All his boasted pomp and show;  
Solid joys and lasting treasure  
None but Zion's children know.

Here Newton turns, for a fleeting moment, to the first person. As the congregation sings together, each member is thus enabled to render praise directly; yet we do not linger long here, nor are we allowed to lapse into sentimentality. We return to to our corporate identity as Zion's children, in the last line. Those who pray these words while singing are sustained, both personally and corporately; through this song God gives us strength for the ordeals that we must face while we remain faithful. Newton reminds us, not so very obliquely, of Jesus' warning in John's gospel that we must not seek the "glory that comes from men," but rather turn to give glory to God. So we will share in reality, in solid joys and lasting treasure. Like the late C. S. Lewis of our own time, the hymn reminds us that the resurrection joy is not something ethereal and elusive, but more substantial than anything we have ever known. *Now* we live in fleeting time and decaying space; *then* all will be perfected through the rescue of our world that God has accomplished in Christ. The domestic is to be caught up into glory; God's children are to inherit Zion because they are, through the Holy Spirit, *in* God the Son.

*Christina Georgina Rossetti, (1830-94); Deceptive Simplicity*

We move on to the nineteenth century, which was an extraordinarily fruitful period for Anglican verse. (We have already seen some of its fruits in the translations of Bishop Neale.) One of its most remarkable poets, Christina Georgina Rossetti, was a member of the group known as *Pre-Raphaelites*, artists who deplored the imitative art of their forbears, and sought a simpler, deeper vision. At worst, the movement was criticized as superficial and sentimental, but at best, it blended reverence for the classics with a

startling earthiness. Christina Rossetti's lyrics remind us, in their deceptive simplicity, of George Herbert. So has the last verse of her well-known Christmas hymn been embossed millions of times over on greeting cards:

*Christina Georgina Rossetti, (1830-94)*

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



Our God, heaven cannot hold Him  
Nor earth sustain:  
Heaven and earth shall flee away  
When He comes to reign:  
In the bleak mid-winter  
A stable place sufficed  
The Lord God almighty  
Jesus Christ

Enough for Him, whom  
cherubim  
Worship night and day,  
A breast full of milk  
And a manger of hay:  
Enough for Him, whom  
angels  
Fall down before,  
The ox and ass and camel  
Which adore.

What can I give Him,  
Poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd  
I would bring a lamb;  
If I were a wise man  
I would do my part;  
Yet what I can I give him  
Give my heart.

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

Our God, heaven cannot hold Him  
Nor earth sustain:  
Heaven and earth shall flee away  
When He comes to reign:  
In the bleak mid-winter  
A stable place sufficed  
The Lord God almighty  
Jesus Christ

**Enough for Him, whom cherubim  
Worship night and day,  
A breast full of milk  
And a manger of hay:  
Enough for Him, whom angels  
Fall down before,  
The ox and ass and camel  
Which adore.**

What can I give Him,  
Poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd  
I would bring a lamb;  
If I were a wise man  
I would do my part;  
Yet what I can I give him  
Give my heart,

Yet the verse needs the whole poem to make its mark. Consider the progression of moods:

the wistful tone of the first verse, with its descriptive quality; (“frosty wind made moan”)

the theological complexity of the second, which treats the immense wonder the Omnipotent who visits his creation; (“Our God, heaven cannot hold him”)

the contrast of the theologically packed second verse with the hominess of the third stanza, (“a breastful of milk”)

and the personal ending. (“What can I give him?”)

You may not be surprised that I want to consider the third verse, which is so often neglected by the squeamish:

**Enough for Him, whom cherubim  
Worship night and day,  
A breast full of milk  
And a manger of hay:  
Enough for Him, whom angels  
Fall down before,  
The ox and ass and camel  
Which adore.**

Here we are in a world that juxtaposes the ceaseless fire of the cherubim with the hormonally stimulated flow of the breast! As if this were not contrast enough, angelic prostrations are performed alongside the unlikely but adoring worship of beasts, in all their comic variety: ox, ass and camel. This is enough for Him, who has created all, and declared it “good.” Rossetti, mindful of the human role that we are to act as “priest” for the rest of creation, gives voice to frosty wind, ox, ass and camel. Nor is this merely pre-Raphaelite fancy, since Paul tells us that “the whole creation waits in anticipation” for the completion of God’s work, and the seer John envisions the entire creation embraced by celestial worship, led by cherubim upon whose faces are imprinted the creatures God has made (Revelation 4). It seems that the homely has indeed a God-given place, in which to “adore” and offer gifts.

### *Contemporary Hymnody*

Had we another whole session we could go on to consider the rebirth of hymnody in Anglicanism that seems to have taken place in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the publication of “Hymns Ancient and Modern.” Some may, in contrasting the fruits of that age with our own time, find themselves wholly dismayed, and nostalgic for the creative impulses of the past. There are, of course, still some gems, notably among hymn-writers who walk consciously in the whole tradition of the Church. Consider Steve James’s reworking of Psalm 90, the psalm of Moses seen through the eyes of the new covenant:



**Steve James**

**Because of the Lord's  
great love,  
We are not consumed,  
For him my soul will wait:  
His faithfulness is great  
And his mercy is fresh  
as the morning dawn  
Because of the Lord's great love,  
We are not consumed.**

Because of the Lord's great love,  
We are not consumed.  
For him my soul will wait:  
His faithfulness is great  
And his mercy is fresh as the morning dawn  
Because of the Lord's great love,  
We are not consumed.

This is simple, but not trivial, joins the personal (“my soul”) to the corporate (“we are not consumed”), and allows hope to spring out of a grasp of reality. Unfortunately, not all contemporary verse is so informed by the Scriptures, by the liturgy, and by the Christian tradition. Too often we may empathize with this satirist’s *Essay on Hymnody*:

Tis hard to say if greater harm is done  
When heresy is preached or when it's sung....  
In my opinion, in these so-called "hymns"  
There's far too much of us, too little Him



*Lex orandi lex credendi*

—the law of worship

becomes

the law of belief???

14

Tis hard to say if greater harm is done  
When heresy is preached or when it's sung,  
But I will argue that the latter's worse—  
More virulent is heresy in verse.  
For heresy may do much greater harm  
Once melody and rhythm have disarmed  
One's judgment, and one's reason has been charmed

...

And songs make us partake in heresy  
Which makes us guilty of complicity;  
And sermons stay not long between the ears  
But song words linger in our heads for years  
—The music and the metre make them stick.

...

Those wicked hymns in the indicative  
That make us sing of how we ought to live  
As though we do—that is, they make us lie  
When they should teach us truths for which to die!  
Or make us sing of feelings we don't feel  
Thus make the ones we do feel seem unreal;

...

Some make themselves the subjects of their song  
Instead of Christ, and as we sing along,  
They lure us from the Rock of history  
Into the mire of subjectivity.

In my opinion, in these so-called “hymns”  
There's far too much of us, too little Him

([http://hippocampusextensions.com/issues/08/an\\_essay\\_on\\_hymnody.php](http://hippocampusextensions.com/issues/08/an_essay_on_hymnody.php))

This naughty little poem puts its finger on the major problems of much contemporary verse—first, the temptation to sing of *experience* in such a way that hymns are coopted for the “power of positive thinking,” for manipulation of the singers, rather than for worship; second, the *ever-present* first person singular, which centres each of us upon ourselves and our feelings, and turns our eyes away from the Lord. Besides such tendencies, which are frequently seen in songs composed by the well-meaning, there are hymns composed today that deliberately spread novel doctrine. For example, the Anglican Church of Canada, in its most recent hymnbook, has printed a verse for St. Joseph’s day that runs as follows:

All praise, O God, for Joseph,  
the guardian of your Son,  
who saved him from King Herod,  
when safety there was none  
He taught the trade of builder,  
when they to Nazareth came,  
and Joseph’s love made ‘Father’  
to be, for Christ, God’s name.<sup>5</sup>

This is, it seems, a touching picture of Jesus and his father: and we have been applauding sensitivity to the domestic during our study together this afternoon. Yet, look at the assumptions here: Jesus could only understand about God being like a father, *because he had a positive experience of father at home*. It was his *human experience* about father, and that alone, that led him to picture God in this way. What audacity is here! There is, after all, *no* indication in Scripture about the psychology of Jesus’ theological development, and how he owed it to his human parents. It is most probably true that Jesus’ human environment played some part in his thinking: but the self-consciousness of the One who was truly human but also the Word of God, and truly divine, is a mystery far

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<sup>5</sup> Hymn 283, option for March 19, St. Joseph’s day

beyond our comprehension. Who are we to assume that Jesus' name for God was born of his own, human, particular, limited understanding, and that we can do better, or use richer terminology? When Jesus taught us boldly to say, "Our Father" was this the simple fruit of his environment and upbringing, or was he revealing to us, opening to us, as his redeemed brothers and sisters, a *new* way, a *true* way, of addressing God? Can we no longer hear Paul, who in Ephesians 3 declares that all *patria*, all fatherhood, derives its reality from *the* Father – and not the other way around?! Because of this new hymn, however, millions of Canadians will come to accept an approach to theology that leads them to *qualify*, or even question as culturally-determined, a great mystery of our faith—the Name of God the Father.

In doing this, pew Christians will follow in the train of thousands of seminarians, who already embrace, without criticism, the "Role Model Theology" that their teachers have inculcated in them. This theology teaches that we only know about the mysterious God by extrapolating from our own experience. The tendency is nourished by what theologians call the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" in which "experience" is added as a fourth authority for making theological decisions in the Church, alongside Scripture, tradition and Reason. Of course, a lively experience of God's presence is important for all of God's children—but to make personal experience a theological authority is a great mistake. This type of emphasis upon experience is far too human-centred, and leaves us always groping to understand the light that has come into the world. The Christian family gives a different account of how God's revelation of himself works in our world. As Christian people, we claim that something *new* has happened in the human understanding about God. We have been told, and believe, that God himself came to dwell among us, and taught us truly, if not exhaustively, about his own nature, and about how he should be named. Our knowledge about the Father comes not simply from what we know of human fathers, by our own understanding, but *by God the Son himself taking up our human language and teaching us the best way to use it*. As the Reformers said, "God 'lisp' his word to us like the parent to an infant." And so, God gives us back our words about him, showing the name that is best suited to his nature, and filling in what that name means.

So, then, just as hymns can lead us to worship, so they can lead us into error and blasphemy. The characteristics of the high, the deep and the domestic have informed English hymnody and served us well. Yet our strength may become an Achilles' heel. There is a sense in which the Latin phrase, *lex orandi, lex credendi* ("the law of worship is the law of belief"), is correct. How people worship is how they will believe. This is especially so of hymns, and the singing of hymns in a theologically-illiterate age. In researching for this paper, I came across some lectures given by M. R. Ritley, a lesbian Anglican who has teamed up with the infamous gay-positive scholar and Anglican, William Countryman, to write the books, *God's Gay Tribe* and *Gifted by Otherness*. Ritley, in speaking of the power of hymnody, quotes Luther, who remarked that he would allow anybody to write the theology, so long as he were allowed to write the hymns!<sup>6</sup> This is perceptive. And it should drive us to our knees. For what will happen to a church whose hymns are written by the likes of Ritley? This leading Anglican, who styles herself as a spiritual leader, declared to her charge, "Go ahead and have your spiritual life. You don't need the church's stamp of approval...It is not for the church to tell you who you are."<sup>7</sup> How sad that Ritley has muzzled the Mother of the Christian family, the Church universal, through which we learn of Christ! Her defiance recalls for us the warning of T. S. Eliot, celebrated Anglican poet of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who declared prophetically:

Why should men love the Church? Why should they love her laws?  
She tells them of Life and Death, and of all that they would forget.  
She is tender where they would be hard, and hard where they like to be soft.  
She tells them of Evil and Sin, and other unpleasant facts.

*(Choruses from the Rock)*

I promised you a rest from controversy, but it seems our Sabbath is over, for even the pursuit of hymnody leads us back to the realities of our day. To think about what we sing, and why, is by no means a frivolous thing! We live in an age that will not hear sound doctrine, and that has a short memory. But folks will still listen to stories, and they will enjoy music, and maybe even hum along. Let us be sure that the songs we offer are

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cdsp.edu/~call/passwelc.html>

<sup>7</sup> Some gays feel a spiritual calling, D. Price / The Detroit News,  
<http://www.detnews.com/2002/editorial/0201/31/a09-401368.htm>

true hymns of the Church, songs of the angels, songs of the Christ. Let us not offer songs that simply beguile, nor songs about ourselves alone, nor hymns to our experience. Let us be careful that what we sing is not, in its relevance, promoting 21<sup>st</sup> c. half-baked theology. If this brief tour of Anglican hymnody can serve a humble purpose, let it be to remind us of the riches which are ours, so that we do not abandon the high strains, the deep meditation, and domestic humility, in a misguided quest for relevance.

### *Hymns as instructive of Role Model Theology!*



All praise, O God, for Joseph,  
the guardian of your Son,  
who saved him from King Herod,  
when safety there was none  
He taught the trade of builder,  
when they to Nazareth came,  
*and Joseph's love made 'Father'  
to be, for Christ, God's name.*



15

And let us pray for new St. Cecilas and St. Caedmons, who will come, not to enchant us, but to guide our worship so that we join with those who even now see the Lord: so will our eyes be opened, as those of Mary Magdalene, to see Him, and our ears opened, to hear. For it is “in the face of Jesus” that we see “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.” (2 Cor. 4:6).

“For He has shone...  
to give the light  
of the knowledge  
of the glory of God  
in the face of Jesus.”  
2 Corinthians 4:6

