

THE RHETORIC OF HYMNS

Festival of Faith and Writing Calvin College 2006

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Hymns from forthcoming book

A Treasury of Faith

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“Ceremonies should be observed both so that people may learn the Scriptures and so that, admonished by the Word, they might experience faith and fear and finally even pray. For these are the purposes of the ceremonies.... We also use German hymns in order that the [common] people might have something to learn that will arouse their faith and fear.” (“Apology of the Augsburg Confession,” [XXIV] “The Mass” 4, p 258

1. Preaching—Audience: congregation, frequently end in prayer—Luther
Close to text, expository “THEIR BOOKS COULD NOT DIVINE THE ONE”
Topical sermon on theme--“ABOVE THE STARS ARE WHEELING”
Exhortation to congregation to praise—REJOICE! THE STONE IS ROLLED AWAY”
Liturgical texts—“All Glory be to God on High”
2. Biblical paraphrase—Audience: varies with original source, Calvin
 - a. Psalms—exact attention to language of psalm--“HAVE MERCY UPON ME”
 - b. Biblical stories—narrative, ballads that tell stories pretty closely, not exact paraphrases “AS THE LILIES HID THEIR FACES”
“THEY CAME TO COVER DEATH”
3. Hymns of praise and prayer—Audience: God, Jesus, Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit
 - a. “HELP ME HOLY SPIRIT”
 - b. “AFTER SINGING SONGS OF COMFORT”
4. Hymns of testimony—Audience: Congregation, Other believers
 - a. LIKE WINTER DRIFTS THAT STILL REMAIN
 - b. JESUS CAME TO KEEP THE LAW
5. Liturgical hymns—Audience: God, telling what we are doing as we sing
 - a. “We Light the Advent Candles”
 - b. “Thy Holy Wings”

THEIR BOOKS COULD NOT DIVINE THE ONE
(8.8.8.8.8.8.)

1. Their books could not divine the one
Who made the star shine like a sun
They had to follow where it led
To find him in a manger bed.
All wisdom now incarnate flesh
Before them in a simple crèche.
2. King Herod feared the new-born King
And all the danger he would bring.
He tried to still the baby's voice
By killing all of Bethl'hem's boys,
The only law he understood
Was brutal force and shedding blood.
3. The wisemen knelt and worshiped him
Unlikely king in Bethlehem.
Thought he was innocent of might
There in the crib he lay, the world's true light.
His wisdom foolish to the wise
His power hid from Herod's eyes.
4. Come, Christians, kneel before his throne,
A rough rude manger not his own,
His weakness soon will break your heart
And pry its iron gates apart.
O, let this little one come in
To cleanse you of despair and sin.
5. Rejoice, O Christian friends, and sing
Delightful carols to your king
The ruler of the galaxies
Whose birth fulfilled the prophecies
A Savior soon would come to dwell
On earth with us: Immanuel!

Text by Gracia Grindal

Topic: Christmas, Holy Innocents

Source: Matthew 2:1-12

Possible tune: *St. Catherine*

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ABOVE THE STARS ARE WHEELING

(7.6.7.6.D.)

1. Above the stars are wheeling
Earth rushes toward the night
Soon church bells will be peeling
To mark the old year's flight.
And we are left with feelings
That we cannot set right.
Our thoughts and dreams are reeling,
Around us this dark night.

2. Old memories gather round us
Regret and grief begin
To mark how they have bound us
As darkness closes in.
While shadows taunt and hound us
We shudder at their din
And marvel that they found us
Before the year begins.

3. The candles on the table
Bring light into our gloom.
Like Jesus in the stable,
Whose birth dispelled our doom
We know his light is able
To fill the darkest room.
Like candles on the table
Drive out the winter gloom.

4. As night is clothed with morning
Regret is garbed in grace
Now at the old year's turning
We rest in Christ's embrace.
To still the devil's storming
We look at Jesus' face.
Its light is bright as morning
And dresses us in grace.

Text by Gracia Grindal

Topic: New Year's Eve

Source: Matthew 2:1-12

Possible tune: *Oslo*

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REJOICE! THE STONE IS ROLLED AWAY
(8.8.8. Alleluia)

1. Rejoice! The stone was rolled away,
And Christ was raised up from the grave!
Cruel death was overcome today!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

2. Rejoice! Christ broke the bonds of death,
So I may live in him by faith,
And praise his name with all my breath:
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

3. Rejoice! Christ took the devil on
And threw his stony kingdom down.
Now sin and death have been undone.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

4. Rejoice! For he has made us free
To praise him through eternity
With all of heaven's company!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Text by Gracia Grindal

Topic: Easter, Resurrection

Source: Matthew 28:1-8

Possible tune: *Gelobt sei Gott*

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HAVE MERCY UPON ME
(9.8.9.8 Amphibrac)

1. Have mercy upon me, O Savior,
According to your loving heart,
Pour out on me your great compassion,
And all my transgressions blot out.
2. My sin, it is always before me,
Against you, you only I've sinned,
I've done what is foolish and evil
I'm through and through guilty within.
3. You knew me, O God, from conception,
You know just how wretched I am.
Come show me the truth, give me wisdom,
Reveal me, uncover my shame.
4. Create in me, Savior, a clean heart
Renew a right spirit in me.
Do not cast me out of your presence,
Restore me to health, make me free.
5. Lord, open my lips with rejoicing,
My tongue, let it show forth your praise.
O Lord, mend my heart that is broken,
Correct it, and teach me your ways.

Text by Gracia Grindal

Topic: Ash Wednesday, Repentance and Forgiveness

Source: Psalm 51

Possible tune: Swedish folktune *Til Österland vil jag fara*

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THEY CAME TO COVER DEATH
(6.6.6.6.4.4.4.4.4.4.)

1. They came to cover death
With aromatic oil,
To use the things of earth,
The flowers of the soil,
And daub away
Their pain and grief,
To find relief
For all their pain. .
To find relief
For all their pain.

2. But death had been undone.
The young man robed in white,
Bright as the rising sun,
Sat in the morning light
“Fear not!” he said,
“From death’s dark pris’n
The Lord has ris’n!
Ris’n from the dead!”
The Lord has ris’n,
Ris’n from the dead!”

3. They threw their spices down
And ran away, afraid.
Death had been overcome.
The promises he made
Were coming true.
Could they believe,
Put by their grief
Like morning dew?
Put by their grief
Like morning dew?

4. Behind them on the stones
Lay alabaster jars,
Their fragrant remnants shone,
While high above the stars
Rejoiced with earth:
The risen Lord
Had kept his Word
And shattered death.
Had kept his Word
And shattered death.

Possible tune: *Rhosymedre*

HELP ME, HOLY SPIRIT
(6.5.6.5.D.)

1. Help me, Holy Spirit,
When I need to pray,
Help me find expression,
Intercede for me.
Make my wordless sighing
Prayers that God will hear.
Heed my troubled groaning
Bring our Father near.

2. Help me, Holy Spirit,
Know that God is love
And to trust the goodness
Jesus' works have proved.
Teach me to be thankful
That God sent his Son
Here to take the sentence
For the wrong I've done.

3. Help me, Holy Spirit,
Fill my anxious heart,
Show me there is nothing
Driving us apart,
Neither past nor present,
Neither height nor depth.
Nothing now can shake me,
Neither life nor death.

4. Help me, Holy Spirit,
Fill my heart with peace,
Peace I cannot fathom,
Peace that gives release.
Bring me to Christ Jesus,
To the heart of love,
There where I can praise him
In our home above.

Text by Gracia Grindal
Topic: Holy Spirit, Prayer,
Source: Romans 8:25-30
Possible tune: *Nous Allons*

AFTER SINGING HYMNS OF COMFORT
(8.7.8.7.D.)

1. After singing hymns of comfort

We have left the one we love
Covered over with bright flowers
On the rich, expensive wood.
Still the words that we are saying
Seem as empty as our hearts,
Even if the sun is shining
Life seems overcast and dark.

2. What we cling to is the promise

Spoken as the pastor stood
By the coffin as they closed it
And we felt your presence there.
Nothing separates us from you
Neither life nor cruel death,
Not the mundane world around us,
Nothing, neither height nor depth.

3. By the casket blooms a lily

Weak and fragile from a stone,
So your promise breaks the iron
Of the doubt that we have known.
Spirit, come to us and give us
Words to help us try to pray
Turn our bitter sighs to morning
And our sorrow into day.

Text by Gracia Grindal

Topic: Death and Burial, Funeral,

Source: Romans 8

Possible tune: *Beach Spring*

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JESUS CAME TO KEEP THE LAW
(7.7.7.7. Trochaic)

1. Jesus came to keep the law
To fulfill it perfectly
It would stand, he said, until
Heaven and earth had passed away.

2. Jesus, what you say is hard,
But I know your words are true,
They dig deep into my heart
And unmask the things I do.

3. Jesus, you know all my sins
And expose them to the day,
When you speak my ears can hear
Truth and life, the only way.

4. Jesus, take my self-deceit,
Crucify it on the tree,
Take the burden of my lies
On yourself and set me free.

Text by Gracia Grindal

Topic: Holiness, Following Christ, Wisdom and self-awareness

Source: Matthew 5:21-34

Possible tune: *Nun komm der heiden Heiland*

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SCANDINAVIAN INFLUENCES ON MY WORK

1. Lutheran hymns of proclamation on texts for the day
Kingo's hymnal—Hymn mass for every Sunday
2. Put self into Bible story as though one is there observing it
Try to see old story from modern point of view
3. Hymn explosion
Use non-theological language so contemporary people can understand them without being "churchly"

PROBLEMS WITH ENGLISH/AMERICAN HYMNS

1. Isaac Watts—created English hymnody in 18th century
General specifics—not very concrete
2. Forms—English is not very rich in rhyming words
Stanzas very ordinary—S.M.; C.M.; L.M.; 8.7.8.7—typically ballad stanzas
Beats are either trochaic or iambic
Lutheran forms are much more varied
Hymns are best when their forms are tight and repetitive
3. Deeply Calvinistic; evangelical, or experiential—fits with my Lutheran pietism, but different—don't paraphrase psalms as much
4. Lutheran hymnody today mostly liturgical—about what is happening in Baptism, Eucharist
5. Mostly what the text meant, what it means—usually literalistic past, moralistic present, no future because we don't like heaven—totally predictable, as they did so must we....
6. Competent poetry, but not very creative—and when does that become a problem? (My own heart's poetry, not the Gospel of Jesus Christ)