Our Changing Hymns:

A literary study guided by a personal aesthetic

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Table of Contents

Summary

My work on this thesis began from a feeling that all was not well with hymn singing in the church's worship. Two decades ago, I completed a Master of Arts (MA) in the English Department at Flinders University about the stirrings generally happening in the language of worship. At the same time, I was becoming significantly engaged in hymn writing myself and was asking serious questions about the poetic text of hymns or, as some would say, of "songs". A clear research question was beginning to frame itself: ***What makes a good hymn text?***

This study demanded a good selection of hymns to be observed so valid conclusions could be drawn concerning congregational song in Protestant churches. As it happened, the church to which I belong, Pilgrim Uniting Church in Adelaide, has three consciously different worshipping congregations on a Sunday morning. At 8.00 am, a relatively traditional Protestant worship is held with traditional Protestant hymns from the *Australian Hymn Book* (AHB), published in 1977. At 9.30 am, worship is more consciously modern with some home-grown "songs", as well as some from *Together in Song* (TIS), the second edition of AHB, published in 1999. At 11 am, the Anglican hymnal, *Common Praise* (CP), is used which is the new version of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, published in 2000. I chose these three books for my study with a strong feeling that they provided a good microcosm of Australian Protestant worship to explore. Many hymns appeared in all three books, with some differences in wording, making it easier to compare different versions of many hymns.

My methodology involved choosing a particular hymn, in which changes of wording had been deemed necessary. I first take a literary critic's stance to evaluate such a hymn before changes were made; and I then evaluate the text of the hymn after the changes have been made. Literary and linguistic skills make for interesting discoveries about hymn texts.

Much of the interest in this thesis is the literary detail of twenty-nine hymns and a few hymn fragments, as it uncovers many of the riches contained in this genre of religious literature. I found that the revision of hymn texts, regardless of how sound the motive, has frequently come at significant cost to the hymn's literary quality. This was particularly evident in *Together in Song* (TIS). The AHB, which was published about ten years before work began on TIS, was successful in its time. Published around the same time as TIS, CP pursued a

standard of "invisible mending" when it came to revising hymn texts. As I found, it was, indeed, largely successful in preserving the quality of the original hymn.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis:

1. Does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and

2. To the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

I think my interest in the business of hymn writing began in a church history lecture at the then-Presbyterian Theological Hall at Ormond College, Melbourne. On a certain day in my final year, I was listening, very intently actually, to Professor George Yule, who was always worthy of careful attention. On this day, he paused in his lecture, and said to us something like, "You should know that in the years ahead, the church is going to need people to write some new hymns for worship". I was excited by the idea, within myself, of course, but, showing unexpected twenty-six-year-old wisdom, I thought to myself "Wow. Maybe I could try that – in a few years. Not yet, of course".

The few years became nearly ten, which was about when I tried my hand at maybe half a dozen hymns. These remain hidden, I suppose in the deep recesses of the bottom drawer of my filing cabinet, never, I trust, to see the light of day. By this time, I had become a South Australian and was in my third parish in Adelaide and, after a marriage breakdown, I had taken leave of absence from the ministry. One of the first things I did was to enrol at Flinders University for a Bachelor of Arts (BA) Honours in English and Drama (my earlier studies to qualify for secondary teaching were at the University of Melbourne and was a Science degree in Physics and Maths). I found the atmosphere at Flinders a great delight for a new "mature-aged student", the official terminology at the time, and I particularly relished the literary criticism skills that I was learning to understand and use at that time.

I made much use of these skills in my MA work, commencing this about three years later under Dr Graham Tulloch, who later became Professor of English. My study was on the issues surrounding the use of contemporary English in the Bible, liturgy and hymns, in public worship in the 1960s and 1970s. Needing to keep body and soul together, I was fortunate to obtain work teaching English to new arrivals, mainly Vietnamese migrant and refugee secondary school students. For me, it was also a wonderful job. Apart from confronting me with cultural differences, the work enhanced my language skills, as I needed to learn some linguistics myself to do the job. I found this subject fascinating and very enriching, for linguistics is a discipline

quite different from literary criticism, although the two disciplines can influence and inform each other. All this meant that my MA thesis writing was largely confined to school vacations. It was however well received, although it took me the best part of ten years. (I was lucky. It seems that today one is not allowed to extend one's studies over such a time frame.)

However, this meant that I was not unduly restricted in the time needed to think through the issues. I could sit in church on Sundays and, at times, wonder about the language of the Good News Bible, or if one was lucky, the Revised Standard Version (RSV). It was a time of considerable experimentation in Sunday worship in the Uniting Church, so we could preach or pray in "unpretentious" language style – determinedly "different" and "modern" – especially if public worship became "more authentic" with a good touch of informal "spontaneity". We sang, of course, but "songs", not "hymns". I must add that I continue to speak of "hymns" for worship, whether they are traditional hymns or modern hymns, and I use "songs" only occasionally. But my Christian friends steadfastly speak of songs as far as their worship is concerned. However, from all of this came the subject of my MA thesis: "The English of Worship: Bible, Liturgy, and Hymns". Together, they truly became the work of that thesis completed nearly three decades ago.

In this present thesis, I have concentrated on hymns alone as, of course, I love our hymn singing. But another reason is that our Protestant hymns are our great gift to Christ's church, and that tradition needs to grow and develop today to feed the church's faith and worship. Writing new hymns (or "songs" in today's language) does not mean that the Protestant hymn tradition must be abandoned. A hymn is a work of art, with some hymns being great art, with the lasting quality of great art. Hymns are not a teaching device although people may learn from them. Hymns are a poetic art suitable for worship and contemplation. I recall being told in my youth that, for beginners doing private devotion, a good place to start was the hymn book: it should be no surprise then that singing hymns can help us in contemplation.

But what about the language of older hymns? Of course, language has changed which is always happening, through time, in any language. And people cope with it. We expect our children in secondary school to read Shakespeare in his own language,

and Shakespeare is coterminous with the *Authorised Version of the Bible* (AV). Incidentally, the same could be said of William Kethe's versifying of Psalm 100, "All people that on earth do dwell", written half a century before the AV, which has shown remarkable staying power over the last four and a half centuries.

We need to be clear that language change is always happening, at times rapidly, at times slowly, but it is always happening. Language changes occur for reasons such as historical events and social changes, or even through the playfulness that people, especially young people, bring to their language use. This can cause some people to accept language changes, while others resist these changes. They can do so from parliament, pulpit or pub, and it may cause language change to be fast or to be slow; but language change never stops, although its process is rarely noticed.

Despite all this, our good fortune is that our language has been through three or four centuries of relative stability. Language change in English has been fairly slow over these centuries, despite the varying achievements of the British Empire and all the places to which the English have migrated. The effect of these influences on our language has been that the speed of language change in English has, in fact, been quite slow. As stated by the linguist David Crystal:

> English hasn't changed much over the past 400 years, but Modern English is obviously different in certain respects from the kind of Early Modern English represented by the King James Bible.[1]

This suggests that people may be better at reading the old language of their hymns – old as it may be – than they are given credit for by church leadership.

Hence, the radical discarding of tradition may be a rather heavy-handed approach to hymnody in our times. To a certain extent, we need to be clear about which hymns are our truly great traditional hymns and devote our attention to judiciously finding our own best newer hymns to add to that tradition.

Another interesting effect of language change today is the effect of inclusivity concerns on the written language, for example, changing a word like "mankind" to

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[1] David Crystal, *Begat: The King James Bible & the English Language*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4.

"humankind" which is not actually the easy linguistic manoeuvre that we imagine. Linguists will want to affirm that real language is what people actually hear and speak. The church has a clear interest in the written word as well as speech: it uses written material for people to sing or speak, as well having a written Bible to be read aloud in church. The desire will continue to find and use language to replace certain lexical items, for reasons of exclusiveness of language, for example, "It's too sexist", or simply for reasons of complexity of the language, "It's too hard for ordinary people!" Therefore, my intention in this study has been to investigate the influence of this fairly recent activity on our hymn books.

Therefore, we need to consider and evaluate examples in our hymnals of changes to hymn texts, which brings me to my key research question: **what makes a good hymn text?** My method for pursuing this question is to use the skill which literary critics would call "close reading". Used in the context of criticising a short poem –a fair description of a hymn text – close reading means to examine a text carefully line by line, even word by word, and to continue to do so until the effects used by the poet are opened as a whole to the reader, and become the basic material for his or her criticism (which may be positive or negative, or some balance of both).

Although this is my own explanation of close reading, it seems to be what is commonly understood by this term. In his book *Close Reading: The Basics*, David Greenham further elaborates on this explanation:

> … the tension between what we can intuitively enjoy and what happens when we slow reading down and begin to analyse our enjoyment by focusing on particular words and quotations – that is, by *close reading*.[2]

Clariza Ruiz De Castilla also points to a necessary slowing down for close reading:

> One may also contemplate decelerating the close reading in order to pay significant attention to what is being examined.[3]

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[2] David Greenham, *Close Reading: the basics* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 15.
[3] Clariza Ruiz De Castilla, *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2018), 137-139.

I award due recognition to the 'old master' Northrop Frye (as I think of him) who, without using the term "close reading", seems to have had it in mind here:

> Once a verbal structure is read, and reread often enough to be possessed, it
> "freezes." It turns into a unity in which all parts exist at once, which we can
> then examine like a picture, without regard to the specific movement of the
> narrative.

Throughout this thesis, I use the term "close reading" to describe the hymn writer's work, using it to assess his or her achievement. Quite often, I use close reading to examine what could be judged the best long-standing version of a particular hymn. To evaluate the modernisation of the text, I then repeat the process on the hymn after it has undergone textual modernisation in one or more of the three hymnals with which I engage in this study. (In Chapter 1, I undertake a close reading of several hymns to help in considering a definition of "hymn" and to explore something of its history in English).

In the other chapters, my basic overall methodology is to use close reading to evaluate well-known hymns with fairly widely agreed texts, and to evaluate them again after changes have been made to the text. It is also of interest to observe the various ways that different hymn books have changed hymn texts, and to assess the approach of different hymn books to making changes in the text of a hymn.

In Chapter 2, I ask what it is that makes for a successful hymn text or, if it is absent, what makes for failure in that endeavour. Two aspects of good hymn writing seem to have presented themselves; firstly, **substantial use of the Bible** is significant for a good hymn with this apparently apprehended from the rise of the metrical Psalms and paraphrases. Secondly, it seems to lead to a necessary search for a poetic style for hymns in English: **a language style for "otherness".**

In Chapter 3, I discuss the differences we might expect between a poem which is written to be read aloud (a normal, although usually unstated assumption for a poem) and a poem clearly written as a text for communal song. This then leads to a discussion and evaluation of changes made to "older" or "unusual" words.

Chapter 4 involves a discussion of the issue of hymn language which is seen to exclude women, and the actual effect of making the changes necessary to ensure the use of inclusive language in hymns.

In Chapter 5, the final chapter, I must confess to something of a hidden agenda. Apart from my intention to contemplate and assess some hymns, written in the last few decades, which may seem to work well as congregational hymns, I also seek to address people who want to be hymn writers. I seek to broaden our ideas of what constitutes rhyme and, finally, with a little hesitation, I offer two examples of its use in my own work. At times, musicians are discovered to have changed to a new melody for a hymn – a particularly risky enterprise for new organists, I would think – but I generally confine this study to the text of new hymns and to textual changes to older hymns.

Chapter 1 – What is a Hymn?

What is a hymn? Erik Routley, Congregationalist theologian and musician, said that "Hymns are the folk-song of the church militant".[4] It is a splendid preacher's line, and he was indeed a preacher. It is not so much a definition as a rhetorical statement by Routley of how church people feel about their well-known and much-loved hymns. It points to the importance of the purpose for this study which is to ask urgent questions about what makes a good hymn text, and what is happening to the hymn in the church's worship in our times. Therefore, it is clearly not a useful definition for answering the essentially theological question: what is a hymn?

Attempts at definition

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) defines "hymn" as:

> A song of praise to God; any composition in praise of God which is adapted to be chanted or sung; specifically a metrical composition adapted to be sung in a religious service; sometimes distinguished from *psalm* or *anthem*, as not being part of the text of the Bible.[5]

Useful elements are included here: "song", "praise", "God", but also some exclusions are made: "metrical" excludes prose texts, and perhaps some poetic texts, and biblical texts are excluded. It is an objective, almost outsider's view, as "religious service" (rather than "worship") would suggest, which is exactly what would be expected of a dictionary in a secular time. It is worth noting that new compositions – "songs" or "worship songs" – fit both the OED definition and that of Geoffrey Wainwright below. I call them both "hymns" for the same reason.

What is a hymn? In his interesting and rather unusual *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life*, Geoffrey Wainwright draws our attention to Augustine's definition: "a hymn is *praise*; it is praise of *God*; it is the *sung* praise of God."[6] It is interesting that, despite some similarities to the OED definition, this definition seems to give the impression that the meaning of "hymn" comes from the

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[4] Erik Routley, *Hymns and human life* (London: John Murray, 1952), 3.
[5] Oxford University Press, *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 1358.
[6] Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life (*London: Epworth Press, 1980), 198.

insider's experience. It is perhaps Augustine's assertion of "praise", "God" and "sung", without exclusions and qualifications, that helps to give this impression. It is Wainwright, himself, who makes the point that "Each of the three points calls for elaboration or qualification," which he then goes on to supply.

For a start, Wainwright wants "praise" – the first point – to be understood broadly, even loosely. He includes under "praise" various activities with various theological understandings, such as:

> confession of sin and prayer for forgiveness; self-offering and dedication; invocation of the divine help, presence, advent or rule … even though they may not be so overtly 'praise'.[4]

Apart from this liturgical variety, when it comes to "praise" being "of God", Wainwright makes it clear that various styles of address are possible:

> in the second person (Te Deum laudamus) or in the third (Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott) or may be quite oblique ('Come, let us join our friends above').[7]

Again, when it comes to praise being **sung**, he need only refer to world-wide cultural differences in thinking about the nature of Christian song, of poetic structure and of musical form – something which Michael Hawn made clear in his book *Gather into One*, where he offers "seven general assertions that frame [his] understanding of *liturgical plurality* as a model for worship".[8]

Another issue of much interest is that Wainwright sees a strong connection between the use of creeds and hymns in worship. Indeed "Creeds and Hymns" is the title of his sixth chapter. And this connection seems immediately plausible: I have a strong memory of Professor George Yule telling us as students in a theological lecture that the sermon should be followed by a "creedal hymn" and this expression would seem to imply at least some connection between creed and hymn. For Wainwright, the issue is perhaps a little blurred, but it is worth pursuing.

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Michael Hawn, *Gather into One: Praying and Singing Globally* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 14

At the beginning of the chapter, he states:

> At its most characteristic, the Christian hymn may perhaps be considered as a sung confession of faith. For that reason, creeds and hymns are being treated in a single chapter ... although it will also emerge that there are important differences between the two genres.[9]

He then relates the emergence of creeds in early times, to baptism, with its need to affirm the faith story of the church for new believers. This use of creedal statements then extends to other parts of worship, and eventually to their use in various theological disputations, to affirm and regulate the faith of the growing church. Wainwright also sees a difference in the kind of language which is used in creeds in contrast with that of hymns. A little later, he affirms that

> [Creeds] are fundamentally 'first-order' language, expressing with a somewhat naïve obviousness the heart of the religious belief ... The existential commitment is being brought to words in as direct a way as possible. Faith is saying as well as it can what it needs to say.[10]

By "first-order" language, Wainwright seems to mean what I simply call factual language. The literary critic Northrop Frye, with an eye to science, calls it "descriptive".[11]

Poetry, however, is not "first-order" language: I once boldly defined it as "language reaching beyond itself'. But Wainwright, with an apparent similar thought, describes poetry more carefully:

> Poetry is able to 'speak' transhistorically, transculturally and transpersonally: this fact presupposes some common experience and understanding between the poet in his experiences and us in ours. Yet the poem is also able to enlarge and enhance our experience and understanding: the poems which 'live on' do so precisely in virtue of this capacity which originates in the poet's primary and 'fresh' experience and understanding.[12]

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[9]Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life* (London: Epworth Press, 1980), 183.

[10] Ibid. 191.

[11] Northrop Frye, *The Great Code* (London: Harcourt, Inc. 1983), 13-15.

[12] Ibid. 194.

The next point is a discussion of the musical aspect of the hymn. Why? The obvious reason is that the hymn is a composite art form, words and music. It is important that it is understood as such, as is implicit, for example, on those occasions when the minister wants a certain hymn for its theological significance, or even poetic quality, and then asks the organist or band leader to find a tune that "fits" – a procedure often more notable for its haste than for its success. Therefore, in the following discussion of some well-regarded hymns, I shall attempt some discussion of musical aspects as well as literary aspects of the hymns, although it will be obvious that I am much more at home in the latter.

A hymn from the medieval church (and a modern translation)

A hymn which came to my attention only in quite recent times is considered first, and is observed (with some close reading) from a literary critical perspective, noting some of the above issues. The Latin original is by Peter Abelard. This English translation is the work of Richard Sturch and appears in *Common Praise* (CP), the 2000 edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (CP 134). It is, of course, set for Maundy Thursday.

This is the night, dear friends, the night for weeping,
when powers of darkness overcome the day,
the night the faithful mourn the weight of evil
whereby our sins the Son of Man betray.

This night the traitor, wolf within the sheepfold,
betrays himself into his victim's will;
the Lamb of God for sacrifice preparing,
sin brings about the cure for sin's own ill.

This night Christ institutes his holy supper,
blest food and drink for heart and soul and mind;
this night injustice joins its hand to treason's,
and buys the ransom price of humankind.

This night the Lord by slaves shall be arrested,
he who destroys our slavery to sin;
accused of crime, to criminals be given,
that judgement on the righteous Judge begin.

O make us sharers, Saviour, of your Passion,
that we may share your glory that shall be;
let us pass through these three dark nights of sorrow
to Easter's laughter and its liberty.

In reading this hymn, it is interesting to ponder the difficulties involved in this kind of translation. Some decades ago, in a poetry seminar that dealt with the great difficulties involved in translating a poem (under Brian Matthews and Humphrey Tranter in the English discipline at Flinders University), we were informed that, if one desired a translation of a poem to be as accurate as possible, a prose translation would be required. However, if a verse translation should be required, a fair degree of inaccuracy could be expected. This means, in effect, we were told, that ***doing a verse translation of a poem is tantamount to writing a new poem.***

A close reading of this hymn recognises the insights of Peter Abelard, who was a well-respected voice in the period leading up to the great flowering of Catholic scholarship in the thirteenth century. So too are the poetic skills of Richard Sturch. For this English hymn, now his own hymn, is a very fine piece of work.

Perhaps the first effect noticed in the hymn is the opening clause "This is the night", followed by the reiterated "This night ... This night ... This night ..." at the beginning of the next three verses, which, almost like a knell, serves as preparation for the terrible events of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Although it is a poetic effect that could be overdone, it is by no means out of place here.

However, the main effect, the all-embracing effect of the poem, lies in the way the great central theme of atonement is manifested through all the characters, with the first and last being we ourselves. This is achieved by a series of deep paradoxes, for which we are prepared in verse one. We mourn the weight of evil, but it is the reader's own sins that betray the Son of Man; we are part of the powers of darkness.

In verse two, we witness the betrayal of Jesus by the traitor, Judas. Paradoxically, Judas betrays himself, because what is brought about by the betrayal is not solely Judas's purpose, but the very will of Christ, the victim.

In verse three, the treason of Judas is joined to the injustice of the court: in another paradox, the court's injustice buys the ransom price – to the value of thirty

pieces of silver. In verse four, it is the soldiers who now become the slaves. By arresting Christ, they paradoxically become complicit in destroying the slavery, by making possible the judgement upon the righteous Judge, whose righteous judgement and just verdict it is, in verse five, that we may pass with Christ through the three dark nights of sorrow to the laughter and liberty of Easter.

Obviously, it is dense writing, a fine example of **literary complexity** (which is a reminder of the number of layers of meaning in the literary work and is not the same as saying literary **difficulty**). Over the years, as we become more familiar with the biblical story of Maundy Thursday, we instead become more aware of the concentration of meaning in the hymn and it feeds our faith as we sing it.

It is also worth remembering today that Peter Abelard broke with the satisfaction theory of atonement. As Gustaf Aulen says in his well-known *Christus Victor*:

> It has for a long time been a commonplace of the historical study of dogma to lay emphasis on the rivalry between Anselm and his younger contemporary Abelard, and to claim the latter as the father of the so-called 'subjective' doctrine of the Atonement. In general, these assertions are sound enough. The interesting thing about Abelard is that the Latin [satisfaction] theory of the Atonement had no sooner received its complete theological formulation than it found a critic; it may be said that the controversy thus begun has continued ever since.[13]

In the hymn under consideration, despite the reference to "ransom price" – which is, after all, an allusion to St Paul (1 Timothy 2:6) – it is not wrong to detect some reaching for an alternative atonement theory based on, perhaps, moral influence, which Abelard came to suggest and perhaps to which Sturch has added something more.

This wonderful hymn would make many a Maundy Thursday service memorable – especially if set to the well-known, solemn Parry tune "Intercessor". This hymn warrants attention in seeking to answer the question that heads the current chapter: What is a hymn? The first part of any answer to this serious question is that **a hymn is a serious art form**. Consciously and deliberatively, a hymn is worship.

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[13] Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor.* Trans. A. G. Hebert (London SPCK, 1970), 93-94.

The Psalms in English

When is the Protestant hymn thought to have first come into being? The Lutheran churches in Germany were singing hymns under Luther's influence quite early in the sixteenth century. The English hymn seems to have come into being rather later, and perhaps awareness of the German experience was an influence on English and Scottish leaders aware of their people's desire to sing in worship. They naturally referred the question of what they should sing to John Calvin who replied, after some thought, that they should sing the Psalms.

Among Anglicans, this led to the development of the Anglican chant for the Psalm translations by Coverdale. His translation of the 23rd Psalm, as given about a century later in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, is below:

> The Lord is my shepherd: therefore can I lack nothing.
>
> 2. He shall lead me in a green pasture: and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort.
>
> 3. He shall convert my soul: and bring me forth in the paths of righteousness, for his Name's sake.
>
> 4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff comfort me.
>
> 5. Thou shalt prepare a table before me against them that trouble me: thou hast anointed my head with oil, and my cup shall be full.
>
> 6. But thy loving kindness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

This beautiful piece of prose writing is designed for either speech or singing. A few differences are found in the AV half a century later, but Coverdale's work survived in Anglican worship. The next point to consider is its effect as speech. When spoken aloud by an individual, or in a group, it sits in the mouth with great ease, and proceeds effortlessly in speech and, more or less so, in Anglican chant, whether for individual or joint congregational use. Coverdale was, I understand, a relatively ordinary Hebrew scholar – not a Tyndale – but his feeling for his native tongue was superb. In fact, Coverdale is a splendid example of Northrop Frye's dictum, that

> … it is a sobering thought that it is sensitivity to one's own language, not scholarly knowledge of the original, that makes a translation permanent.[14]

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[14] Northrop Frye, *The Great Code* (New York: Harvest, 1983), 208

Let the modern translator beware!

Although the main interest here is in sung language, it is interesting, to digress for a moment, to understand more of what is happening in Coverdale's feeling for the spoken language, for his Psalm could have been sung (chanted) by Anglicans, or, as observed here, spoken by Anglicans.

Firstly, the distinction needs to be considered that occurs between languages, some of which are *syllable-timed* while others are *stress-timed*. Many, perhaps even most, languages, are *syllable-timed*: syllables tend to be separated by equal time intervals. Many Asian languages are examples – I particularly noticed this in the Vietnamese language. However, English belongs to a smaller group of languages which are *stress-timed*: stressed syllables tend to be separated by equal time intervals. Andrew Dutney tells a delightful story of how he spent some time visiting various Asian countries and grew used to the way that Asian speakers spoke and prayed in English with syllable timing. He became accustomed to and liked the sound: on returning to Australia, he found our normal stress timing a little unattractive at first. This can immediately be appreciated as English is markedly stress-timed.

Here, I discuss a strong tendency in the English language rather than a strict metronomic effect. An interesting effect, however, is the slowing down and speeding up of English caused by its stress-timed nature. With equal timing between stressed syllables, a phrase with three or four unstressed syllables between two stressed syllables needs to be hurried, and will sound fast, while a phrase with only one unstressed syllable (or none at all) between stressed syllables sounds much slower.

Good examples occur in Coverdale's 23rd Psalm. I note the quite strong tendency to find a slowing down in verse one with consecutive stressed syllables at "lack nothing". The same sort of slowing down happens at "green pasture" in verse two, and "Name's sake" in verse three. The slowing down in these places simply makes them quietly emphatic. In most of the Psalm, two or three weakly stressed syllables are found between strong syllables, which accounts for the feeling of easily controlled elegant utterance. However, in the third verse, in "bring me forth in thy paths", the word "forth" may be weakly stressed by good readers, making this part of the verse very fast with four successive weakly stressed syllables. Some readers prefer to give a strong stress to the word "forth" to slow down the speech at this

point and make it less demanding. It may well be that many would use some intermediate stress at this point – a good reminder that we are talking of a **tendency** in the language, too human to be described with complete precision. However, it all points to the genius of Coverdale and the Anglican chant that they make it work.

Of more interest in this study is the way that John Calvin's advice to Reformation leaders, that the people sing the Psalms, was taken up in a different way by both the English and Scottish Puritans. The Puritan writers decided that the stanzaic form would be the best way of involving the common people in congregational song. The frequently used form was the four-line "common metre" form, or perhaps to literary critics, the "ballad form", for it was greatly influenced by folk music. This form has a syllable count of 8 6 8 6 in iambic feet (weak/strong) and usually rhymes first and third lines, second and fourth lines. However, the metrical Psalms, as they were called, only rhyme second and fourth lines, as the poet's task of rhyming was recognised to be very demanding. In the early Reformation times, only very accurate translation of the Bible was acceptable; faithfulness to the Hebrew original was a major concern. An implicit contradiction is found between this demand for accuracy in translation and the modern judgement, as previously mentioned, that translating a poem into a poem in a second language, means writing a new poem. This meant that the language would have to be squeezed very tightly to fit the task: it is fascinating to read the much-loved 23rd Psalm in the light of this prosodic necessity. This version is from the 1650 *Scottish Psalter*, although it is probably several decades older:

> The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.
> He makes me down to lie
> In pastures green: he leadeth me
> the quiet waters by.
>
> My soul he doth restore again;
> and me to walk doth make
> Within the paths of righteousness,
> ev'n for his own name's sake.
>
> Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,
> yet will I fear none ill:

For thou art with me; and thy rod

and staff me comfort still.

My table thou hast furnished

in presence of my foes;

My head thou dost with oil anoint,

and my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life

shall surely follow me:

And in God's house for evermore

my dwelling place shall be.

Some interesting shuffling can be observed here. This is particularly so in the first stanza, where it must have been the result of a desperate search for a rhyme between lines two and four. To achieve this, the writer needs to switch "down", here functioning as an adverb, from its normal place after the infinitive, so that it makes possible the rhyme with "lie". Completing the rhyme with "by" in line four is an even more desperate ploy: not many English sentences or stanzas finish with a preposition (as the word itself "pre-position" suggests). A somewhat similar desperation occurs in the second line of verse two, but we need to be aware that beginning the first line with the direct object is the kind of thing that poets can do for emphatic effect; it happens twice in the quite splendid fourth stanza in which three lines end with strong verbs. However, the point is that conflict is involved in seeking fine literary quality in a translation, along with accuracy in a translation, as well as desiring a tight poetic form, such as common metre. Equally, a close look reveals that the poet quite often succeeds in meeting the challenge.

In confirmation, one of the most interesting aspects of the metrical 23rd Psalm is the modern language used. Nearly all the words with substantial meaning (in contrast with words mainly of a grammatical function) are words we still know well and use ourselves, nearly half a millennium later. Except perhaps "yea" in the second stanza? But do we fail to understand the word, or simply do not use it in that form? How about "vale" in the same line? We are perhaps losing its connection with "valley", but we still have the word in place names, for instance, Vale Park in Adelaide, Ascot Vale in Melbourne. Could it be that in asking "what is a hymn?", we need to be

aware of the variety of language awareness and artifice involved in writing a hymn? It must be said that talk about "archaic language" seems today to be much more strictly "yes" or "no" than needs to be the case, or indeed *is* the case, if we want to be true to actual language use in all its variety. In this discussion, answers are beginning to be found to the immediate clarifying question – ***What is a hymn?*** and the important research question, ***What makes a good hymn text?*** The answer to the first question is partly to be found in the assertion that the hymn, as sung in English, is public worship.

It seems fitting to finish this section with a quotation from *The English Hymn,* a vast and illuminating literary study by Professor J. R. Watson. He asserts that the English metrical Psalm represents not a conservative opposition to the emerging hymn, but is the birth of the English hymn itself.

> Together with the Geneva Bible, the metrical psalms … helped to establish a temper of mind that was to have a profound significance for political events in the seventeenth century. It is possible, too, that they had much more of an effect on the writing of hymns than has hitherto been suggested. In many ways they look forward to hymns: sometimes their actual phrases are preserved intact – 'From age to age', 'Ye servants of the Lord', 'His mercy faileth never' – but more often it is a question of the general accommodation of the sense to the verse form …
>
> But there is more than versification and rhetoric to justify the suggestion that the metrical psalm, rather than keeping out the English hymn, actually was a part of its development … In the creation of the metrical psalms, we are witnessing not only the birth of a new and recognizable rhetoric, but also the beginnings of the art form that we later recognize as hymnody.[15]

Birth of the Protestant hymn in English – Isaac Watts

Another hymn which comes out of a Psalm, and which may help in the endeavour to discover what a hymn is, is the well-known hymn by Isaac Watts, "O God, our help in ages past" (CP 537). A story of the hymn is told, which appears in several sources. An Oxford don, Dr Jowett, asked his fellows to write a list of their favourite hymns on a slip of paper and send it to his office. The slips were duly sent in. Each had just one

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[15] J. R. Watson, *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 53.

hymn – this one. This story says something about Watts's hymn, although it may well be a put-up job.

The hymn is a somewhat loose paraphrase of the first few verses of Psalm 90, written, according to Wesley Milgate, in "about 1714" – so it is now three hundred years old. The first line of the original hymn begins, not with "O" but with "Our". Milgate notes that

> John Wesley was quick to note [the hymn's] merit, and included it in his *Psalms and Hymns 1738,* changing the first word to 'O'; he did not like over-familiarity with the Deity, and perhaps thought that the repetition of 'our' was clumsy also in literary style.[16]

It is interesting to note that copyright laws were not enacted until, at the earliest, very late in the nineteenth century, with one result being many different changes to hymns by various publishers. One may note with a gentle smile that John Wesley himself was trenchant in his criticism of the practice; however, his own effort on "Our God our help" is probably quite justified and is actually the only change to the original wording of Watts' hymn, except for the omission of verses.

There are nine verses in the original hymn, and three are omitted, probably to keep the hymn to a reasonable length, perhaps because the three are of lesser quality. The latter judgement may be considered a little harsh, but hymns which are too long risk falling out of favour. My own rule is a limit of twenty-four lines maximum: three eight-line verses, four six-line verses, or six four-line verses – although I think that five four-line verses is actually ideal for quatrains. However, the well-known version of Watts's hymn with its six verses is what is considered here.

> O God, our help in ages past,
> our hope for years to come,
> our shelter from the stormy blast,
> and our eternal home;
>
> Under the shadow of thy throne
> thy saints have dwelt secure;

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[16] Wesley Milgate, *Songs of the people of God: A companion to The Australian Hymn Book/With one voice*. (London: Collins, 1982) 41.

sufficient is thine arm alone,

and our defence is sure.

Before the hills in order stood,

or earth received her frame,

from everlasting thou art God,

to endless years the same.

A thousand ages in thy sight

are like an evening gone,

short as the watch that ends the night

before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,

bears all its sons away;

they fly forgotten, as a dream

dies at the opening day.

O God our help in ages past,

our hope for years to come,

be thou our guard while troubles last,

and our eternal home.

The first verse of this hymn is, quite simply, beautifully put together. It is in a verse form usually known as common metre, or, in poetry, as ballad form.[17] In his writing, Watts shows a good deal of use of parallelism between lines. The very clear parallelism is observed between the first two lines of his first verse. The emphatic effect of this parallelism is further heightened by the alliteration between "help" and "hope". Not only this. Apart from the more subtle parallelism between lines three and four, the repeated use of "our" is found near the beginning of each of the four lines. Pronouns are nearly always unemphatic and this is so here. However, with "our" being used four times in the verse, the effects of the other prosodic devices just mentioned are greatly heightened – a feeling of "All this!" – so that the first verse becomes a powerful affirmation of the trust we may place in this God and a striking introduction to the hymn. The hymn is a good example of the well-known observation

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[17] Paul Fussell Jr, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form.* (New York: Random House Inc, 1965), 142.

that people habitually refer to a hymn by its first line, especially if it has a good first line. Well, this hymn has a great first verse.

This affirmation of trust is the underlying theme of verse two: here on earth "thy saints have dwelt secure". In this verse there is also a change in Watts' use of parallelism: the first two lines of the verse are paralleled by the last two lines of the verse. But notice the striking third line of this verse: the subject, "thine arm", and its complement, "sufficient", have been reversed out of their normal modern English word order. This does not indicate an older form of the language (the English syntax of Watts's time is almost indistinguishable from our own). The reversal of word order here is a poetic device, not old-fashioned English, and the third line is beautiful, even stirring. Finally, notice the pronouns, unemphatic yet repeated: "thy throne", "thy saints" and "thine arm". There is no "defence" as "sure" as that.

Touches of parallelism, similar to those in verse two, mark the first and second lines of verse three: hills "in order", and earth's "frame". But in line three, "everlasting", and line four, "endless years", the parallelism is emphasised by alliteration, and it works very well.

Similar remarks about parallelism could be made for verses four and five. The first two lines of verse four are of particular interest where the parallelism has a noticeable antithetic flavour.

Perhaps is it even possible to read "before the rising sun" in line four as being in antithesis to "the watch that ends the night", with maybe just a hint of resurrection. Maybe? Perhaps not for Watts, who had Psalm 90 in mind. However, our job is actually to have his hymn in mind, and two observations support such a reading: firstly, we know that it is possible for the writing of a poet to mean more than he or she actually intends, and secondly, the natural word for Watts to use before "sun" would be "morning", the word the AV uses twice in the early verses of Psalm 90. The use of "rising" with its hint of resurrection would thus appear to be a fairly deliberate choice on Watts' part. Certainly, this would be a decidedly conjectural reading, but the very fact that it could occur to us suggests that there is more meaning of interest in the verse than might at first appear.

Finally some consideration of the final verse, which simply repeats the first verse, with the exception of the third line, which now reads quite differently. I seem to have vaguely wondered about this on and off over the years, and suddenly the reason is quite obvious: verse five, despite its very real quality, would be a very lame ending to the hymn. So what does Watts do? He repeats his first verse, changing the third line enough to turn the verse into deep prayer – a fitting ending to a great hymn.

Apart from this consideration of the hymn as we now have it, it is also of interest to see what has happened to the three missing verses. Wesley Milgate's very thorough book gives them to us.[18] (I label the verses 3a, 4a and 5a to show which verse in the six-verse version they follow.)

3a Thy word commands our flesh to dust,
'Return, ye sons of men':
all nations rose from earth at first,
and turn to earth again.

4a The busy tribes of flesh and blood
with all their lives and cares,
are carried downward by the flood,
and lost in following years.

5a Like flowery fields the nations stand
pleased with the morning light;
the flowers beneath the mower's hand
lie withering ere tis night.

Perhaps none of these stanzas are good enough to include in the six-verse hymn, although 3a may be judged most nearly to match its solemn dignity. Of more interest it is to notice that if 5a were the second to last verse, we would still feel the need of the final verse 6 to conclude the hymn adequately.

The well-known tune "St Anne", probably by William Croft, is a splendid example of a Reformed communal song for public worship. Within the discipline of necessary simplicity, it creates high meanings. "St Anne" massively supports, with its own musical meanings, the grave meanings of Watts' writing. Although the tune

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[18] Milgate, *Songs of the People of God,* 46

(except for longer notes at the ends of the second and fourth lines), is now sung with notes of equal time, like others of this genre, it was not always so.

In the earliest times congregation singing was led by a precentor, who would call out after each line the words of the next line, a practice described as "lining out." It seems likely that this practice was facilitated by composing the tune with notes twice as long at the beginning and end of each line. It works. And in a time of low literacy among ordinary people, it was very important. It is also worth wondering if this lining out was perhaps something like an unexpected Protestant version of antiphony – two musical parts, one leading, the other responding – which goes back, in the history of Christian church music for worship, to the Greek period before the Roman time, and in fact goes back to the Jewish temple. The precentor used speech rather than song, but must have also needed a good sense of rhythm a; and we are perhaps not wrong to see some very old musical ideas influencing the beginnings of the new hymnody.

In his book *Hymns and Human Life*, Erik Routley describes Watts as the father of the English hymn.[19] This does not mean that Watts was the first to write such – George Wither and Thomas Ken were already doing so more than thirty years earlier – but it was Watts who started to lead Protestant worship in Britain from the singing of metrical Psalms to hymn singing. In this, of course, Watts had the now long-standing example of Luther and the German Protestants. But in his work, the question ***What is a hymn?*** becomes the question ***What will the English hymn be?*** and perhaps becomes ***What makes an English hymn good?***

The Protestant hymn coming of age – Charles Wesley

The Wesley brothers, John and Charles, came nearly half a century after Watts, John the leader, preacher, and superb organiser, with Charles the hymn writer. They were Anglicans and so were able to have at Oxford, the best of a university education which included the ancient classics, all this in contrast with Watts who, as a Congregationalist, would, for all his scholarly ability, have been denied this privilege at that time. Perhaps this also explains in part a certain seemingly effortless quality

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[19] Erik Routley, *Hymns and Human Life.* (London: John Murray, 1952), 64.

of Charles Wesley's hymn writing. This perhaps seems especially so when Wesley is writing a hymn in quatrains (four-line verses). Here is one such Charles Wesley hymn, in common metre actually, that I discovered with delight a good number of years ago, soon after my arrival in the state of South Australia, where I, as a Presbyterian minister, had to learn, not without delight, to use the Methodist Hymn Book (MHB). AHB names the delightful tune Jackson, presumably after the composer, Thomas Jackson. The original hymn had four verses. The third verse is an addition taken from a different Wesley hymn. Otherwise, apart from the correction of a couple of eighteenth century "typos", this version, taken from AHB 146, is the original.

> Let him to whom we now belong
> his sovereign right assert,
> and take up every thankful song
> and every loving heart.
>
> He justly claims us for his own,
> who bought us with a price;
> the Christian lives to Christ alone,
> to Christ alone he dies.
>
> And while our hearts are bowed to thee
> thine easy yoke we prove,
> and own it perfect liberty
> to serve the Lord we love.
>
> Jesus, thine own at last receive,
> fulfil our heart's desire,
> and let us to thy glory live
> and in thy cause expire.
>
> Our souls and bodies we resign;
> with joy we render thee
> our all, no longer ours, but thine
> to all eternity.

The elegant simplicity of this hymn actually belies a very significant art. In the first two lines, we "belong "to Christ, so that he has "sovereign right" over us, but this is reinforced by interrupting normal word order, firstly by placing the verb "assert" emphatically at the end of the line, and secondly by putting this verb after its object, "his sovereign right assert". Not only this, there is very clear parallelism between the

third and fourth lines, and this is emphasised further by a touch of anaphora (rhetorical repetition) with the word "every: ... every thankful song ... every loving heart".

In the second stanza there is some very complex parallelism. Firstly, there is a clear parallelism between the first two lines: Christ justly "claims us for his own" because he has "bought us with a price". Furthermore this is also enriched by a biblical allusion (1Cor 6:20 and 7:23 "You were bought with a price"). Again, there is a very striking parallelism between lines three and four, but it is a very formal parallelism: the first part of line three parallels the second part of line four, and the second part of line three parallels the first part of line four. That is to say they form a *chiasmus* – a crossing over, which reinforces strongly our living and dying in Christ:

the Christian lives   to Christ alone,

to Christ alone   he dies
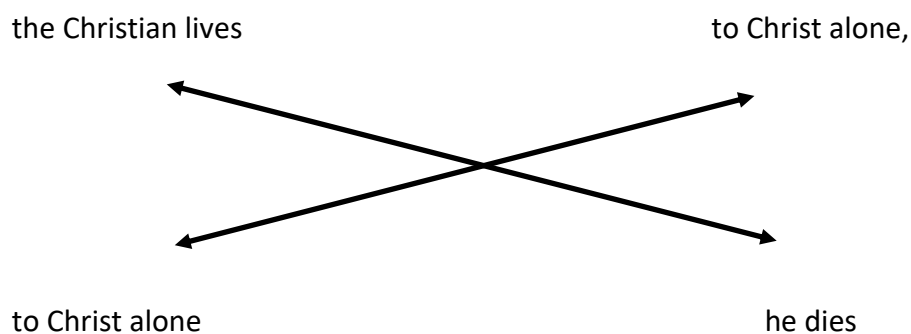
Chiasmus is indeed a very striking device, but there is yet more complexity to this second verse. The verse actually divides quite easily into two couplets, with the first telling about Christ's saving action towards us, and the second telling of the Christian's living response to Christ. The second couplet is in fact a rather compressed allusion to Rom 14: 8, "If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live, or whether we die, we are the Lord's". It is also quite noticeable that the two couplets are strongly held together by the rhyming, which emphasises the overall structure of meaning. Despite the seeming simplicity of its surface, the second verse is dense with meaning. It is a huge success.

Verse three is also quite dense with meaning, but here it is Wesley's use of allusion which creates this effect. When a text alludes to another earlier text, then the meaning of the earlier text crowds in on the new text, which thus becomes denser in meaning to the reader. This is what happens in verse three which has two nice examples of literary allusion. The first two lines allude to the well-known text of

Matthew 11:29, 30: "Take my yoke upon you ... For my yoke is easy and my burden is light," which crowds in upon the reader with extra meaning. This is further emphasised for the reader by the word "bowed" which can express both humble devotion and shouldering a yoke. The third and fourth lines do a similar thing with the well-known "Collect for peace at morning prayer" (well-known especially to Anglicans, of course): "O God ... whose service is perfect freedom," although "freedom" has been changed to "liberty" in the hymn, presumably to satisfy the need for a rhyme. It is not, perhaps, a good reason for a rhyme; but here, who cares? It is another splendidly done verse, and the more worthy of praise, for, as Milgate reminds us, the verse is actually taken from another Wesley hymn.

By way of perhaps a helpful digression, before coming to verse four, let us have a more general look at the pleasure Wesley takes in chiasmus. Here is a particularly strong example from his Easter hymn "Christ the Lord is risen today"[20]: "Fought the fight, the battle won." Here the two halves of the line form a chiasmus:

Fought   the fight

the battle   won
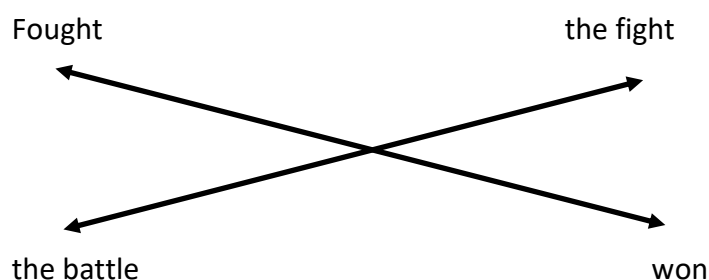
Splendid, is it not? And just for good measure Wesley manages to put the two very dynamic words, the verbs "fought" and "won", in the two most emphatic places – the beginning and especially the end of the poetic line. A magnificent example of a chiasmus. And here is just one more example from a different Wesley hymn[21]:

> Rejoice, the Lord is King;
> Your Lord and King adore

I imagine that by now no comment is necessary for this example, but with this exploration of chiasmus in mind, we may return to the fourth verse of "Let him to whom we now belong."

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[20] The Australian Hymn Book Pty Limited. *The Australian Hymn Book.* (Sydney: Collins 1977). 290. "Christ the Lord is risen today".
[21] Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd., *Common Praise* (Norwich: Canterbury Press 2000) 563: "Rejoice the Lord is King".

> Jesus, thine own at last receive,
>
> fulfil our heart's desire,
>
> and let us to thy glory live
>
> and in thy cause expire.

It sometimes may seem in a hymn that Wesley has been looking for a chiasmic structure, but has failed to make the chiasmus work, and has settled on something with a simpler structure that fulfils his purpose. Perhaps the first two lines of verse four almost seem like this. But observe his careful placement of the verbs in emphatic positions: three are in the terminal position of the line, and one in the initial position. Wesley is still very much in control of this verse. I prefer to regard the first two lines of the verse as a somewhat disguised chiasmus, and the verse as a whole has all the dynamism of the first three verses.

Verse five? It is certainly different, is it not? It lacks the fire and energy of the previous verses. But that is surely the author's intention. That verb "resign", prominent at the end of the first line sets the tone for the last verse, a tone of resignation. It is actually a quite humble resignation; for it is assisted by a touch of enjambment (i.e. allowing the meaning to flow across the ending of the second line into the third line without syntactic pause). It is a gentle, understated effect, but he thus abandons all his intricacies and puts our hands into the divine hand for a gentle but genuine conclusion to his hymn.

Thus, it is a great hymn. Despite the intricacies of Wesley's writing, the effect is of a seemingly effortless simplicity, which is nevertheless completely satisfying. But what is a hymn? What does this hymn teach us about our big question – what makes a good hymn text? It must be something about beauty and simplicity, and perhaps the meeting of the twain.

The Victorian Age – unacknowledged decline

In the Victorian Age a century or more later, a very different kind of simplicity is found. Here is John Ellerton's "The day Thou gavest, Lord, is ended" which actually began as a "missions" hymn, but fairly early in its life became an evening hymn.[22]

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[22] Milgate, *Songs of the People of God,* 155.

The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended;

the darkness falls at Thy behest;

to Thee our morning hymns ascended,

thy praise shall sanctify our rest.

We thank thee that thy church unsleeping,

while earth rolls onward into light,

through all the world her watch is keeping,

and rests not now by day or night.

As o'er each continent and island

the dawn leads on another day,

the voice of prayer is never silent,

nor dies the strain of praise away.

The sun that bids us rest is waking

our brethren 'neath the western sky,

and hour by hour fresh lips are making

thy wondrous doings hears on high

So be it Lord! Thy throne shall never,

like Earth's proud empires pass away;

thy Kingdom stands and grows for ever,

till all thy creatures own thy sway.

It is difficult for me to forget an assessment of Ellerton's hymn writing, which I heard in a theological lecture once, as a "descending series of clichés," and there is much to be said for that judgement. However, this is Ellerton's best-loved hymn, and has been widely used in many places and churches for more than a century. Therefore, it is fair to assess it, not on the basis of a general, catch-all phrase like 'series of clichés,' but with a clear look at its own overall literary worth. An artist has a right to be judged by his or her best work.

In this hymn the verse writing of Ellerton is very competent. There is in his verse plenty of line integrity (i.e., clear beginning and end of lines, without enjambment). It is not necessarily a requirement for verse of course, but, in hymns, line integrity tends to aid clarity of meaning, even simplicity, which is, it would seem, particularly important for verse which is for communal singing.[23] Check back, for example, to

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[23] Paul Fussell Jr provides an interesting discussion of enjambment and line integrity in his *Poetic meter and poetic form,* 116ff.

Watts's *O God our help in ages past*. The verse has considerable line integrity; each line ends with a firm pause – as does the music.

A significant aspect of this line integrity also assists Ellerton's use of parallelism in all stanzas, except, perhaps, the fourth. In the first stanza this includes a chiasmus with the first two lines, and in the third stanza this occurs with the third and fourth lines. In the last stanza the parallelism between the first two lines and the last two lines makes for a strong conclusion. The verse perhaps lacks the crispness and clarity of Wesley; but this is, at least in part, the result of the poetic lines being a little longer than in a tight common metre stanza. Apart from this, the devices are there, and they are effective.

Despite the real technical skills of Ellerton, other issues of meaning arise from the use of the image of earth's rotation on its axis and the resultant movement of day and night around the globe. Although now, commonplace with international air travel, although well enough known in Ellerton's time, this was still perhaps not without a touch of wonder. In his time, Ellerton seems to have felt this to be of symbolic interest concerning the church's world-wide mission. Indeed the first intention of the writer was that this should be a "missions" hymn, so that "The voice of prayer [be] never silent". Perhaps the use of Louis Bourgeois' magnificent tune "Les Commandments de Dieu" dates back to this use as a "missions" hymn. Perhaps we should also reflect that the pressing of the metaphor of earth's rotation through day and night is a bit too easily followed for the three middle verses, and may just deserve that "descending series of clichés" judgement.

But dare we not find here also, a hint of affection, and perhaps pride, for another Empire on which "the sun never sets." I think so – there are "brethren 'neath the western sky." And perhaps there is also just a hint that the great days of the British Empire are now passing, and may be on the way to joining the "proud empires" of earth that "pass away." The Victorian age had a strange mixture of pride and foreboding about that; and it is surely lurking in the background of this hymn.

Meanwhile we also need to consider the hymn as music: One thing seems to have saved Ellerton's hymn, and that was a realisation – as mentioned above – that it could function better as an evening hymn, than as a mission hymn.

But this seems on the face of it a rather amazing situation: the same words and the same music can be either a mission hymn or an evening hymn! One would have thought that this would be highly unlikely. Mission hymns, briefly speaking, could be thought to be about the active life and work of the church in the world. Equally briefly speaking, evening hymns could be expected to be about rest and refreshment of spirit, perhaps of prayer and contemplation of future challenge. How could the same lot of words be a mission hymn at first, and later be considered an evening hymn? The answer seems to be that the music imposes its own preferred meanings on the hymn, regardless of the meanings which are to be found in the verse; and the meanings in the music tend to be rather sentimental: a "feel good" tune one might say. It gives, rather too easily, good feelings of calmness, sympathy, and peacefulness. Erik Routley puts it thus:

> The vice of Victorian music is often said to be "sentimentality," and if sentimentality is **emotional content backed by no solid truth**, a show of feeling with no intention of consequent honesty, the description is an accurate one.[24].

Routley also describes this kind of music as "tool music" designed to "help the business of music-making along ... the hack-music of the church." The hymn tune under discussion is by no means the worst of its kind, but we leave discussion of this sort of hymnody to another time. It is worth noting that there have been a number of other tunes suggested for this hymn, but all to no avail. St Clement has seen them all off, and has lasted nearly to the present day, and remains the only tune people know for these words, as has been the case for the last hundred years or so.

The hymn music of the Victorian age adds urgency to our perception of the need to consider the melody of hymns in contemplating our question of what is a hymn. For the popularising motive, which was so significant then, still manifests itself in our own times with worship in modern idiom. Part of our answer to the question of what makes a good hymn is that we need to create *a language for otherness*. By this term, I mean that we must seek a language that leads us into touch with transcendence – that brings us, perhaps, into the presence of the holy. Of course, part of an answer to such a question is that while there is obviously a poetic answer

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[24] Erik Routley, *The Church and Music (*Edinburgh: Duckworth, 1967) 179. My emphasis.

to a question seen in poetic terms, writers of music also need to see the same question in musical terms, of finding a ***musical language for otherness***.

That language for otherness is actually our second postulate for an answer to our question of what makes a good hymn text. The first postulate was that the good hymn text ***brings the singers into the world of the Bible***. Ellerton's well-crafted hymn is a notable failure in this respect. In comparison, Kendrick's verse, despite its rough-hewn technique, brings us quite clearly into the biblical world.

Modern idiom services

Yes. This subheading is a very dated expression which unexpectedly sprang out of my octogenarian memory. I also recall grumpy older ministers referring to "modern idiot services". But then, Graham Kendrick is only a dozen years younger than myself, so he may remember the words also with a gentle smile, while thousands might just scratch their heads. In a collection of essays entitled "Composing Music for Worship", Kendrick contributes an essay under the title "Worship in Spirit and in Truth", in which he says:

> ... Stylistically, these new [Christian] movements have been more willing than traditional churches to draw on popular music culture, so that the contemporary praise and worship songs that originate in them have sometimes been light-heartedly dubbed 'baptized rock and roll'.[25]

On the next page Kendrick refers to "My own song, 'The servant king.' I think in so speaking that he shows some affection for it; and perhaps rightly so. Here it is:

> From heaven you came, helpless babe,
> entered our world, your glory veiled;
> not to be served, but to serve,
> and give your life that we may live.
>
> > *This is our God, the servant King,*
> > *he calls us now to follow him,*
> > *to bring our lives as a daily offering*
> > *of worship to the Servant King*

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[25] Graham Kendrick, "Worship in Spirit and in Truth" in *Composing Music for Worship*, eds Stephen Darlington and Alan Kreider. (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2003) 88.

There in the garden of tears,

my heavy load he chose to bear;

his heart with sorrow was torn,

'Yet not my will but yours, he said.

This is our God, the servant King,

Come see his hands and his feet,

the scars that speak of sacrifice,

hands that flung stars into space

to cruel nails surrendered.

This is our God, the servant King,

So let us learn how to serve

And in our lives enthrone him;

Each other's needs to prefer,

For it is Christ we're serving.

This is our God, the servant King,

A useful start to seeing what is happening in this hymn is to note that Kendrick writes both the verse and the music. In fact, it seems not uncommon in this kind of hymn writing, and it could actually have a real value. I imagine that Kendrick does not write all the words first and then the music, nor vice versa. I suspect he does them together, so that the poet in him and the composer in him play off each other. And it must have its advantages: notice how the first three syllables of each verse have a different stress pattern, yet each works reasonably successfully with the musical setting. This effect is even more noticeable with the third line of each verse.

I have to say in passing that I only know of two traditional hymns which are written, both words and music, by the same person: Joachim Neander's "All my hope on God is founded" (in Robert Bridges' translation, CP 368), and Erik Routley's "In praise of God meet duty and delight" (CP 479 Routley's words and music). Both are very fine hymns, the first now better known to Howells' splendid tune Michael, and alas, Routley's fine hymn, I suspect, hardly known.

Another common feature of the *band-plus-lead-singer* type of hymn is that the form, with verse followed by refrain after each verse, seems now to be very common. This is in some contrast with the traditional Protestant hymn, in which it is quite uncommon. One positive effect of the refrain after each verse is that the people can

learn it quite quickly and join in after each verse. However, a disadvantage is that the refrain needs to be very well written. And this is very important, for otherwise the people can become inured to it before they have actually learned to handle the verses. The question is how does Graham Kendrick's verse-plus-refrain form appear in this respect in its overall form.

Firstly it can be seen that, while line endings in the verses do not rhyme, I suggest that the line endings in the refrain all rhyme with each other. Of course this is so with *King* and *offering,* but is it so with *King* and *him*? Well it is a fairly near rhyme: the vowel *i* is the louder sound in both, and the consonants *m* and *ng* (and *n* incidentally) are rather similar sounds because they are nasal consonants; that is, the main airway is stopped, so the sound goes through the nose. And let us remember that with rhyming it is not how the words look in print, but how they sound to a hearer. So the refrain rhymes well. But does it matter? Yes it does. Rhyming should not be seen as a formal expectation that poets feel they need to satisfy, in order for their work to be poetry, but rhyming actually creates a strong emphasis that a poet may use; therefore, ***a rhyming scheme is a pattern of emphasis***. The refrain with its strong rhyming scheme works well in general; but if there is a weakness, it is that in the second line *him* gets too much rhyming emphasis. For *him* is a pronoun, and pronouns are normally unemphatic in speech. Of course the strong words in this line are the two verbs, but they do not use the possibilities which are available in the pattern of rhyming emphasis – the rhyming scheme.

The best writing in the hymn is the four stanzas. However, a major fault needs to be discussed first. The stanzas do not rhyme. In doing so, Kendrick forsakes the opportunities that a rhyming pattern offers, but more important than this, he is ignoring the expectation that *verse for communal song will rhyme.* Of course community singalongs have become things of the past – times have changed with the possibilities we now have with electronic amplification and recording, with wide-reaching marketing and the like. Times have changed. Yes, we no longer have community song books with "Daisy, Daisy" or "Pack up your troubles." Yes, we also know that Milton, Wordsworth, Eliot and others, could write blank verse (i.e. verse without rhyming). But when it comes to communal singing, folk songs, ditties, play songs, work songs, protest songs, or in the church, singing traditional hymns of praise,

the age-long expectation of rhyme is there. And it is too age-long to die out quickly. Anyway rhyming is good, it creates emphasis, and it is reinforced every time we sing a nursery rhyme for our kids, or, at the test cricket, when we hear the Barmy Army – a group of English supporters, encouraging their team with raucous song.

Of course it is otherwise for the modern popular song: whereas, the popular song of early last century would likely be used for a singalong around someone's piano, now it is written for electronic reproduction for a variety of listening audiences, rather than singalong (which may be why the Barmy Army works on older songs). Hence the oft-heard remark "You don't have to rhyme these days" is actually a bit of a folk myth; and so it is, as far as hymn writers are concerned. Hymn writers, want the people to sing; and for this they need to satisfy the unstated expectation of rhyme for communal song. It is very important, for it helps memory too. (In Chapter 5, I discuss my own way of dealing with the expectation of rhyme in communal song which may be of help to other hymn writers.)

All this having been noted, we must say that there are some very good things happening in the verses of Kendrick's hymn. In each verse there is some variation in normal English word order. This creates emphasis simply because it is not normal, and provokes a spark of attention in the singer. This is actually in clear contrast with the refrain of the hymn, in which every line is in normal word order, and this is another reason why the refrain is rather less interesting than the verses. In the opening line of the first stanza, the adverbial phrase "From heaven" comes not after the verb, as is common with adverbials of place, but before the verb, and makes a nice emphatic beginning of the hymn. The second line of the second stanza puts the object, 'my heavy load,' before the subject and verb, against the strong expectation of subject-verb-object word order in modern English, and so it makes for a very strong line. In the fourth line of the third stanza the indirect object 'to cruel nails' comes before the verb, 'surrendered,' which gives a very strong conclusion to the stanza. There are similar effects in the second and third lines of the last stanza, which makes for a very powerful conclusion to the hymn. Does this matter? Well it does show that these devices are not out of date.

I am very glad to note these effects in Graham Kendrick's hymn, because there is a routine comment that people make about the verse of hymns: that is that we

need to use "the language of ordinary people." It is not altogether true, and in this hymn the writer is actually showing us exactly that. Our English language is a much more flexible instrument than we have been led to believe in the church in recent times. Variation of normal word order does not necessarily confuse readers; it can create emphasis that is interesting to readers.

A further confirmation of this flexibility of language can also be seen in another aspect of the success of the hymn, which is the way its language recalls the language of the Bible, not so much with clear quotes (not that there is anything wrong with such) but with a language that just hints at the literary world of the Bible. Thus in the refrain, 'follow him' hints at Jesus call, "Follow me" to his disciples in the gospels, 'daily offering' hints at the Old Testament temple worship, and also, in the epistle to the Hebrews, at Christ's offering of himself. It is interesting that Kendrick admits to taking the phrase 'the Servant King' from the title of a 1983 conference which he was attending[26]; but it is a splendid paradox: Christ is the Servant who is King, and the King who is servant, and it works itself out through all the verses. In verse one 'not to be served but to serve' is a broad hint at passages in Matthew and Mark. In verse two 'the garden of tears' reminds us of Gethsemane, and so does 'not my will but yours'. In verse three 'his hands and his feet' remind us of "behold my hands and my side" in John's Gospel, and lead us to the paradox of the creator's hand being nailed to the cross, with all which that might suggest – including in verse four the suffering Christ's divine enthronement in our lives.

Despite my opening comments, it seems clear that there is much to recommend this hymn – and I do refer to it as a hymn. However, two theological aspects provide some concern. Firstly, I have some doubt about the theological propriety of the opening clause of the refrain, "This [Christ] is our God," which must occur, of course, four times in one sing of the hymn. I mention this because I think there is an implicit neglect of Trinitarian theology in a straight equivalence of Christ with God. The use of the first person of the Trinity for the whole Godhead is quite acceptable, and it occurs quite often in the New Testament: for example, "our Father in heaven", "I must be about my Father's business", "the promise of the Father". However, the use of Christ for the whole Godhead is rare: except, for example,

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[26] Graham Kendrick, "Worship in Spirit and in Truth", 89.

"before Abraham was, I am" (Jn8: 58). Is it a small point? Perhaps it may seem so; but can it be ignored in a time when theologians point to the neglect of the Trinity in our worshipping language? I have my doubts that ignoring the issue is enough, and I make the point every so often in this book.

My second point is that in his hymn Kendrick makes no mention of resurrection. Karl Barth asserts that we should not talk resurrection without talking of the cross; nor should we speak of the cross without mention of resurrection. Here is one such statement of this from Barth:

> Of course, there is no Easter without Good Friday, but equally certainly there is no Good Friday without Easter! Too much tribulation and sullenness are too easily wrought into Christianity … It is not a sad and miserable business that took place on Good Friday; for he rose again.[27]

Despite the negative comments above, this hymn remains an effective piece of verse writing, and, at least in a *band-plus-lead-singer* situation, should work well. This brings us to the music of the hymn, where, as we have noticed above, Kendrick writes the music as well as the verse of the hymn, which is quite rare in Protestant hymnody – except in the recently emerging *band-plus-lead-singer* type of hymn singing leadership.

In the music there is a considerable effort on Kendrick's part to make his melody singable for a group of musically untrained singers. The first aspect of this which we notice is that the melody is quite carefully constructed for the untrained singer. There is much use of a short, simple phrase in the stanza – three quavers followed by a longer note. This is done four times in the first two lines, which are then repeated to complete the four-line stanza. Simplicity itself. The refrain again uses the four note motif, slightly changed, and to avoid dullness Kendrick artfully increases the third line to an eleven-syllable count, thus enabling some rhythmic variation, and hence musical interest.

A second aspect of his hymn which we notice is the complete lack of syncopation, both in the melody, which is the people's main concern, and in the accompaniment, at least as it is given in TIS, (*Together in Song*) – though one imagines

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[27] Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline (*London: SCM Press 1949), 114-115.

this sort of restraint may not apply to a percussion section. Syncopation is a device which can be rather tricky for non-musicians even in quite simple writing. However, not using syncopation would seem to be quite a demanding restriction for Kendrick, because syncopation is much used to create energy in modern popular music, and to avoid it may risk some disinterest among its probably youthful church gathering.

Kendrick, then, shows a good awareness of the needs of his intended congregation, and a desire to take these into account in his work. It does seem that in this quite reasonable restraint he may run some risk of blandness in his hymn, though in this particular case that may be a rather tough call. However, it is worth noting that the very rarity, mentioned above, of hymn writers doing both verse and music, suggests that hymn writing is a very challenging activity. To which Kendrick may well reply that the church greatly needs a new kind of communal song – a new genre perhaps. It is an interesting question.

It is also of interest that Kendrick, in the quotations above, clearly seems to prefer the word *songs* for his work. I take this to mean that he would feel *hymns* to be a traditionally loaded word which is best avoided, whereas I treat *hymn* as a useful inclusive word.[28]

By way of contrast, *song* used of worship seems to me to imply that hymns should be much like any other worldly song, while a term like *modern hymn* could imply a new style, while also implying that the new hymns and the old have the same function – worship. Be that as it may, it raises from a different direction the question concerning us in the current chapter: What is a hymn?

So, what is a hymn?

This question is quite demanding but it is important to answer it as the first step toward our overall question: what makes a good hymn text? If we come across somebody's work, we can know fairly easily if it is a hymn or not; but it is quite hard to state what constitutes a hymn. As Geoffrey Wainwright says, "Although fairly easy to recognize, hymns are rather more difficult to define".[29] And he then adds that "St

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[28] I title Maarten Ryder's and my recent collection *Hymns for Times and Seasons*. Not songs.
[29] Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life*, 198

Augustine's definition" has found wide acceptance, "A hymn is praise; it is praise of God; it is the sung praise of God."

There seems nothing to doubt in this definition. However, it does seem that in our own times it is important to add, to the Augustine definition, mention that hymns are quite definitely *the people's part of worship* – this seems to be in good accord with the clear mention in St Paul, in both Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, of the people joining together in "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs". Of course, Routley's splendid preacher's line, 'the folk-song of the church militant' – as I described it at the start of the current chapter — also hints that somehow hymns are part of the work of the people.

Of course both the Augustine quotation and the OED definition do mention that hymn is praise, perhaps taking for granted the people's participation therein. Nevertheless we need to be aware that there have been times when hymns were sung to the people by a choir, perhaps by a soloist or small professional group, while a large congregation constituted something like an audience. In our own times it would seem important to stress the people's part as well. Perhaps Abelard's Latin hymn would have been used in this way too, but Sturch's "translation" certainly anticipates congregational singing – and thus is definitely "hymn".

That worship, and hence hymn, should be praise *of God* – Augustine's second point – is more than a simple statement of the One to whom the hymn is directed in singing. The hymns covered in the current chapter, at least those of Sturch, Watts, and Wesley, achieve this kind of beauty by giving a worshipping people entry into the world of the Bible through communal song. A hymn is not a sermon, nor a theological discourse. Hymns create a literary world, and worshippers gain entry to such a world, not by the flat language of commonplace description, but by a poetic style – a language for otherness – that takes the divine *strangeness* into itself.

Augustine's third point emphasises that hymn is *sung* praise. It is a very significant point, because communal singing is an activity which, of its very nature, can be both memorable and enjoyable to individuals, and can thus build Christian community among them.

In a little story about me as a very green young minister, an older member of the church came out after the service and was overheard to mutter to his friends "At least he chooses good hymns." It doesn't say much for me, but it says a lot about the advice I and my fellow theological students received from a lecturer in our last year of training: "Don't choose hymns written between 1850 and 1900".

With few rare exceptions, this was a very good rule of thumb. That congregation did not hear "The day thou gavest" or a few other "old favourites". But the older member, bless his heart, kept coming to worship.

Chapter 2 – What Helps or Hinders Hymn Writing?

Singing a hymn is an act of worship; or that, at least, is what we intend if we are serious about our hymn singing. But what do we mean by worship? Or by the term 'an act of worship'? Professor Don Saliers', *Worship as Theology*, approaches this question from what seems to be an ancient Christian understanding of worship, that from the human side there are two human activities involved in worship: the praise of God for his glory in his creative and saving work in Christ Jesus, and our obedient opening of ourselves to the sanctifying work of the Spirit in a broken world. For these two aspects of worship Saliers uses the terms

> the glorification of God, and the transformation toward the Holy ...

and then adds:

> Yet such glorification and sanctification require human modes of communication, and must "touch down" into the whole range of human experience.[30]

To say that singing a hymn is an act of worship is to say that one needs not only a text, not only a musical setting, but a people singing; indeed, for most Christians, standing to sing, which is actually a symbolic action in itself. For singing a hymn is a sharing of joy – sometimes, of course, it is the exuberant joy of, say, Wesley's "Christ the Lord is risen today", and sometimes it is the unbelievably solemn joy of Watts's "When I survey the wondrous cross". Not only this; the result is not just living worship because the words and notes are sung; nor is it living worship because its meaning becomes clear, but because its meaning reaches beyond itself. Saliers speaks broadly of *ritual symbol* – which I take to mean a habitually repeated action which carries meaning – and it is clear that he includes hymns in this:

> Even the word – read, spoken, <u>sung</u>, contemplated – therefore becomes symbol; unless, of course, we confine the word to its discursive or merely propositional level – reducing our preaching or hearing to listening for moral maxims and/or

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[30] Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 205.

dogmatic truths, literally dispensed. This is the great flaw of all fundamentalisms
– biblical or ecclesial.[31]

As we noticed in Chapter 1, hymnody is language (and music) reaching beyond itself. We will examine what is happening to hymnody in Australia, by looking at three well-used hymn books. The *Australian Hymn Book* (AHB) was published in 1977 and is widely used in Australian churches. The *Australian Hymn Book* committee continued to work together, and a bit over twenty years later *Together in Song* (TIS) was published in 1999. Meanwhile the Anglicans had been at work in Britain, and in 2000, they published *Common Praise* (CP) a new revision of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* which is reasonably well used by Anglicans in Australia, more, perhaps, in Sydney and Melbourne than in Adelaide[32]. It is of interest, at least to myself, that the Uniting Church congregation to which I belong, Pilgrim Church in the centre of Adelaide, has three worshipping communities: the small 8am community, which values a traditional Protestant form, and cherishes its close-caring community; the 9.30am community, which takes a very contemporary, experimental approach to theology and liturgy; and the 11am community, which has a fairly fixed liturgical form, which has been described light-heartedly by an Anglican layman in the choir as "more Anglican than the Anglicans", but the 11 am community greatly values the excellent work of the organists and choir, with works both traditional and modern, from Tallis to Messian – a splendid coverage. Fascinating at Pilgrim Church is how all three of the hymn books mentioned above are in use on Sunday mornings, each community using a different one of these books: 8am, naturally uses the well-tried-and-tested AHB; 9.30am goes for a variety of recent sources, but calls on TIS when all else fails; 11am, after some serious research, has thrown in its lot with CP. And not any American books? Up to the middle of the nineteenth century, the main influence on Australian hymn singing has been from English and Scottish sources. From that time on, American influence steadily increases but tends to arrive in Australian churches by way of the same English and Scottish hymn books. Perhaps not until after World War II does American influence on Australian hymnody become more immediate, though the British influence certainly continues. I intend to look into

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[31] Ibid. 144. My emphasis.
[32] Martin Bleby, Anglican Priest, personal communication.

these particular hymn books, the three of them, in order to keep this study to a manageable size.

Language issues from a study of two fine hymns – and some literary issues

The following hymn is the first hymn text written by Erik Routley – "All who love and serve your city". (AHB 462, CP 373) Routley is well known for his far-reaching contribution to theology and the church's music. Most of us who have tried to write hymn text would be rather pleased if our first attempt at hymn writing were nearly as good as this. Routley actually wanted words for the tune Birabus, a quite sombre tune which he had heard and greatly appreciated. Wesley Milgate quotes him as writing in a letter:

> 'I had been looking for a text to fit it.' he writes. 'I had never written a text before; but this one emerged in about half an hour, and the workshop [which was about writing new hymns] accepted it, all except a 6th verse which was never printed. I tried to find a subject sombre enough for the tune, and thoughts of Oakland, California, where grievous riots were going on at that time, presented this theme.'[33]

Intriguingly, Routley goes on to add,

> I also tried to find as many monosyllables as possible so that the tune would have a chance to breathe.

I'm not sure what it means for a tune to 'have a chance to breathe', but the literary critic within me cannot resist adding that there are also good linguistic and literary reasons for the monosyllables. Many of our monosyllables go back well over a thousand years to the Anglo-Saxon (Old English) period, and to a language and poetry of great vigour. Such monosyllables tend to be very firm in place with their meanings, (e.g., think of *dark*, *night*, *folk*, *day*) and the use of such gives considerable strength to modern English writing.

To a certain degree, some of this can also apply to Norman French loan words, quite a number of which are mainly monosyllables which came into English within the first two or three centuries after 1066; such words have been in the language for

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[33] Wesley Milgate, *Songs of the People of God - Companion to AHB.* (London: Collins Liturgical Publications 1982), 198.

eight hundred years or more (e.g. *daub*, *grain*, *judge*, *lake*). The meaning of such loan words can shift around in the new language for some time, some centuries even, before settling into the meaning that the new language really needs, and then its meaning can hold firm for a long period. Good examples of this tendency are the words *very* and *verily*. The second of these words is, of course, well known in the AV, in Matthew's gospel, and doubled up in John's gospel, "verily, verily I say unto you". It can now be described as archaic; for it is well on the way to being dropped from the language, in favour of retaining the Old English *truly*.

Somewhat different is what has happened to the related word *very*, which, like *verily*, is ultimately from Latin. The word is well known in the Nicene Creed *"very God of very God",* and quite commonly in the AV, as in 1 Sam 26:4, *"Saul was come in very deed."* Now the word remains firm in place, and exceedingly common, as an intensifier: *very big*, *very loud*, etc. Later loan words, often needed as a result of scientific and technological progress, seem to have frequently been deliberately derived from the traditional languages of learning, Latin and classical Greek originals, sometimes borrowed into different disciplines at different times with different meanings. A good example is the word *resolve*, which has been borrowed with different meanings in physics, astronomy, and medicine from the late medieval times. About two centuries later musicians seized the word for describing aspects of harmony, while parliamentarians used it for agreeing to parliamentary action, a meaning which came to be used in normal speech, or at least in writing, as in the first verse of Wesley's hymn, a few pages below: *Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go ... thee, only thee **resolved** to know.* In this way, words, especially from Latin or classical Greek, can still be moving around in their English meanings. However, by way of contrast, earlier French loans have often had time to settle into their meaning in English, and its monosyllables add to the texture of English, and its poetic force.

Of course it would be easy to make a bit of fun of Erik Routley giving the hymn tune "a chance to breathe". However, English monosyllables do fit easily into the short lines that hymn writers normally use in English hymnody. This may not be without musical significance, especially since a number of verses must be written, all in order to fit the same tune. Perhaps Routley's comment about letting the tune

breathe is pointing to something like this without making a fuss about it. Anyway, here is the text of his hymn:

All who love and serve your city,
all who bear its daily stress,
all who cry for peace and justice,
all who curse and all who bless.

In your day of loss and sorrow,
in your day of helpless strife,
honour, peace, and love retreating,
Seek the Lord, who is your life.

In your day of wealth and plenty,
wasted work and wasted play,
call to mind the word of Jesus,
'I must work while it is day.'

For all days are days of judgment,
and the Lord is waiting still,
drawing near to those who spurn him,
offering peace and Calvary's hill.

Risen Lord, shall yet the city
be the city of despair?
Come today, our Judge, our Glory,
be its name 'the Lord is there'.

The striking thing about this text is the way the city, any modern city, is **brought into the world of the Bible**. The Bible is not brought into the world of the city; that is for the preacher to do. But with this hymn writer, the world of the modern city is brought into the world of the Bible, and the singing of the hymn becomes worship, and that is something we all need to do.

This aspect of hymn can be seen in the use of the word *day* in every verse, through its plural *days* and its compounds – *daily* in the first verse, and *today* in the last. This has the effect not only of unifying the structure of the poem, but also of bringing it into the world of the Bible. For the word *day* is exceedingly common in the Bible with a number of Hebraic meanings which go beyond our normal English meaning of twenty four hours, or daylight hours; such meanings in the verse of the hymn clearly recall biblical use. Of course the Hebrew meaning of the word includes

our twenty four hour meaning. However, the Bible extends it. The Hebrews looked for the great and terrible *day* of the Lord. But there shall be a *day* of atonement. Job, at the end of his rewarding struggle with God, dies "old, and full of *days*". And so on. And thus the modern city is being brought into the world of the Bible. This bringing of our world into the world of the Bible seems to be a great recurring feature of fine hymn writing. It is part of our answer to the question of what makes a good hymn text.

We also find this recall of biblical usage in the arresting use of anaphora (emphatic repetition) in verse one of this hymn – the repeated use of *all* at the start of each line; and it brings us face to face with the pain of the city – remembering the pain of Oakland, now the pain of every modern city. We see this in the last line of the first verse, "all who curse and all who bless". Of course this is the action of the people of the city, not the action of God, who, in the Old Testament, sets his own blessing and curse before Israel (Deut. 11:26). However, to extend our discussion of allusion in Chapter 1, people who sing *curse* and *bless* in this hymn may well think "Aha! Bible"; or, if not, will sub-consciously register the connection while singing the hymn. Allusion works like that when one quietly reads a poem or a novel; but especially is this so when people are singing a hymn together; for hymn singing involves the singer in both the music and the language of the hymn, not only mentally but also physically, and in company with other Christians. That is part of the joyful sharing of worship which happens with hymn singing in public worship.

In the second stanza, we begin to see the development of something which could be called a gospel shape. If the first stanza could be seen to point towards the sin of the city, the strain and the pain of it, the second stanza begins to point towards a saving of the city. The fourth line recalls, probably quite clearly in this case, biblical injunctions like "Seek and ye shall find", "Seek ye first the kingdom". In English, *seek* is a very common biblical word. One can hardly hear it without thinking "Bible", or biblical allusion. Indeed "seek the Lord" is a very common clause in the Old Testament. In Psalm 34, v.10, "they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing;" in Proverbs 28, v.5, "they that seek the Lord understand all things;" in Isaiah 55, v.6, "Seek the Lord while he may be found." In Amos 5, v.6, "Seek the Lord and ye shall live."

In verse three it would seem that, because we love John's gospel, we may recognise the healing work beginning to take shape in the divine judgement. And perhaps we will find our own repentance for our "wasted work and wasted play" (and note the anaphora again, "wasted ... wasted ..."). All this we find in the allusion, to John Ch. 9, and, marvellously so, to Jesus' saving and healing of the blind man at the end of the verse: "I must work while it is day."

And in verse four there are unmistakable suggestions of the biblical world with its saving Word: "days of judgment", "offering of peace" and, of course, "Calvary". Nobody could call this a conventional gospel hymn, yet all the themes are there.

The final stanza is given a touch of prominence by being the only verse in which there is any change in normal word order; and it occurs twice – *yet* in the first line and *be* in the last. The first line fills out the biblical picture of the world of the hymn: the Risen Lord, our Judge, our Glory; and the final line alludes to Ezekiel 48:35, the last verse of his prophecy: "the name of the city henceforth shall be, The Lord is there", which also reminds the reader of something like the Hebraic quality of naming – a Hebrew name not only indicates the person or place; it also tells something about the person or place. Hence the name of the city, is Jehovah-Shammah, 'The Lord is there', which are the final words of Ezekiel. It is a biblical name with a powerful resonance, which Routley uses tellingly to finish his hymn.

Routley has clearly raided the Bible for allusion, and actually wrote a sixth verse for the hymn, but it seems to have been dropped quite early. And rightly so, for any sixth verse, coming after his verse five, would have been an anticlimax indeed.

As far as the music is concerned, Erik Routley got what he wanted with Peter Cutts's tune, Birabus, which Routley described as 'a most beautiful and haunting tune'. And it is indeed so. However, being in a minor key with some slightly unusual 'modern' harmony (as some might say) it would seem that many congregations would need a bit of serious leadership, and a few experiences of the hymn in worship in order to 'grow into it'. Wesley Milgate gives an amusing account of the process involved in the committee's decision to have, for safety's sake, a second tune for the hymn by Martin Shaw:

> ... It is proper to say that Dr Routley does not much like the second tune MARCHING for his words; the Committee inserted it in order to prevent timid congregations and inexperienced organists from using an alternative tune of monumental inappropriateness ... [34]

Such, no doubt, is normal consideration required for a hymn book committee's work. If there is any genuine doubt about the tune Birabus, it could only be as far as the final verse is concerned. After all, to call upon the "Risen Lord, our Judge, our Glory" may be felt to require a more robust melody with some sense of resolve to it. Perhaps the editors of CP detected something like this, and decided to look elsewhere for a tune that could cope with all five verses. They have chosen Omni Die, a tune which works well with the Brownlie translation of the Russian Trinitarian hymn "Come you people, come, adore him" at TIS 5. However, for Routley's hymn, I would yet prefer Cutts's Birabus, which is also the choice of the AHB editors. A personal choice on my part? Perhaps so. For some reason I actually find Peter Cutts's tune somewhat reminiscent of the work of Maarten Ryder, who has written the music for my texts in our recent book of hymns. There is a freshness about both men's music; I assume this to be the result of what I take to be unexpected key changes in their approach to composition. I think it works well, and I delight in it. I have included two hymns by Maarten and myself in Chapter 5.

It is interesting to compare Routley's hymn with another hymn on a somewhat similar theme, AHB (560), "Lord, look upon our working days" with text by Ian Masson Fraser, a man with an amazing variety of ministerial work to his credit[35].

> Lord, look upon our working days,
> busied in factory, office, store;
> may wordless work your name adore,
> the common round spell out your praise?
>
> Bent to the lot our crafts assign,
> swayed by deep tides of need and fear,
> in loyalties torn, the truth unclear,
> how may we build to your design?

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[34] Milgate, *Songs of the People of God*, 198
[35] Milgate, *Songs of the People of God*, 254.

You are the workman, Lord, not we:
all worlds were made at your command.
Christ, their sustainer, bared his hand,
rescued them from futility.

Our part to do what he'll commit,
who strides the world and calls us all
partners in pain and carnival,
to grasp the hope he won for it.

Cover our faults with pardon full,
shield those who suffer when we shirk:
take what is worthy in our work,
and give it place within your rule.

While it is not necessarily the first thing one would notice about this hymn, it is perhaps the first that one should comment upon, that Fraser's verse makes use of the *In Memoriam* stanza – that form which Tennyson used for his long poem (80 pages) of that name, a poem which could be briefly summarised, if one so dared, as a reflection on Victorian doubt and disillusion. Here are some verses from the first section of that poem:

Thou wilt not leave us in the dust:
    Thou madest man, he knows not why,
    He thinks he was not made to die;
And thou hast made him: thou art just.

...
Our little systems have their day;
    They have their day and cease to be;
    They are but broken lights of thee,
And thou, O Lord, art more than they.

...
We have but faith: we cannot know,
    For knowledge is of things we see;
    And yet we trust it comes from thee,
A beam in darkness: let it grow.

There are three possible rhyming schemes that may occur in a quatrain stanza. The most common rhyming is *abab*, probably because the rhyming scheme, with its alternate lines rhyming, tends to hold the verse together as a whole. A good example is Charles Wesley's *Let saints on earth in concert sing*.

> Let saints on earth in concert <u>sing</u>
> with those whose work is <u>done</u>,
> for all the servants of our <u>King</u>
> in heaven and earth are <u>one</u>.

Much less common is *aabb* as in Watts's *Jesus shall reign where'er the <u>sun</u>*: Watts quite often throws stress onto the first syllable of a hymn.

> Jesus shall reign where'er the <u>sun</u>
> does his successive journeys <u>run</u>;
> his kingdom stretch from shore to <u>shore</u>,
> till moons shall wax and wane no <u>more</u>.

Here, by way of contrast, the effect of the rhyming scheme is to give a feeling of the stanza being divided into two couplets, so that the poem as a whole starts to feel like a series of couplets – which may, or may not be what a poet wants.

The third possible rhyming scheme, *abba*, the In Memoriam stanza (see above), is very rare. In all three types the effect of the rhyming scheme is to give structure to the verse beyond the effect of punctuation. However, this effect seems particularly pronounced in the third type, with *bb* bracketed, as it were, by *a* and *a.* and the result of this *abba* is that that each stanza feels a very complete piece in itself – unable to be broken up into two couplets, and thus, perhaps, stanzas seem more complete and finished in themselves. Certainly Tennyson seems to have been aware of this effect, and has taken steps to make the structure particularly clear by indenting the second and third lines of each stanza of his long poem.

It seems quite possible, also, that Fraser discerned something like this, quite possibly knew the poem, and made use of the form for his own purpose. For there are certain similarities between the poems despite their obvious differences: Tennyson is aware, with a certain perplexity, of the certainties of a past age of belief coming under some questioning in the mid-nineteenth century. Fraser, now writing in the nineteen sixties, has seen with seemingly similar perplexity the world of work

going awry. And he had experience: he was, in the wartime of the early forties, "probably the first 'worker' pastor, serving in industry as a labourer".[36] That these two men chose the same rare form for their verse seems to require more explanation than mere coincidence. The most likely explanation would seem to be that Fraser had some familiarity with Tennyson's work, and decided to use the form that Tennyson had made famous with his great poem.

For Ian Fraser's poem is a particularly good poem. Indeed it is reasonable to find in it a tough Psalmic quality, by which I mean here something like faith's awareness, under God, of the human condition. Just as the Psalms contain things we delight to say, and things we simply cannot say, but must say because they are in the Psalm, so it is with Fraser's poem. There is a hint of Psalm about it. In the Psalms, we find things we need to say not because they are beautiful or even desirable or fair, but because the Psalms are the strange, unprayable prayer of the Christ suffering and glorified. This is how Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts it in his engaging and deeply challenging book, *Life Together*:

> The Psalter occupies a unique place in the Holy Scriptures. It is God's Word and, with a few exceptions, the prayer of men as well. How are we to understand this? How can God's Word be at the same time prayer to God? ... We recall, for example, the psalms of innocence, the bitter, the imprecatory psalms, and also in part the psalms of the Passion. And yet these prayers are words of Holy Scripture which a believing Christian cannot dismiss as outworn and obsolete, as "early stages of religion." ... Only in the whole Christ does the whole Psalter become a reality, a whole which the individual can never fully comprehend and call his own. That is why the prayer of the psalms belongs in a peculiar way to the fellowship. Even if a verse or a psalm is not one's own prayer, it is nevertheless the prayer of another member of the fellowship; so it is quite certainly the prayer of the true Man Jesus Christ and his Body on earth.[37]

Herein is much that might provoke thought about the use of the Psalter in a worshipping community, and at least some of this might relate to the serious use of hymns. So we need to think more about the Psalmic quality of the Fraser hymn.

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[36] Milgate, *Songs of the People of God*, 254.
[37] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together. Trans Daniel W. Bloesch*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015),35-37.

In accomplishing this Psalmic quality of a hymn, the poem creates a diction more noticeably poetic than much modern hymn writing (which often only seems to be trying to make reading of the text as simple as possible for the reader). This poetic quality we find, for example in the adjectival use of the perfect (i.e. past) participles *busied/bent/swayed/torn* which compress so much meaning in the first two stanzas, because, it seems, each one replaces what might otherwise have to be a full clause. The questions with which Fraser concludes these stanzas create a sense of feeling which above I have called *perplexity*, though Fraser calls it *futility* at the end of verse three. I mentioned in Chapter 1 that pronouns are normally unemphatic and, therefore, can seem out of place at the end of a poetic line. The pronoun *we,* at the end of the first line of verse three, offers one of those rare occasions when the pronoun needs emphasis, and receives it at the end of the line.

It is also of interest to observe the linguistics of this use of *we*, for in this situation in, say, informal conversation, *not us* would be quite normal rather than *not we*. Behind the line *"You are the workman, Lord, not we"* is a perfectly correct and normal longer sentence, *"You are the workman, Lord, not we are the workman"*. Perfectly correct, but what a mouthful! No English speaker would talk like that, so what does he or she do about it? He uses rather complex English rules[38] that, quite simply, allow him to elide the last three words in this sentence, *are the workman,* because they are repeated. And when we do so, there is Ian Fraser's perfectly correct poetic line, *"You are the workman, Lord, not we"*. I hope the reader will forgive my teacherly tone here, but there is more to come. There is an amazing little language "motor" in the human brain, which is highly expert at working with the rules and techniques of one's native language, but here it does make a little mistake. It reminds us that there is a very important rule in English that a pronoun coming after a preposition must be in the accusative case: for example, *above me, near him, beyond them, with her*. And naturally, *not us*. It looks right; it sounds right, but the language motor in our head requires another catch-up look. For *not* is an adverb, even if it is rather short and looks like another little preposition, it is an adverb; so the preposition-plus-accusative rule does not apply; so that while expressions like *not I,*

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[38] These receive solid treatment in M. A. K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan's *Cohesion in English* (London: Longman, 1976)

not he, not they, and, of course*, not we* in that kind of sentence are formally correct, expressions like *not us* or *not me* are formally incorrect, (despite the fact that we use them all the time in speech).

So Ian Fraser is formally correct with *not we*. But what about *not us?* Do we not all say it anyway? And doesn't that mean that *not us* is correct in present-day English? As linguists would point out, it's what we all do, unless we are being particularly punctilious. It is the language people use, so why not use it here (disregarding the rhyme, of course, for the sake of our immediate point of interest here).

That interest brings us now to a literary question, not a scientific linguistic question: what is the **literary effect** of using *not we* rather than *not us*? The quick answer is that *not us* would yield a slight drop in tone: could we not say it is just a bit slangy? Just a wee bit. In comparison, *not we* is formally correct; and so it sounds, shall we say, a little 'refined', though not really 'la-de-da', and helps Fraser to create, in Professor Graham Tulloch's words, "a language which speaks fittingly for worship"[39].

This, however, is not true of the pronoun *it* at the end of the fourth stanza: the word does not require emphasis but gets it in full measure at the end of the line, causing a slight awkwardness, which leaves us with the impression of a word brought in mainly as a rhyme for *commit*. By way of contrast, *all* and *carnival* in the fourth stanza are a good, indeed delightful, original rhyme; not quite a full rhyme, but does that matter? *It* works admirably here, conveying a sense of the ambiguity which is involved in working life in the modern age. Moreover the third line *partners in pain and carnival* is a theologically very strong expression of that ambiguity. Indeed so is the verse as a whole: the creation is the work of the Lord (the Father) and its salvation is the work of Christ.

However, the fourth verse is rather demanding, and it would take some intellectual sorting out on the singer's part. Is that a fault in the hymn? I don't think so. People are experts at their native language. The big question, as far as the language of Bible, liturgy and hymn is concerned, is not "How do we make our

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[39] Professor Graham Tulloch was kind enough to write this for the back cover of Maarten Ryder's and my book of "Hymns for Times and Seasons."

worshipping language plainly understood?" but rather, "**How can our liturgical language be strangely different, strangely other?**" People don't need to be insulted by a continuing diet of the trite and ordinary, especially not for worship. As Nathan Mitchell puts it in a discussion of the language of liturgy in the Expository Times, which could equally apply to the language of hymns:

> I suspect that the sensory impoverishment and deprivation of so much liturgy today results from our rush to make intelligibility the centrepiece of reform and renewal. The unintentional consequence is a liturgy which "explains" rather than evokes, speaks rather than sings, drones rather than dances, skulks rather than soars.[40]

The final verse of Fraser's hymn amounts to a straight forward signing off that gathers the worshipping community into a simple, but not trite, confession and commitment. But there is also one other quiet, contradictory delight about the hymn: the music is the work of Erik Routley. The writer of the text for our first hymn in the current chapter, "All who love and serve the city", now turns to writing the music for the second hymn, "Lord, look upon our working days"! And it is a serious, singable melody in a minor key, worshipful, part of some very versatile hymn writing.

The two hymns together provoke, on one hand, much interest, but on the other hand they provoke a rather serious question. Firstly, the Routley/Cutts hymn appears in all three hymn books, AHB, TIS, and CP. Judging from Professor Milgate's comments[41] seemingly based on some contact he had with Routley through work on AHB, it seems that AHB 562 most likely has Routley's original words for line three; and twenty or so years later TIS follows suit. CP 373 includes the hymn almost in its entirety about a year later, only making the small change of *and* to *from* in the last line of v. 4 – perhaps a theological point? More likely, perhaps, a copyist's error.

In contrast with this favourable treatment, the Fraser/Routley hymn is fairly poorly treated. Despite appearing in AHB, the hymn is overlooked by TIS, and neither does it appear in CP, and the question really has to be Why? Is Fraser's verse writing in the Fraser/Routley hymn not as good as Routley's verse writing in the

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[40] Ian Paton, "Sacrosanctum Concillium: Fifty Years On", *The Expository Times*, 125/4 (January 2014)

[41] Milgate, *Songs of the People of God*, 198.

Routley/Cutts hymn? I do not think so. If anything, Fraser's verse writing seems in some ways more effective. If anything, his poem is better – at least as a <u>poem</u>; be it noted that it actually works well for the spoken voice. Read aloud, it works very well indeed. Yet the TIS committee judges the Routley/Cutts hymn to be the better <u>hymn</u>, and they may well be right. It might seem that the Routley words are better for singing voices – something that the musical Routley would manage by instinct. It would seem that a good reason for this could be that Fraser's verse has a number of stops within the poetic line, with the result that his hymn does not fit its musical setting with the same consistent ease that the Routley text fits Cutts's melody.

A good, clear example of this is the enjambment at the end of line two in the fourth stanza. It creates an excellent ambiguity, a double meaning of *calls* occurs here: Christs call is ***for*** us all. This is the first meaning, and it ends with the pause at the end of the line. Then it carries over to the next line. And there is a second meaning. Called also to <u>be</u> *partners in pain and carnival*. It is excellent use of ambiguity –called ***for***, and called to ***be***. It is fine verse, but perhaps not easy to sing, especially for a congregation not in good singing form. Although they would no doubt give it a good try.

Hymns create a literary "world"

It is useful also to observe these two hymns from the perspective of what I call, without any originality, their literary world. Any literary work – be it novel, poem, short story, etc. – creates a literary world, an imaginative background, which, gives a latent unity to the work. The great literary critic of the twentieth century, Northrop Frye, in his *The Great Code*, a work in which he seeks to give an introduction to the Bible in literary terms, explains the concept of a literary world thus:

> Originally I wanted to make a fairly thorough inductive survey of Biblical imagery and narrative, followed by some explanation of how these elements of the Bible had set up an imaginary framework – a mythological universe, as I call it – within which Western literature had operated down to the eighteenth century and is to a large extent still operating.[42]

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[42] Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York: Harcourt. 1983.) xi

A couple of pages later Frye extends this in order to speak of the unity of the Bible and what I call "the world of the Bible" as he understands it, himself, not as a theologian or biblical scholar, but as a literary critic (p. xiii). In this endeavour Frye seems to concede that to some extent this unity is imposed on the Bible by such as may read it or teach it, but nevertheless argues that this would not be possible unless some ***actual internal unity*** were there already:

> What matters is that "the Bible" has traditionally been read as a unity, and has influenced Western imagination as a unity. It exists if only because it has been compelled to exist. Yet, whatever the external reasons, there has to be some internal basis even for a compulsory existence. Those who do succeed in reading the Bible from beginning to end will discover that at least it has a beginning and an end, and some traces of a total structure. It begins where time begins, with the creation of the world; it ends where time ends, with the Apocalypse, and it surveys human history in between, or the aspect of history it is interested in, under the symbolic names of Adam and Israel. There is also a body of concrete images: city, mountain, river, garden, tree, oil, fountain, bread, wine, bride, sheep, and many others, which recur so often that they clearly indicate some kind of unifying principle.[43]

In the light of this understanding, it is now interesting and informative to come back to our two hymns, and look into the literary world of each. Firstly the Routley/Cutts hymn. It is quite clear that the world of the hymn is continuous with the biblical world; this is ensured by the allusion to biblical material throughout, which we have observed above. The effect of this is that the hymn and those who are singing it have been brought into the world of the Bible, and singing it becomes an act of worship. The result is a superb hymn. Have I heard the hymn used, or used it myself? Well, no. And that says something about how badly we use our hymn books.

And what about the Fraser/Routley hymn? It seems quite obvious that the world of this hymn is quite different. Despite significant social and theological observations, it seems quite clear that the world of the hymn is something like the work-place of post war reconstruction in Britain, and it is done with understanding and compassion by someone who knew about it all, and can write. But will the singing

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[43] Northrop Frye, xii.

of this hymn be an act of worship? Well it is possible for it to contribute to good worship, if it follows, say, a prayer or a sermon that brings to its post war world an awareness requiring faith and action. It is quite possible that it would be a very good, useful hymn. However, in this case, the problem for the hymn seems to be that its usefulness will be limited to infrequent occasions. Despite being a rather good singable hymn, which would certainly be a defensible judgement, it is likely to be left out of any hymn book for lack of space. This, unfortunately, seems to be what has happened to the Fraser/Routley hymn.

Testing our hymn/Bible hypothesis – a modern example

It seems a reasonable generalisation to assert that the hymn that enters into the world of the Bible is more likely to become a solid, hard-wearing hymn. In an article in The Reformed Theological Review, Professor Davis McCaughey discusses the language the Church uses to describe herself – a discussion that contrasts the language the New Testament uses about the Church with the theological language the modern church tends to use about herself. In his final remarks he says,

> ... it is only as we live in the image-affirming life of the Church as Israel, qualified by the Biblical language, that we shall achieve our true existence as the household of faith, the people of God.[44]

Hymn texts are also language about the church, with McCaughey's general remark here also applying to the text of hymns.

Some testing of this conclusion can be gained from the text of the following hymn (AHB 112) which is by Catherine Bonnell Arnott, a Canadian sociology lecturer in the USA at the time of writing. AHB 112 seems likely to be her original text. TIS 163 has a number of changes, to which Arnott may well have agreed, or even made herself, at a later time.

> God, who stretched the spangled heavens,
> infinite in time and space,
> flung the suns in burning radiance
> through the silent fields of space,
> we thy children, in thy likeness,

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[44] J. D.McCaughey, "Language about the Church", *The Reformed Theological Review* Vol XV (Feb 1956): 17.

share inventive powers with thee:
great Creator, still creating,
teach us what we yet may be.

Proudly rise our modern cities,
stately buildings, row on row;
yet their windows, blank, unfeeling,
stare on canyoned streets below,
where the lonely drift unnoticed
in the city's ebb and flow,
lost to purpose and to meaning,
scarcely caring where they go

We have conquered worlds undreamed of
since the childhood of our race,
known the ecstasy of winging
through uncharted realms of space,
probed the secrets of the atom,
yielding unimagined power,
facing us with life's destruction
or our most triumphant hour.

As thy new horizons beckon,
Father, give us strength to be
children of creative purpose,
thinking thy thoughts after thee,
till our dreams are rich with meaning,
each endeavour, thy design:
great Creator, lead us onward
till our work is one with thine.

In view of Arnott's concern with sociology, which was unknown to myself at first, it is interesting that my early reaction to reading the hymn, not intending to sound unkindly, was that the second verse reads a bit like a piece of sociology. A more leisurely consideration, however, revealed that this only applies to the second verse, and I consider that this verse should be omitted.

Given a bit of close reading, it becomes obvious that the second verse is not part of the original hymn, but appears to be a later addition, presumably by Arnott

herself. – there are very perceptible "seams" between her first and second verses, and between her second and third verses.

It is not that there is anything against a writer working in this way. We noticed in Chapter 1 that Charles Wesley has done much the same thing in the third verse of his hymn "Let him to whom we now belong". The difference here is that, while there are no noticeable seams in Wesley's hymn, the seams in Arnott's hymn are quite clear – at the end of her first stanza, and the beginning of her third stanza. Furthermore, it is clear that, if the second verse were omitted, no particularly noticeable seam would exist between the end of the first verse and the beginning of her third verse, now her second verse.

Of course this would give Arnott some pain, especially since the "canyoned streets", "windows, blank, unfeeling", and, pointing perhaps to morning and evening vehicle traffic, "the city's ebb and flow" are skilful writing and effective metaphors, and they indicate how strongly she feels about this. On the positive side for my suggestion that the verse be omitted, however, dropping out the second stanza would actually make for a more effective, more unified text on the general theme of the possibilities and the challenges which have opened to our kind under God through the work of modern science and technology. Furthermore, the hymn would then obey my twenty-four-line test – mentioned above – for the maximum length of hymns. (Yes I have broken that rule myself on occasion, but I hope rarely.)

Regardless of whether we follow a possible three-verse hymn, or the given four-verse text, it seems clear that the theme of science and technology, with its meanings, is carefully thought through. The opening couplet with its "God, who stretched the spangled heavens/ infinite in time and place" invites us to a glimpse of a universe – a "world" – that "stretches" our meanings, our understandings of astronomy and physics. There is a very clever, half-hidden metaphor there.

In verse three meanings are "undreamed of", "uncharted", "unimagined", and, in verse four, "rich with meaning", so that we can even dare to speak of "thinking thy thoughts after thee" – risking presumption? I hesitate to think so, but it is a very daring metaphor – although a rich one. It is this concentration of various meanings which seems to bring verses one, three, and four together as a unified piece, and the

result is that verse two can seem like a later insertion – and it makes the hymn too long. To which I hear Arnott's response to me, "Yes, but the city *is* rather *blank, unfeeling*", and those *lost to purpose and to meaning* can be found there. So I turn aside somewhat abashed, muttering that the hymn is still too long: four eight-line verses indeed!

What is the world, the literary world, of this hymn? That is the crucial question for a criticism of the poem as hymn. To what extent is the universe, even, perhaps, the expanding universe of modern astronomy, the world of this hymn, and does the hymn allow it to enter into the world of the Bible? The answer has to be 'only to a fairly limited extent'. One could deduce from the first line of the hymn that Arnott has Genesis 1:26 in mind; but that would be to offer a theological comment; it is not actually allusion to the passage by the poet.[45] On the other hand, line five, "we thy children, in thy likeness", does recall biblical language like "children of Israel", "children of men", and "children of God", and furthermore the second half of the line clearly recalls Genesis 1, "let us make man in our image, after our likeness". Outside verse one, however, there seems to be only one other biblical allusion; this is to "Father" in the last verse. It is, of course, Jesus' own word, and it carries strong connotations of worship and humility, as, to a lesser extent, does "Creator" in the seventh line.

Our answer to the question of whether the hymn gives entry to the world of the Bible must be that this is rather doubtful. Despite the real poetic skills of Arnott, the worlds of astronomy, physics, and perhaps sociology tend to dominate the hymn. A good test of the hymn would be the reaction of a singing congregation. The result would probably not be disapproval – our people know that the worldview of the sciences is something of a challenge in our time. But I would expect a subtle disappointment, a loyal but less than enthusiastic response. It must be said that this hymn is by no means clumsy writing; rather, the writer has set herself a very demanding task, but only partly succeeds in bringing it off.

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[45] Milgate frequently gives a list of scriptural references in order to alert the reader to theological meanings in a hymn, but these references are not always actually alluded to in the hymn.

Our disappointment with the hymn would not be the fault of the music. The tune in AHB is the good, strong German eight-line melody Wurtzburg. The first two lines are repeated for lines three and four. Lines five and six give a striking melodic contrast – with less step by step movement, some intervals and slightly different rhythmic figures. The last two lines offer a strong hint of the repetition of the movement and harmony of the first and second lines, but includes rhythmic touches of the fifth and sixth lines – all an effective use of a useful musical strategy.[46]

Earlier examples to confirm this study's hypothesis

We go back in time to the end of the nineteenth century, and not all is gloom. Along with a few other writers and musicians, the poet Robert Seymour Bridges is reacting against the generally shoddy hymn writing of the Victorian era, both verse and music. Now, near to the turn of the twentieth century (about 1897/8), he seeks to write hymns which are fine poetry. Anything less is not good enough for him. And he brings enormous prosodic skill to the task, as well as much experience. Professor J. R. Watson says of him,

> Bridges was an expert on English prosody, and had written two distinguished essays on Milton's poetry: his lines show a distinctly Miltonic ability to use pauses and caesuras (although Milton preferred blank verse, and [in contrast] Bridges's rhymes give strength to his hymnody).[47]

Here is the text of a hymn of Bridges which we usually sing at the Pilgrim 11 am service in Holy Week or Good Friday. I do actually give here the version at AHB 254 because the AHB editors have a clear preference for something like the original form of a hymn, and so they do here. However, they prefer 'Jesus' rather than the Latin 'Jesu', which CP100 prefers, while being happy to make other changes. *Together in Song* (TIS), however, drops the hymn altogether:

> Ah, holy Jesus, how hast thou offended,
> That man to judge thee hath in hate pretended!
> By foes derided, by thine own rejected,
> O most afflicted.

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[46] I proudly assert that this wee skerrick of musical criticism is my own effort, but with much help from John Wilson's essay "Hymn Tunes: Objective Factors" in *Duty and Delight: Routley Remembered* ed Robin A. Leaver, James H. Litton, and Carlton R. Young,. (Carol Stream, Illinois: Hope Publishing Company, 1985)

[47] J. R. Watson, *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study* (New York: OUP, 1999), 513.

Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon thee?

Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone thee.

'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee:

I crucified thee.

Lo, the good Shepherd for the sheep is offered;

the slave hath sinnèd, and the Son hath suffered:

for man's atonement, while he nothing heedeth,

God intercedeth.

For me, kind Jesus, was thy incarnation,

thy mortal sorrow, and thy life's oblation;

thy death of anguish and thy bitter passion,

for my salvation.

Therefore, kind Jesus, since I cannot pay thee,

I do adore Thee, and will ever pray thee,

think on thy pity and thy love unswerving,

not my deserving.

Now this is very substantial writing. Bridges has used a German text, as well as following a German musical setting which may have been developed from a Genevan original. So we can call this text a translation, as does AHB. However, CP100 gives more detail: "from Johann Heermann 1585–1647 based on an 11th century Latin meditation." As mentioned in Chapter 1, translating a poem in one language to a poem in another language should be regarded as writing a new poem. So we can immediately see that this gives extra force to Watson's statement that "Bridges' rhymes give strength to his hymnody". Especially is this so here, because all the rhymes in this hymn are two-syllable rhymes (which seem to have been forced on Bridges by the music – by the shape of the melody). Two-syllable rhymes are more difficult to achieve in English, although the positive aspect of two-syllable rhymes is that the rhyming lines become even more emphatic, though more demanding on the poet's skills. Especially is this true of its effect on the short fourth line of each verse: this shortened line makes the effect of the rhyme the more striking, because the last rhyme appears rather quickly, an effect which is used at the end of each verse, so making a decisive end to each verse.

However, real difficulties are apparent. In verse one, *pretended* is used in a somewhat unusual sense more like that of the noun *pretention*. In verse three one needs to read the punctuation with unusual care. Otherwise the best reader will find difficulty with the adverbial phrase *for man's atonement*, and instead of connecting it in his reader's mind with *intercedeth* in the fourth line, will possibly connect it with *suffered* at the end of the second line. The reader does have to be on his or her toes. A further problem with Bridges's verse here is with his wide choice of rather formal vocabulary: *incarnation*, *pretended*, *oblation*, *passion* (actually extremely rare in the AV), *afflicted*, *mortal*.

So this is quite formal writing. Bridges is also happy to use significant changes from normal word order and other devices in order to stress important theological points. For example, he is also concerned to create a feeling of deeply contrite prayer. He achieves both in this line,

> 'twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee:

where there is an artful repetition of *twas I* which is then repeated with change of word order, *I it was*, while the repetition is then artfully half concealed by the reminder of Peter's denial. It is quite a "tour de force".

It would perhaps be a mistake to claim that there is little biblical allusion in Bridges' hymn. Apart from our attention being drawn to Peter's denial, and a feeling that the events of Maundy Thursday are in mind, there is also in verse three the reference to the 'good shepherd of the sheep' in John 10 – but notice also the strong, repetitive rhythm of the two halves of the next line, an effect reminiscent of the Old English alliterative line, as we shall see a few pages below:

> the **slave** hath <u>sinnèd</u>, and the **Son** hath <u>suffered</u>;

and, remembering also to sing the older two-syllable pronunciation of <u>sinnèd</u> as it is marked. Oh! And who is the slave? Well it took me a little time to realise it must be the 'one who is a hireling and not a shepherd'. I hope I am right, but it does further illustrate the complexity of Bridges' writing – recalling from Chapter 1 that, in this context, complexity refers, not to unfortunate difficulty of meaning but to density of meaning – a bit like a red wine having complexity of flavour, as wine critics might say

– part of the fashionable writing that press writers can pretend to – if I may use that word 'pretend' myself.

Many church leaders today seem to think that density in the wording of a hymn is a fault, but Robert Bridges would disagree strongly. He had seen enough rather slight hymn writing going on in the Victorian era, and he sought to do something about it with great commitment.[48] However, the Bible appears to have been rather crowded to the edge of this hymn – by which I mean that the theologically formal vocabulary mentioned above tends to have taken over the flow of meaning, and crowded out the sharp edged, pictorial language of the Bible. In a different context Davis McCaughey makes this remark about theological language:

> Confessional and systematic theological statements inevitably move away from the concrete imaginative language of the New Testament to more generalised formulation.[49]

Of course this would not have been Bridges's intention, but despite his great prosodic powers this seems to have happened, at least to the extent that people may find his hymn 'a bit difficult'. Yet there is certainly a place for such a hymn.

I will, of course, sing the hymn on Good Friday with determined theological intent, and not without a little enjoyment of the melody. However, I fear that the hymn rather negatively confirms our hypothesis, that a successful hymn gives worshippers entry into the world of the Bible, by just not quite succeeding in doing so.

I return to Bridges at the end of the current chapter as he is a very fine writer but, first, it is good to compare his work with the great Good Friday hymn of Isaac Watts:

> When I survey the wondrous cross
> on which the Prince of glory died,
> my richest gain I count but loss,
> and pour contempt on all my pride.

---

[48] J. R. Watson gives a fine discussion of Bridges's work in *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 511 .

[49] J. D.McCaughey, "Language about the Church", *The Reformed Theological Review* Vol XV (Feb 1956): 1.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
save in the death of Christ my God;
all the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.

See from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down;
did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were an offering far too small:
love so amazing, so divine
demands my soul, my life, my all.

Well what can a simple literary critic say about this hymn? It has the straight forward, ceremonious dignity of the best of Watts' writing, which comes from having a verse line which seems inevitably end-stopped, having a degree of completeness in itself, never broken by enjambment. And the result is that the meaning of the poem proceeds through an orderly progression of single, but more or less complete one-line steps; and the effect is a simple but ceremonious dignity. One has to sit and contemplate what one can say about such perfection – until the simple, obvious answer comes along: Watts has made the cross of Christ – the agony and the glory – a thing of immense beauty. End of story, as they say. Well not quite; one should ask, how does Watts make the cross, of all things, beautiful?

For a start, the cross is *wondrous* with the burden of the *Prince of glory*: *my richest gain I count but loss*. It is almost as if Watts finds all assertions inadequate; but the AV comes to his rescue with an allusion to Philippians 3:7: "what things were gain to me I counted loss for Christ". Then with *pour contempt* we find an allusion to Psalm 107:40, "he pours contempt upon princes". In the second stanza the Lord *forbids boasting*: (splendid, uncompromising AV words – no ifs or buts about them). And what is it that is flowing from the marks of the thorns and the nails? In the third stanza *sorrow and love flow mingled down* – and what a wonderfully constructed metaphor that is – an implied metaphor, of course: it is the blood that flows down, and *sorrow and love* are the meaning of it all. And at the end of the final stanza, that

love also *demands* (another forceful AV word) everything from me – *my soul, my life, my all*.

Now I must confess that I have been a bit wilful here. I have changed Watts's word *present* in the last verse to *offering*, not so much because *offering* is better known, although that is not unimportant. The Revised Church Hymnary – Presbyterian (RCH) and the Methodist Hymn Book (MHB) use the word, but perhaps the hymnal Songs of Praise (SOP) began the reaction against it. However, with *offering*, it is the meaning which is better: a *present*, although quite a common word in the AV, almost always seems to be given to a person or persons. On the other hand, the word *offering* recalls the language of *sacrifice* – to the divine, and in the hymn, to *his blood*. Thus, the well-known word is actually the right word to use. It is not altogether surprising that the AHB, with its editorial stress on original wording, uses *present*. What is somewhat surprising is that the other hymn books follow suit.

In the light of all this it is clear that Watts has achieved the quite remarkable result of writing a hymn that has made the cross utterly beautiful. How? He makes the hymn beautiful in meaning, by highlighting the meaning through skilful use of a language that is immersed in the rhetoric of the Bible, and hence in the literary world of the Bible. By immersing his singers in the literary world of the Bible, Watts brings them face to face with the agony and the glory of the cross.

It may be useful to look a little more closely at this theme of the agony and the glory. Hoping to avoid too much of a distraction, we shall try to enrich our perception of this theme which comes from two poets, one much earlier than Watts, and the other much later. We commonly, and quite rightly in modern theological work, think of the cross as an ugly thing. However, the idea that the cross is not only ugly, but also beautiful is long standing. In the New Testament the Spirit predicts a searching of "the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent Glory" (1Peter 1:11).

It struck me recently that I may have begun thinking of the beauty of the cross when I studied The Dream of the Rood (Rood = Cross) in Professor Graham Tulloch's Old English class about thirty years ago. Old English – or Anglo-Saxon, as it is now more often called – was the language spoken before 1066, a language of great vigour, highly inflected like Latin and Ancient Greek. Years later I purchased the *Faber Book*

of Religious Verse which had a translation of The Dream of the Rood. It may be helpful to see how the poetic line of Anglo-Saxon verse differs from the two main prosodic expectations of rhythm and rhyme that we bring to modern English verse.

Although the Anglo-Saxon verse line does not have strict syllable count of the poetic line, it has a striking sense of rhythm, for there are normally four strongly stressed syllables to a line, and the first three are pointed by alliteration. Sometimes there is even alliteration between all four stressed syllables. More often there are just three, occasionally only two, stressed syllables which alliterate; in which cases the last stressed syllable is not alliterated. Here is an example from Helen Gardner's work using underlining to show the pattern nicely, even in modern translation, of three stressed syllables which alliterate, and a fourth, which becomes strangely emphatic because it does not alliterate:

*S*uffered great *s*orrow. Now the *s*eason is *c*ome

Helen Gardner offers her understanding of her translation task thus:

I have attempted to combine a literal translation with an approximation to the verse form and poetic conventions of the original, preserving formulaic phrases and tending to respect the poet's choice among various synonyms for the Cross or for Christ. [50]

Our earlier discussion of translating poetry into poetry in a different language suggests that Gardner has written a new poem! Gardiner's work is much longer than a hymn, of course – about four and a half pages – so we should not make direct comparison with a hymn either in length or content; but it gives some confirmation that cross-as-beauty is an ancient theme. Here are some of the first few lines of the poem, which are spoken by the Dreamer (remembering that we still occasionally hear the Cross referred to as the Tree – one of Gardner's synonyms) I think it is necessary to see two or three good-sized fragments of the poem to make the point, but it is indeed beautiful. Oh. And try to say it aloud to get the rhythmic feeling and vigour of the alliteration:

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[50] Helen Gardner, Ed. *The Faber Book of Religious Verse.* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979),342.

Listen! I will tell the most treasured of dreams,

A dream that I dreamt the deep middle of the night,

After the race of men had gone to their rest.

It seemed to me I saw the strangest of Trees,

Lifted aloft in the air, with light all around it,

Of all Beams the brightest. It stood as a beacon,

Drenched in gold; gleaming gems were set

Fair around its foot; five such flamed

High upon its cross branch. Hosts of angels gazed on it

In world-without-end glory. This was no felon's gallows.

...

Stained by my sins. I saw the Tree of Glory

Bright with streaming banners, brilliantly shining,

Gilded all with gold ...

Yet beneath the gold I glimpsed the signs

Of some ancient agony when again as of old

Its right side sweated blood. Sorrow seized me;

I was full of fear. I saw the beacon flicker,

Now dazzling, now darkened; at times drenched and dripping

Running red with blood, at times a royal treasure.

So in this centuries-old poem, we are seeing again both the agony and the glory. And there is a strange beauty to it all. We can feel something of the full force of the alliterative rhythm. A bit later, here is the Cross (Tree) telling its story to the Dreamer:

Many years ago – the memory abides –

I was felled to the ground at the forest's edge,

Severed from my roots. Enemies seized me,

Made me a mark of scorn for criminals to mount on;

Shoulder high they carried me and set me on a hill.

Many foes made me fast there. Far off then I saw

The King of all mankind coming in great haste,

...

Then the young hero – it was God almighty-

Strong and steadfast, stripped himself for battle;

He climbed up on the high gallows, constant in his purpose,

Mounted in sight of many, mankind to ransom.

...

I was raised up a Rood, a royal King I bore,

The High King of Heaven: hold firm I must.

They drove dark nails through me, the dire wounds still show,

Cruel gaping gashes, yet I dared not give as good.

...

... all embracing darkness

Covered with thick clouds the corpse of the world's ruler;

The bright day was darkened by a deep shadow,

All its colours clouded; the whole creation wept,

Keened for its King's fall; Christ was on the Rood.

So in this poem again we find the agony and the glory being brought together. We have been back much earlier than Watts's hymn – eight or nine centuries perhaps. I hope my reader has found the journey worthwhile.

Now let us come forward nearly to our own time to the *Four Quartets* of T. S. Eliot. The second of the Quartets, *East Coker*, contains the following short poem, which clearly is saying something about a healing atonement. Of this Eliot uses three metaphors: the *wounded surgeon*, the *dying nurse*, and the *ruined millionaire*. Again it is the agony and the glory.

The wounded surgeon plies the steel

That questions the distempered part;

Beneath the bleeding hands we feel

The sharp compassion of the healer's art

Resolving the enigma of the fever chart.

And note, of course, the bleeding hands and the healer's art.

Our only health is the disease

If we obey the dying nurse

Whose constant care is not to please

But to remind of our and Adam's curse,

And that to be restored, our sickness must grow worse.

The whole earth is our hospital

Endowed by the ruined millionaire,

Wherein, if we do well, we shall

Die of the absolute paternal care

That will not leave us, but prevents us everywhere.

...

> The dripping blood our only drink,
> The bloody flesh our only food:
> In spite of which we like to think
> That we are sound, substantial flesh and blood –
> Again, in spite of that, we call this Friday good.

We are still early in the Quartets. The feeling of this little poem is very much of the agony rather than the beauty. For the beauty we may see the oft-quoted end of the fourth Quartet which draws on Julian of Norwich (and remembering that *quick* here means "living" – as in the Apostles Creed "the quick and the dead". Eliot doesn't fuss too much about "archaic language". He just uses English.):

> Quick now, here, now, always –
> A condition of complete simplicity
> (Costing not less than everything)
> And all shall be well and
> All manner of things shall be well
> When the tongues of flames are infolded
> Into the crowned knot of fire
> And the fire and the rose are one.

And after the agony wrestled in the poem, it is a resounding statement of the glory – as we might find it.

The following hymn text is by John Mason Neale whose short but moving biography in Milgate reveals a man and a scholar worthy of great admiration. Most of his hymns are translations of ancient hymns, but very good poems.[51] (There are differences from AHB and TIS only in the last two stanzas.)

> The royal banners forward go,
> the cross shines forth in mystic glow;
> where he in flesh, our flesh who made,
> our sentence bore, our ransom paid.
>
> There whilst he hung, his sacred side
> by soldier's spear was opened wide,

---

[51] I have to admit I only learned this hymn, which is based on a sixth century Latin hymn, in the last year or two. In deference to Neale's high Anglicanism, we follow the text as it is given in CP 122.

to cleanse us in the precious flood

of water mingled with his blood.

Fulfilled is now what David told

in true prophetic song of old,

how God the nations' King should be;

for God is reigning from the tree.

O tree of glory, tree most fair,

ordained those holy limbs to bear,

how bright in purple robe it stood,

the purple of a Saviour's blood!

Upon its arms, like balance true,

he weighed the price for sinners due,

the price which none but he could pay,

and spoiled the spoiler of his prey.

To thee, eternal Three in One,

let homage meet by all be done:

as by the cross thou dost restore,

so rule and guide us evermore

Before looking at the text of this hymn, it seems appropriate to look at the two musical settings for the hymn. The first, Vexilla Regis, which appears only in CP and AHB, is described in AHB as "Proper plainsong melody from the 'Sarum Antiphonal". I really like it, but suspect it is beyond the average Protestant congregation, unless such a congregation were ready to put in some hard work. The second setting, which appears in all three hymnals is Gonfalon Royal by Percy Carter Buck; it is well within the capability of a congregation. It is also a very good tune for the words: it seems to be early twentieth century work, so that Buck has escaped the allure of late nineteenth century hymnody, avoiding its worn-out conventions, and giving us a quite robust, singable melody**.**

The text of the first verse, the only verse 'unchanged from Neale's original', according to Milgate (p.115), sets the tone of the hymn from the beginning. In ancient and medieval times, banners were an expression of political and military power; they could assert a sovereign's status at a tournament or lead an army into battle. And *The*

royal banners forward go. It is a strong, emphatic opening line, achieved quite simply by putting the verb *go* at the end of the line, after its qualifying adverb *forward* instead of its normal position before the adverb of place. It is the cross triumphant; it *shines forth in mystic glow*, not a glowing sentimentality, but a glow of triumph born out of the deep mystery of the divine triumph of the cross: The one who is incarnate in our flesh – *he in flesh* – who is involved in our creation – *our flesh who made* – now comes to his triumph on the cross. There is an amazing complexity in this third line; creation and incarnation all in two balanced half lines forming a rather subtle chiasmus – Charles Wesley would have loved it – but note also the use of anaphora as well, with the repeated use of *flesh* in the same line. And the fourth line completes the triumph: it involves two completely parallel half lines, *our sentence bore, our ransom paid*, each emphasised by placing the verb not before the object (which would be normal English word order) but strikingly after, at the end of each half line.

Oh yes. Ransom. It would be interesting to allow ourselves to be distracted by current liberal theological issues that are being raised in our times – a reversion to late nineteenth century liberal theology, or perhaps otherwise. For us it is enough to be aware that here as elsewhere the hymn enters the world of the Bible, as good hymns must, with considerable poetic force. **It is not the function of hymnody to seriously interpret the Bible**. That would turn hymn into sermon. It is the function of hymnody to bring us into the literary world of the Bible – whence come the great yearnings and learnings of the Christian faith.

We can hardly expect that, as we proceed through the poem, this level of prosodic excellence will be sustained. I must confess that my first thought concerning the second stanza was that it is – well – ugly. It may even seem that the verse should be omitted. However, the verse clearly refers to John 19:34: "But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith there came out blood and water". The second verse is ugly, and it is part of the agony and the glory. To omit this verse would obviously be to unbalance the hymn text. A glory without the agony could be of the world, but not of the Christ.

It is interesting to pause in our movement through these verses , and notice that the rhyming scheme is *aabb*, with its tendency to divide a four-line verse into two couplets. The verses of this hymn seem to be good examples of this tendency; but the third stanza is an exception, for it is clearly marked with a semicolon for a stronger pause after, not the second line, but the third line. What is the effect of this? The first three lines seem to refer to an Old Testament prophecy by David that *God the nations' King should be* (note the plural possessive, *nations'*). Is the prophecy one of the Psalms of David? The best we can reasonably say is 'maybe'. Maybe Psalm 67:4: "... for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth" is perhaps a reasonable conjecture, but that is all. And in the hymn, its fulfilment, emphatically marked by the placement of *fulfilled* at the beginning of the first line, is now clearly marked off in the fourth line of the poem, in that *God is reigning from the tree*. Tree as cross, of course. It seems by no means unlikely that a very fine scholar like Neale would have read "The Dream of the Rood" – a feeling reinforced by the next two verses.

These next two verses bring the poem to a resounding song of praise. In verse four the two-couplet form reasserts itself after the three-line/one-line structure of the previous verse. Note the anaphora, the emphatic repetition of *tree* in the first line, with its balanced, parallel half lines. Note also the use of *ordained* in the second line, with both a suggestion of human planning, but also a strong hint of divine purpose. In fact the second line is carefully structured; note how the verbs are emphatically placed at the beginning and the end of the line – a participle and an infinitive actually. The second half of the verse has another example of anaphora, this time of the word *purple*. This word came from classical Greek, and was borrowed into Latin with the meaning of the colour we now refer to as crimson, which is also the colour of blood. This was the colour an Emperor or other high official might wear at a rally or games. Also, of course, it was the colour a military General would wear when his victorious army entered into Rome. It is only on entering into English that the word changes its meaning to the colour which is familiar to us. When we look into verse four of the hymn, it is quite clear from the last line, *the purple of a Saviour's blood,* that it is the older meaning of *purple* that is intended in both places in this verse. Some will say that the word should be changed to the modern *crimson*. I think I would plead that the older meaning is not completely lost, that it still holds when

we talk of someone going 'purple in the face' if he is very angry. But be that as it may, there is more to the meaning of purple than this. It has a certain literary resonance that we see, for example, in the expression 'Royal Purple'. The use of the very word purple here gives a hint, that behind all the agony and the ugly, we behold the struggle and triumph of the King – *how bright in purple robe it stood/the purple of a Saviour's blood*. The repetition of purple is also an impressive use of anaphora. (The change of *purple robe* to *royal robe* in AHB would seem to be unfortunate. It destroys the anaphora.)

This brings us to the end of the story in the fifth stanza. The metaphor here is the shape of the cross as a beam balance or set of scales, on which the Saviour *weighs the price* – *weighs* in the sense of weighs up, considers, with an emphatic repetition, *the price which none but he could pay* and – wonderful last line, with another emphatic use of anaphora – *spoiled the spoiler of his pray*. Last line? Well not quite. Anglicans often like to finish a Psalm or hymn with a Gloria (and more of us should do so for its Trinitarian conclusion!) Neale gives us his own Trinitarian Gloria without using the word "Gloria". But Trinitarian it certainly is – for *"homage meet"* which it is meet and right so to do.

This is a very fine hymn. Readers and, of course, singers, would naturally be aware that this hymn uses a language style that is clearly poetic. Variation of word order is a marked feature of Neale's style, and it is very easy to dismiss it as "archaic". It is not so. Neale's everyday speech would have been very much like ours – probably with a "posher" accent – to our Australian ear. All sorts of poets of any skill do this sort of thing in any age. It may be possible to make a case for a suggestion that the style of the Latin original has affected Neale's English style, but that would prove nothing – for this is likely to happen whenever a writer translates a poem from another language. Hymn book editors are likely to call Neale's text a "translation", and are, perhaps, more or less justified in doing so; but the English text is Neale's, and it is a fine poem – and a fine congregational hymn with the help of Percy Buck's splendid musical setting.

There is, nevertheless, a serious question that can be asked about hymn "translations" in general and of Neale's hymnody in particular, for much of Neale's

output goes back to ancient sources. To what extent does a "translation" of an ancient hymn bring us into the world of the Bible, and to what extent does it bring us into the world of an ancient Roman or Greek church? Such a question could raise a like question: to what extent does the ancient source take us back into the world of the Bible? However, for the above hymn by Neale, which has been our subject for consideration, there seems no doubt that we are firmly placed into the biblical world, for the poem brings us into the biblical story itself.

A second criterion for hymn language

The current chapter has been spent time seeking to establish a criterion for excellence in a hymn – that the hymn enter into the literary world of the Bible and bring the singers themselves into the world of the Bible, and it seems manifest that Neale's text achieves this. We are also starting to feel our way into another criterion – that the hymn writer needs to create a **language of otherness**, because God is other than his creation;

Such a language would need to be other than that of everyday discourse, or, indeed, a language other than that of worldly specialities. This is not a surprising necessity. People generally shape their language to where they are, and what they are doing, sometimes intentionally, sometimes without realising it. The business owner will use a different language style in the workshop from the language he or she might use with a customer. The politician will use a different language in Parliament than he or she might use on the hustings. I even suspect that a media personality might use a different language on radio than he or she might use on television. I just wonder. We all shape our language to the place and the activity in which we are engaged, and so it must be when we come to church to worship. There is actually nothing strange about that – our English language adapts to the situation of worship. We expect it to be somehow other – to have a certain "otherness" – perhaps something of the "holy" about it.

Worship is a human activity utterly different from other human activities. Hence it would be very surprising indeed, from a linguistic point of view, if its language style were not different from the language styles of other activities. To put it another way, the question which should be asked by the liturgist or the hymn writer

is not "How do we make worship language plainly understood?" Up to a point, that may be a fair back-of-the-mind question for the worship leader or preacher to contemplate. But for the hymn writer, and the liturgist generally, the question must be not the hackneyed "How do we get our worship language plainly understood?" but "***How do we have a worship language that is strangely other?***" The answer of the ages has been something like "Worship needs a ceremonious language style" and the ages have something to teach us about that: the Latin Mass, the Authorised Version of the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, and various metrical Psalms and hymns. And just incidentally, it is of some interest that CP, with perhaps more regard for the Latin, tends to prefer *Jesu*, while AHB prefers *Jesus*.

Neale manifestly achieves a ceremonious style in his hymn above, quite noticeably so, with a use of various prosodic skills: He plays with word order, parallelism, chiasmus, biblical allusion, but also holds, seemingly quite strongly, to his ancient Latin and Greek sources. We will now check a very fine Charles Wesley hymn – different theology, different ecclesiastical tradition – and compare the prosodic skills he uses with those used by Neale in his hymn.

> Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go,
> my daily labour to pursue;
> thee, only thee, resolved to know,
> in all I think, or speak, or do.
>
> The task thy wisdom hath assigned
> O let me cheerfully fulfil;
> in all my works thy presence find,
> and prove thy good and perfect will.
>
> Thee may I set at my right hand,
> whose eyes my inmost substance see,
> and labour on at thy command,
> and offer all my works to thee.
>
> Give me to bear thy easy yoke,
> and every moment watch and pray,
> and still to things eternal look,
> and hasten to thy glorious day;

> For thee delightfully employ
>
> whate'er thy bounteous grace hath given,
>
> and run my course with even joy,
>
> and closely walk with thee to heaven.

It would seem to me that the supreme test of a hymn would be to put it up for morning worship at a 'schoolful' of teenage boys. Ian Forbes, retired minister, teacher, tertiary lecturer, but by the time I knew him, general 'dogsbody' at Pilgrim Uniting Church, Adelaide, once told me that, at such-and-such a school where he had been teaching, if this hymn – set to Orlando Gibbons' Song 34 of course – was put up for worship at the morning assembly, the boys would 'get into it' with particularly robust musical enjoyment. He was not kidding: these boys would sing this hymn more than two hundred years old to a tune four hundred years old with evident pleasure. And we can still find it surprising.

Now this hymn is obviously different from John Mason Neale's hymn. On one hand, Neale is dealing with one of the great centralities of the Christian faith. On the other hand, Wesley's hymn is a sung prayer for the help of grace as we deal faithfully with the challenges of our daily work. Nevertheless, for our purpose here, what is of interest is not so much the differences between the two hymns as far as subject matter is concerned. What is important is to note similarities and differences of prosodic style and technique.[52] We will consider some of these similarities and differences while enjoying some of the excellence of Wesley's work.

We observed in Chapter 1 that one notable aspect of Wesley's hymns is the use he makes of the Bible. In the second verse, *prove thy good and perfect will* clearly alludes to Romans 12: 2. In the fourth stanza, *every moment watch and pray* alludes to Jesus instructions to his disciples in the garden of Gethsemane. In the same verse *easy yoke* alludes to Jesus' çall to those who labour and are heavy laden in Matthew 11, etc., sometimes just words that belong in the biblical register, such as *offer*, *eternal*, *glorious*, and, of course some older second person singular pronouns – actually already out of common use before the publishing of the AV in 1611.

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[52] I deal at greater length with Wesley's hymn in my M.A thesis, *The English Of Worship*, 298-305 Copies of the thesis are in the Flinders University Library, Bedford Park, South Australia.

Wesley's hymn begins with a fairly clear allusion to Psalm 104: 23 "Man goes forth to his work, and to his labour until the evening". But what is of considerable interest is the way Wesley does this. He takes the phrasal verb *go forth* – which is quite common in the AV – and he puts the verb *go* at the end of the line, and the adverb *forth* at the beginning of the line to form a striking opening line. Pretty clever, is it not?

> Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go,

Even more than Neale in his hymn, Wesley uses the device of placing verbs at the end of the poetic line. A clear example of this is the first verse, where all four lines end with a verb (if we count the infinitive *to know* as a verb). Not only this, all the other verses have lines ending in verbs two or three times; this gives his hymn considerable force. We also find the device of anaphora used for strong emphasis in Wesley – *thee, only thee* in verse one – and, of course, there are three such examples in Neale.

There are two excellent examples of Wesley's much-favoured chiasmus in the hymn. The last two lines of the fourth verse are splendidly so:

> and still to things eternal look,
> and hasten to thy glorious day.

In the last two lines of the second verse, the chiasmus is slightly hidden because it is not quite complete:

> in all my works thy presence find,
> and prove thy good and perfect will.

In both of these verses, the first two lines bring the singer in some way into the "nitty-gritty" of daily work and into its mundane responsibilities. And again, in both verses, the third and fourth lines of the verse, comprising a very effective chiasmus, bring the singer into a situation of enormous significance and imponderable moment.

Chiasmus is, of course, a special case of parallelism. Normal parallelism is a common device, quite commonly used by writers. In a way, parallelism often seems to have been Wesley's starting point for working on a verse: it seems that sometimes it can be the starting point for turning it into a chiasmus, or on the other hand,

sometimes it tends, somehow, to fail, and he lets the parallelism become quite loose. Sometimes no real parallelism happens at all, but that does not necessarily make the poet's line into a failure. In fact in this struggle with alternative possibilities one can almost perceive the poet at work. In the first stanza of the hymn, the whole verse is developed into a bigger, single parallelism: the third and fourth lines closely parallel the first two lines. In the third stanza, the third and fourth lines are a good clear example of parallelism, and we see it working well to shape the verse:

> and labour on at thy command,
> and offer all my works to thee.

The first couplet of the fourth verse could actually have been something of a failed parallel couplet that Wesley could not quite make to work: but look again at that marvellous chiasmus that comes after the so-called failure: does it not make an utterly splendid verse of it all? So can we really call the first couplet a failure? Of course not. Just teasing. Of course I've been a little tongue-in-cheek over these "failed" couplets. However, I think the reader catches just a glimpse of the poet at work – and that it is interesting.

A similar sort of thing happens with the last verse – it starts with two somewhat ordinary lines on Wesley's part, but look what happens with the last two lines:

> and run my course with even joy,
> and closely walk with thee to heaven.

which is a simple, straightforward parallel couplet – and a beautiful conclusion to the hymn. But whence comes the beauty? It comes, for a start, with the qualifier of the adjective *joy* – note the little Anglo-Saxon adjective *even*, so beautifully chosen for its precision: *even joy*. We commonly think of joy as a momentary high point on the journey, but here for Wesley it is the journey itself; not ups and downs, not ons and offs, but *even joy;* evened out, perhaps. How? That is the gift of grace, the *bounteous grace* of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, that we encounter on the journey, with whom, for Wesley, we *closely walk ... to heaven*. Note also there the little Old French loan word *closely*. What a precisely chosen qualifier it is, as is *even* in the previous line, *closely walk* and *even joy*, to give us the journey of grace, the even joy

of a close walking to heaven. Something like this seems to be what T. S. Eliot is giving us in the conclusion of East Coker, second of his Four Quartets:

> Not the intense moment
> Isolated, with no before and after,
> But a lifetime burning in every moment.

The Four Quartets are a demanding read. I was lucky enough to get a CD I could play over and over in the car! But I am also blest when the next hymn on Sunday morning is Wesley's *Forth in thy name*.

A final example from Robert Seymour Bridges. The great twentieth century hymn?

It was a sudden thought as I typed this sub-heading – the great twentieth century hymn – Yes. The same Bridges we met a few pages back! So I covered myself with the interrogative at the end of the sub-heading above. However, I think a very good case can be made for the worth of Bridges' *All my hope on God is founded*. Again, his work is based on an older hymn; this time in German by Joachim Neander. AHB and CP are in virtually complete agreement with respect to the text of the hymn, but this virtual unanimity says something for the quality of Bridges' text – it forbids trivial dismissal. *Together in Song* (TIS) feels some wordings need to be modernised – something of an insult to Bridges, I might have thought, but more of that a little later.

> All my hope on God is founded;
> he doth still my trust renew.
> me through change and chance he guideth,
> only good and only true.
> God unknown,
> he alone
> calls my heart to be his own.
>
> Pride of man and earthly glory,
> sword and crown betray his trust;
> what with care and toil he buildeth,
> tower and temple fall to dust.
> But God's power,
> Hour by hour,
> Is my temple and my tower.

God's great goodness aye endureth,

deep his wisdom passing thought,

splendour, light and life attend him,

beauty springeth out of naught.

Evermore

from his store

newborn worlds rise and adore.

Daily doth the almighty giver

bounteous gifts on us bestow;

his desire our soul delighteth,

pleasure leads us where we go.

Love doth stand

at his hand;

joy doth wait on his command.

Still from man to God eternal

sacrifice of praise be done,

high above all praises praising

for the gift of Christ his Son.

Christ doth call

One and all:

Ye who follow shall not fall.

Before getting to our great twentieth century hymn suggestion we need to ask, if the hymn actually is a twentieth century hymn? Well, the poem belongs alongside early twentieth century reactions against the excesses of the Victorian hymn. The English text may be described as a translation of Neander's work, but, that should not disqualify our hymn either; as Professor Milgate says,

Robert Bridges [has] made a very free rendering with additions of his own.[53]

So we will definitely regard the text as Bridges' poem. The text does first appear just before the new century, in 1898, but obviously it would not have come to any wide knowledge until well into the twentieth century.

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[53] Milgate, *Songs of the people of God*, 174.

And the tune? Well, there are two tunes in AHB (465): Meine Hoffnung, and Michael. Meine Hoffnung was composed in the early seventeenth century by Joachim Neander (who also wrote the German text). It is a splendid tune which demands to be sung, and, as sometimes should be said to congregations, sung not just for words, but for meaning. However, Milgate writes

> The average congregation might find 5 stanzas to this tune heavy going; in this (or in any) case it is no hardship to learn both tunes.[54]

I agree with his judgement on Meine Hoffnung, that it could be "heavy going" for five stanzas. (Remember my 24-line rule?) However, I suspect that his two-tune solution for congregations would possibly stretch friendships.

The second tune, Michael, was written by Herbert Howells, who has much musical achievement to his name, and the tune appeared, firstly it seems, in Britain in 1936. It is perhaps a feather in AHB's cap that while both tunes have been included therein, Australians have 'picked up' on the new tune. In my experience in various ministries around South Australia, it seemed that people knew the hymn and sang it with enthusiasm; and I, no doubt rather easily, have assumed this was general around the country. So the enthusiasm for the hymn occasioned interest, but no real surprise for myself. It certainly is an excellent hymn. It is interesting that CP, a quarter of a century after AHB, now has only the one tune, Michael, for this hymn – Meine Hoffnung inevitably seems to have been superseded. It is also of interest that Wesley Milgate remarks that Michael 'is now established as one of the finest hymn tunes of this [twentieth] century', and I would like to say something like that about Bridges's verse, thus in text and music, confirming perhaps, the great twentieth century hymn.

It is interesting to compare something of the work of Robert Bridges in this hymn with the technical skill of his hymn which we encountered earlier in the current chapter, "Ah, holy Jesus, how hast thou offended?" In that hymn we have the careful work of Bridges in a very unusual stanzaic form, with three quite long lines of eleven syllables and a short line of five syllables. If there is a common poetic line in English poetry, it is iambic pentameter – ten-syllable lines (five iambic feet). Shakespeare's plays and sonnets are obvious examples, as are Milton's "Paradise Lost",

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[54] ibid

Wordsworth's "Prelude", Gray's "Elegy", etc., but it is otherwise with hymns. The most common verse, common metre, has a syllable count of 8686; long metre, 8888, is nearly as common; short metre, 6686, is less common, but far from rare. The effect of the iambic pentameter line is that it gives the poet room for some flexibility within the line, which has made it a favourite choice for poets. And perhaps this line just fits the distinctive rhythms of the spoken language. The effect of the shorter hymn lines is to force a tighter, more compact verse on both the poet and the composer, which helps the singing congregation to stay together – and to support each other. It also seems quite possible that popular community singing culture (if it exists any more) tends to have short lines, but this obviously is beyond our study here. The great hymns of Watts, Wesley, and others have been written to very tight verse forms. It is interesting that hymn writers seem not to have used longer lines until well into the nineteenth century. 'Immortal, invisible, God only wise' (AHB 80) looks like a good example, but note how the half lines rhyme, and give a feeling of a stanza of eight lines. Dugmore's 'Almighty Father of all things that be', with its somewhat hidden Trinitarian structure, is a good clear example of iambic pentameter – and is inexcusably omitted from TIS.

In 'All my hope on God is founded' the syllable count of the stanza runs at 8787337, which are good short lines. Perhaps unusually for Bridges, who is skilled at rhyming, the first and third lines in his stanza do not rhyme. Nevertheless we must recall that this is an unusual verse form, at least for English speakers singing hymns. It is a form which no doubt is forced on Bridges by the form of Neander's music, which presumably he wished to retain. Bridges handles all this with apparent ease, despite the fact that he must have three short lines rhyming at the end of each stanza, which is no mean feat. For what makes this particularly impressive is not only that short lines are harder to rhyme than longer lines; but that their rhyming here also seems to have a more emphatic effect: they make for an impressively resounding ending to each verse – to each verse, that is, not just to some of the verses; Bridges's prosodic standards are maintained to the end of each verse – and the result is a hymn that, with Howells's music, simply demands to be sung. And I have never heard a complaint about five long verses – my 24-line rule has its limitations.

We must just cast our minds back to our assertion that a well-written hymn will bring worshippers into the world of the Bible We dared to suggest that his 'Ah, holy Jesus, how hast thou offended?' ultimately fails to do this because it tends to squeeze out the world of the Bible to the edges of the hymn. Does this not happen also with 'All my hope on God is founded'? I would contend that it does not, despite some appearances which may seem to be to the contrary.

Bridges takes great pleasure in the Bible, which comes from a great familiarity with it. We imagine he well knew the Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent:

> Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our saviour Jesus Christ[55]

And this knowledge, indeed familiarity, shows itself. It comes as no surprise that we find use of the Bible in the hymn. *Sacrifice of praise* in the last stanza is a clear allusion to Hebrews 13: 15. Reasonably such, but less clearly so, is an allusion to Psalm 40:8 in verse four, *his desire our soul delighteth*. We could put up *aye endureth* in verse three as an allusion to Matthew 10: 22, 'he that endureth to the end', but it would be a bit strange: the Matthew text refers to a disciple's necessary endurance, but in the hymn text it is God who *aye endureth*.

In this hymn, at least, we find less of the prosodic technique which we revel in with Watts or Wesley. We certainly find examples of verbs emphatically moved to the end of lines – the first two lines of the hymn are good examples. We do find a touch of anaphora in the fourth line of the first stanza, *only good and only true*. Of course there is little we could call parallelism, let alone chiasmus. It is also worth noting that Bridges does seem to enjoy a touch of alliteration, as do we all. Perhaps it goes back to the roots of our language in Anglo-Saxon and its poetry – a common enjoyment for English speakers it seems to me, but not particularly common in our hymns.

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[55]London SPCK. *Book of Common Prayer.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 89.

There is a structure that Bridges has used quite often, in this hymn at least, which is to build a phrase by joining words of like grammatical function with the copula *and*. So in the second stanza we find *sword and crown*. In the third stanza we find *rise and adore*, and perhaps *one and all* in the fifth stanza, though this last may seem to be just a somewhat conventional, popular phrase. However, very strong examples of this effect are produced when the joined pair is emphasised with alliteration: *change and chance* in the first stanza, *tower and temple* in the second stanza, and *light and life* in the third. However,none of these interesting aspects of the hymn hide the fact that the striking device in every verse is the powerful three-line rhyming structure which concludes it.

It is interesting to reflect here, as a side issue, that a lesser writer might well have been tempted simply to have a single three-line refrain, and to use it for each stanza – the three-line ending of the last stanza, for example, would have done quite nicely for every stanza. In this case we would certainly still have had an adequate hymn, but perhaps not a great one. Refrain (or chorus) is an aspect of folk song – it gets everyone into a good ''sing-up''. For hymn, which is primarily worship, the engagement of the people in song is a bit different from a rousing sing-up – but perhaps not completely different. Of particular interest in verse two is how, after *tower and temple* in the fourth line, the word order is reversed in the last line of the verse so that God's power *is my temple and my tower*. It is brilliantly clever!

Earlier in the current chapter, I described Ian Fraser's hymn as having a tough Psalmic quality, by which I meant that it spoke of **faith's awareness under God of the human condition**. Now I want to bring in another aspect of Psalmic quality, which is **faith's confidence in the greatness of God**, and I want to use the same expression, Psalmic quality, for Bridges' hymn also. Awareness of the human condition is still there in Bridges' hymn: there is change and chance, betrayal of trust, human pride, the world of care and toil, and great human achievement ending as dust. But more telling in this hymn is faith's confidence and trust in the greatness of God – it is the vital strength of those final three rhyming lines at the end of each verse. And that is part of its Psalmic quality. Blessed are they that find within their deepest being both sensitive awareness of the human condition and quiet confidence in the greatness of God – as in the Psalms.

Two criteria for a good hymn text

In the discussion in the current chapter, I raised the point several times that ***a successful hymn text brings worshippers into the literary world of the Bible***. We put this up as our first and main criterion for a good hymn text. We find in it the wisdom of a tradition that starts with the Psalms and later extends to the scriptural paraphrases. We find it in the work of the great seventeenth-century preachers and hymn writers. We find it in the work of Anglican and Catholic writers who came, perhaps a century later, to the English hymn. At times, it is perhaps found in what has been called the 'hymn explosion' which gathered force in the second half of the twentieth century.

We cannot consider this first criterion to be some kind of restriction on the hymn writer. The theological nicety of the Bible as Word seems to work in practice for the hymn writer. The help in considering a particular hymn topic that a hymn writer obtains from enjoying the Bible and working imaginatively with the Bible can help with the way he or she may discover an appropriate literary style that reaches beyond itself, *a language of otherness* – our second criterion. This does not mean that we need to copy older styles, but it does mean, that we can learn from them. Of course we have already found it necessary to consider whether today's hymn writers have failed or succeeded in creating such a language style. If we succeed in the first of these – bringing worshippers into the biblical world – we sometimes find ourselves well on the way to achieving the second, which is finding a language of otherness. The second will receive more attention in the following chapters, as we evaluate some new hymn writing and some changes wrought on older hymns. But, for now, we can claim good evidence for our two criteria for good hymn writing and singing.

Chapter 3. Can Poetic Texts be Sung? The Modernising of a Hymn Book

Although I made some sharp remarks about the AHB in "The English of Worship[56]" when it was first written, these, while justified, involved specific hymns or quite isolated aspects of the hymnal. However, churches were ready for such a hymnal, and the AHB won immediate approval and widespread use. Lawrence Bartlett, in his Foreword to *Together in Song* (TIS), the revised edition of the AHB, published in 1999, seems entirely justified in making the following remarks in his opening paragraph:

> Since its publication in 1977, the *Australian Hymn Book* has been widely used throughout Australia. Under its international title, *With One Voice*, it has also gained acceptance in parishes and schools in the United Kingdom and New Zealand, and to a lesser extent in Canada. In 1989, work began on a revision.[57]

People who were there in churches in the nineteen seventies, especially, perhaps, Protestant churches, would remember how there was some excitement about it all. But it also raises an interesting question. Why did people feel, only twelve years later, that a revision was necessary? It was a question fraught with possibilities for division and strife: some felt that some once-loved hymns should no longer be used, at least in the form in which they appeared in AHB, and that new hymns and 'worship songs' were needed. Others felt that great classics needed to be kept, and that many which were still useful were in danger of becoming lost. Bartlett further added that

> Contrary views were put by others who said that unless *The Australian Hymn Book* were modernised, they would abandon its use. Some indicated that there were many hymns in *The Australian Hymn Book* they could no longer use because of what they saw as gender exclusive language employed unwittingly by the authors.[58]

which may sound a bit like threats, though perhaps that is just an indication of the importance of the issues involved. There actually seem to have been two issues involved: the modernising of an older language in the church's worship, and a spirited

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[56]Donald W. H. Bell, *"The English of Worship: A study of recent use of English for liturgical purposes in Australia"*. MA Thesis. Flinders University 1988.
[57] AHB eds *Together in Song: Australian Hymn Book II*, p. vii
[58] Ibid. p vii.

opposition to an English language in the world which was seen to be too near to masculine dominance in Australian society.

Together in Song (TIS) is a copious hymnal – nearly eight hundred hymns, which number is exceeded only by *Congregational Praise* (CngP), and especially by the *Methodist Hymn Book* (MHB). Although occasional references have been made to TIS in Chapter 2, it has become clear that this hymn book would need a chapter or two on its own, for it differs quite clearly from the AHB despite its sub-title *Australian Hymn Book II*. We can start to see some of this difference in the way TIS treats William Cowper's hymn, "Jesus, where'er thy people meet".

The following discussion begins with a fairly full literary description of Cowper's achievement in his hymn text. The question then is whether a further responsibility exists, on the poet's part, if he or she knows that the text is to be used not only for reading but also for singing, in particular, for **communal singing**. This involves a glance at various poetic texts, asking what it means that the author expected, or took for granted, that the poem would be sung. We then need to further ask what influence this has on the work of the poet as hymn writer. This leads us to observe the presentation of Cowper's hymn as it now appears in TIS.

"Jesus, where'er thy people meet": A **Together in Song** *(TIS) case study*

First let us take note of Cowper's connection with John Newton, the great adventurer whose personal story is a well-known wonder. Cowper ministered as curate to John Newton in the Olney parish. Ricardo Quintana and Alvin Whitley describe Cowper as

> … didactic, although he taught Evangelical Christianity rather than Christian Stoicism;[59]

Together Newton and Cowper worked on a hymn collection for the parish, *Olney Hymns*, in which, according to Ricardo Quintana and Alvin Whitley, "Cowper sang his religion". Their collection included this hymn[60]. Cowper's life was a sad tale, with a number of episodes of mental illness throughout his life. Although somewhat late in life he achieved fame with his poetry, he died in 1800 by his own hand. Perhaps his best-known

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[59] Quintana, Ricardo and Whitley, Alvin. Eds, *English Poetry of the Mid and Late Eighteenth Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), 224.
[60] Ibid. 225.

hymns are "O for a closer walk with God" and "God moves in a mysterious way". However, I find it hard to go past "Jesus, where'er thy people meet". Although it seems to be less well known, it achieves a quiet perfection as an endeavour in hymn writing.

The occasion for the writing of this hymn was a change in location for a regular prayer-meeting at Olney.[61] Newton, though lacking the poetic finesse of Cowper, was a man of many parts and of considerable energy; he wrote well over half the hymns in the Olney collection, and they included such hymns as *Amazing grace* and, of course, *Glorious things of thee are spoken*. It is of interest that Newton also wrote a hymn for the occasion of the new worship centre. I like to think of the two men deciding together that the occasion was important enough for each to contribute a hymn. Anyway let us first take a quick look at Newton's contribution as it appears in the Revised Church Hymnary (RCH – Presbyterian 1928). Here is his first stanza:

> Dear Shepherd of thy people, hear,
>
> thy presence now display;
>
> as thou hast given a place for prayer,
>
> so give us hearts to pray.

Now this is the direct, down-to-earth enthusiasm of Newton. It must have been a significant occasion for the parish, one which was felt to require some enthusiastic publicizing. And Newton's forthright enthusiasm is by no means unattractive: he has his point to make and, firmly and clearly, he makes it. In the rest of the hymn, he continues in similar vein:

> Within these walls let holy peace
>
> and love and concord dwell;
>
> here give the troubled conscience ease,
>
> the wounded spirit heal.
>
> May we in faith receive thy word,
>
> in faith present our prayers,
>
> and in the presence of our Lord
>
> unbosom all our cares.

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[61] Milgate, *Songs of the People of God*, 150.

The hearing ear, the seeing eye,

the humbled mind bestow;

and shine upon us from on high

to make our graces grow.

It would be tempting to describe Newton's hymn as instructive prose made to look like poetry, but perhaps this would be a little unfair. The top verse on this page (which is actually the second stanza) makes a reasonable chiasmus of the verse. In the next verse there is a nice piece of parallelism between the first two lines. So we should 'cut a little slack' for John Newton. Perhaps there is a place for his forthright tone, which is certainly approachable.

However, to return to Cowper's hymn, the poetic achievement of Cowper is an altogether different achievement, with great density of meaning, through which the singer is brought into the biblical world. It is worth noting that this is the original form of Cowper's hymn. Of course early editors tried various changes – as editors did in those days before copyright – but none have lasted. In all my various hymn books the text of Cowper's hymn is unchanged, and Milgate affirms that "most hymnals now, however, use the original".[62] It is a real compliment to the skill and care of Cowper's writing.

Jesus, where'er thy people meet,

there they behold thy mercy-seat;

where'er they seek thee thou art found,

and every place is hallowed ground.

For thou within no walls confined,

inhabitest the humble mind;

such ever bring thee when they come,

and, going, take thee to their home.

Dear Shepherd of thy chosen few

thy former mercies here renew;

here to our waiting hearts proclaim

the sweetness of thy saving name.

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[62] Milgate, *Songs of the People of God*, 150.

> Here may we prove the power of prayer
> to strengthen faith and sweeten care,
> to teach our faint desires to rise,
> and bring all heaven before our eyes.
>
> Lord, we are few, but thou art near;
> nor short thine arm, nor deaf thine ear;
> O rend the heavens, come quickly down,
> and make a thousand hearts thine own.

It seems good in the first place to observe how tight the verse form used here actually is. As was noted in Chapter 2, a structural issue occurs in a four-line verse if it consists of a pair of rhyming couplets: the possibility of a four-line verse form can be felt to be breaking up into two halves. However, in each stanza, except, perhaps, the fifth, Cowper avoids this possibility. He does this in the first stanza by using *where'er* early in both the first and the third line, and this creates a feeling of two couplets belonging together, especially since there is also a good degree of parallelism between the couplets. At first sight the danger of the verse breaking up seems greatest in the second stanza. However, *such* is a very strong syntactical connective: it makes *the humble mind*, which is the object of *inhabitest*, into the implied subject of *bring*, which tends to connect the two couplets. In the third stanza, unity is suggested by the use of *here* near the end of the second line, and then at the beginning of the third line, thus creating a relationship between the two lines, which tends to bring the two couplets together. In the fourth stanza, the string of infinitives, *strengthen*, *sweeten*, *teach, rise*, *bring* (some of the *to* markers have been elided) which explain the power of prayer, also tend to hold the verse together. Finally it now seems clear that if this structural issue does not receive the same attention in the fifth verse, this would be because by now the four-line verse structure is well established.

We may turn now to the biblical meanings found in the hymn. In the first stanza, wherever Christ's people meet for worship, they *behold* mysterious presence, the *mercy seat* (Exodus 25:17ff) which is behind the veil of the temple, covered in gold; and, as the gospels remind the singer, those who *seek* find (Matt 7:7). And is there not just a hint that the seekers themselves are also *found*? For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19: 10); and the reference to *hallowed ground* recalls, of

course, Exodus 3:5 with Moses removing the shoes from his feet because he is on *holy* ground (*hallowed* and *holy* both share a common Anglo-Saxon root). It is interesting to notice that while for Newton we are given 'a place for prayer', for Cowper, 'every place is hallowed ground' – a daring extension of Moses' holy ground, but completely successful.

Why is this? In the first two lines of the second stanza, we are reminded that the Christ is not confined by walls, but inhabits the *humble mind;* and this is emphasised with a fine chiasmus. The second couplet is further emphasised by parallelism so that *such*, as they *come*, and in their *going*, take the Christ himself with them and it completes a very strong stanza.

The third stanza, which opens with the biblical *Shepherd*, dares to consider those – the *such* of verse two – to be, in a biblical sense, of the elect. They may consider themselves as being among the *chosen few* (recalling Matthew 20:16, "few are chosen"). And they wait on the *former mercies* (the plural seeming to be a distinctively biblical usage in the AV, for example Psalm 51:1, "according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions"). All this is done with considerable circumspection and skill: the whole third stanza actually seems intended to work as a chiasmus; for there appears to be some parallelism between the second and third lines, and also between the first and last lines. However, the point to be made here is not the quality or otherwise of the chiasmus; rather it is Cowper's success in taking election, an issue notoriously prone to theological disputation, and, by holding close to the Bible, making a verse of much devotional moment.

The use of *here,* which occurs twice in the third stanza, is now continued at the very beginning of the fourth stanza, and it is highly emphatic, greatly heightening the force of *power of prayer/ to strengthen faith and sweeten care*, and coming to a nice climactic moment in the second couplet with teaching *our faint desires to rise*. And grateful I am to Wesley Milgate for the keen observation that Cowper's wonderful line, *and bring all heaven before our eyes* is "a reminiscence of Milton's *Il Penseroso*", – which is much better than calling it 'a steal', though we have observed what T. S. Eliot had to say about that in Chapter 2.

A nice return to the *few* occurs in the first line of the powerful last stanza: *Lord, we are few, but thou art near*. And after that it's all Bible! The deft parallelism of the splendid line *nor short thine arm, nor deaf thine ear*, takes up Isaiah 59:1, "Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear", and fashions it into a beautiful line made of two parallel half-lines.

Next, Cowper takes Isaiah 64:1, "O that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down", and he makes it into the final couplet, dense with meaning: *O rend the heavens, come quickly down,/ and make a thousand hearts thine own*. We notice that the word *thousand,* which for us has an exact meaning, frequently just means a really large number in the Bible. We find this, for example, in the Watts hymn (Psalm 90) in Chapter 1: "a thousand ages in thy sight"; in Psalm 91, "a thousand shall fall at thy side"; in Revelation 20, "the souls of them that were beheaded ... they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." And so Cowper's hymn prays for *a thousand hearts*.

Thus we see how this tightly-written hymn is dense with meaning – densely packed into five quatrains. (My twenty-four-line rule allows six quatrain stanzas, but five is actually better for quatrains – the exception which tests the rule.) This density of meaning, which controls an evangelical passion with considerable poetic sophistication, is the result of thorough use of the Bible, which gathers additional meaning into the text, and brings singers into the literary world of the Bible, seemingly here within an evangelical provenance. It is bringing singers into the world of the Bible, its literary world, which is a vital mark of a fine hymn text. And more than this actually happens here – the use of the Bible, with all its poetic intensity, tends to help the poet achieve that second trait of a good hymn, a language of otherness – our two marks of an effective hymnody, a hint of the Divine in our midst.

What is the difference between a poem to be spoken and a poem to be sung?

It is very important to recognise that a hymn is incomplete until it has melody, although better still, it is incomplete until it is actually sung. I apologise if that sounds like a merely conventional thing to say. But if we do mean it, then we need to ask "What is the difference between a poem, which is written with a quiet assumption that it might, just on occasion, become speech (although more likely to be read silently) and a poem which is written to be sung?" To put it another way, what difference does it make to a poet's

work if he or she is asked to write not a poem but a hymn text? It is a demanding question.

A discussion of what tune should be set to Cowper's text may be an interesting place to start. For while there is complete agreement about the text of Cowper's hymn, there is almost complete disagreement about the music: in the seven various hymn books in my study – and Cowper's hymn is in all of them – there are five different tunes to which Cowper's hymn is set. This is probably a sign that none of the tunes are quite right for Cowper's text.

The tune used by both TIS and CP is Wareham, which is a fine tune that suggests robust, affirmative praise and thankfulness. And I must say that I am personally delighted to discover it is also used in TIS for "Where high the heavenly temple stands", a fine hymn based on Hebrews 4:14-16, which is described in a note to TIS 377, as "Especially suitable for Ascension tide." And it is indeed so, a hymn of great trust and confidence in the saving Christ; in whom, as George Yule once put it in a lecture, "human nature is gathered up into the Godhead; that is a deep meaning of ascension". For all this, the robust affirmation of the tune Wareham is a great expression.

However, what makes Wareham naturally right for that hymn seems not quite right for Cowper's hymn. For Cowper's hymn has a certain gentleness, a stillness about it as it seeks the *humble mind*, the *waiting hearts* and the *faint desires*. And it promises the *hallowed ground*, for the strengthening of faith and the sweetening of care, and offers to *bring all heaven before our eyes*. Such a hymn does not need the greater exuberance of William Knapp's Wareham, fine tune that it is. It needs a tune that suggests something of the stillness of prayer.

I'm going to be a little daring and suggest that an excellent tune for Cowper's text is the one I learned at John Knox, Gardenvale, in my youth – Samuel Webbe's "Melcombe". The tune is not the set tune in RCH – or any of my hymn books – so perhaps its choice was the work of our learned minister Rhys Miller, with his immediate post-war experience at Iona, or of our organist Bill McMillan, who was a pretty canny musician, or, perhaps more likely, it could have been the result of the two in consultation. The hymn was used frequently enough to grow me: I liked it as a callow youth and I still cherish it.

The question raised here is what do we look for in a hymn tune. Whether that is the question of a composer who has just been given a new hymn text, or the minister who wants, not the set tune in the book, but a "decent tune" for the hymn that he or she wants to use next Sunday, they are obviously somewhat related questions. Whether we have the minister shuffling through the hymn book, or the composer seated at the keyboard, testing ideas with his pencil between his teeth, and music manuscript in front of him, they are actually asking somewhat related questions. I want to suggest that the author of the hymn text has a responsibility in this issue also. What, then, are the requirements for the writing of a text which the composer will be able to turn into a hymn? What kind of text is required in order to make good hymn composition possible?

I would like to extend this question by asking firstly the broader question of the musical setting of any text which has been written for communal song. In an honours class well back in the last century, in the 1970s actually, I attended a session on the topic of folk song as literature, led by Brian Matthews and Humphrey Tranter (who were mentioned in Chapter 1). I was already somewhat intrigued by the idea of hymn literature, and naturally sensed some similarities between hymn text and folk song text – a common concern for communal song at the very least. It certainly seems to be the case that the nineteenth century popularity of hymn singing gave encouragement for community singing as well, and perhaps further encouraged folk song. A bit of discussion in the class about this sort of thing, and some discussion of the musical aspect, eventually gave Brian and Humphrey the opportunity to offer this bit of wisdom: *The text of a folk song must leave room for the musician to have something to say with his art that will add to the full meaning of the song.* This thoughtful statement certainly seems to suggest something for the hymn writer as well.

In *The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs*, the editors, Ralph Vaughan Williams and A. L. Lloyd make the following comment in their introduction which seems to give a hint of the contribution which the musician can make to the full meaning of a song:

> In very rare cases, and only where it seemed otherwise very hard to make the text fit the tune, we have ventured to cancel a few words, or to add interjections such as 'oh' or 'and', in order to complete the scansion of a line. In most cases, irregular lines have been left irregular, for therein lies some of the beauty of folk song; any folk singer worth his salt delights in variation, and some of the happiest

I cannot resist adding that our national anthem *Waltzing Matilda* – perhaps better described as a folk song – has an amazing rhyme. What about *billy boiled* rhyming with *billabong*? That sort of ingenuity seems definitely to be a feature of folk song.

We shall test the statement by Brian Matthews and Humphrey Tranter about the musician adding *to the full meaning of a song* by taking a very fine poem that was not intended for song, certainly not for communal song, and comparing it with a song text; and this comparison will only be for the consideration of rhythm – anything else would be too contrived. For that very fine poem, here is a sonnet by Shakespeare; it is number 65 in a collection of 154 – here, of course, in modern standardised spelling:

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,

But sad mortality o'ersways their power,

How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,

Whose action is no stronger than a flower?

O, how shall summer's honey breath hold out

Against the wrackful siege of battering days,

When rocks impregnable are not so stout,

Nor gates of steel so strong, but Time decays?

O, fearful meditation! Where, alack,

Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid?

Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?

Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?

  O, none, unless this miracle have might,

  That in black ink my love may still shine bright.[64]

Of course, there are plenty of interesting things to notice in this poem, but we shall ignore these, except for matters of rhythm, which shall be our interest. Firstly the poem is in the most common English verse form, iambic pentameter – ten-syllable lines: five iambic feet, each foot being of two syllables – a weak, unstressed syllable followed by a

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[63] R. Vaughan Williams and A. L. Lloyd, eds, *The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1959), 8.

[64] John Kerrigan, ed, *William Shakespeare, The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint* (London: Penguin Books, 1986), 109.

stressed syllable. (I apologise once more for the teacherly tone.) The first line of the poem, a perfect iambic pentameter line, sounds something like,

Since **brass**, nor **stone**, nor **earth**, nor **bound**less **sea**,

and similarly the eighth line is perfect iambic pentameter:

Nor **gates** of **steel** so **strong,** but **Time** de**cays**?

The other lines in the poem are all ten-syllable lines but they differ markedly in stress patterns from the above two. And they are all different from each other. For example, in the seventh line,

When **rocks** im**preg**nable are not so **stout**,

there are seven unstressed syllables and only three stressed syllables; although a poor but quite common reading might also stress the monosyllable **not**. In contrast, the weighty tenth line has only three unstressed syllables and no less than seven stressed syllables:

Shall **Time's best jew**el from **Time's chest lie hid**?

And the effect is that, while the seventh line trips along at a good pace, the tenth line moves with a very measured speed. It is of the genius of Shakespeare, that while he maintains the general feeling of an iambic pentameter line, he creates various contrasting rhythmic effects by manipulating in various ways the placement of strong and weak syllables in his line. In this poem no two lines are rhythmically quite the same, and I have heard this described by comparison with traditional jazz: a simple underlying melody and rhythm can be improvised upon by a solo instrument like clarinet or trumpet, with varying rhythmic effects – a clever metaphorical description of the varying rhythmic effects in different lines of the Shakespeare sonnet. It is as if he is improvising on the pentameter line. And for the poem spoken, it works splendidly, and creates the distinctive Shakespearian voice.

The main point of this narrowly focused analysis is to ask what would happen if, say, a folk singer or a rock star decided this sonnet were the very text he needed for a

brand-new song – with words well out of copyright. Now this is quite possible.[65] The poem could well be divided into three stanzas of four lines, followed with a rhyming couplet as a final coda. This would actually reflect quite normal sonnet structure, and that is easily confirmed with a glance at the rhyming scheme: *abab cdcd efef gg*. It could well be a song structure too: three verses of quatrains and a two-line coda to complete the song.

But what sort of effect would result from this kind of song-making? If such a communal song were desired, the result would seem to be one of some difficulty for the composer. Nearly every line of the verse would have a different stress pattern, not in syllable count, but in placement of stresses. It also seems likely that different verses would have somewhat different stress patterns, and this would cause increased complexity in the song. This may not necessarily be a problem for a solo performer[66], but it would inevitably make the song more difficult for communal singing, with the result that the music would need to change from a communal sing-along style to a more expert solo style. The desire to create communal song and to leave room for the musician to add to the meaning would be lost. Shakespeare's sonnet is a great poem, but would not be at all useful for **community** song. Definitely not. Notice that I am not asserting that this poem could not be set to music, but I do claim that, if this did happen, it would end up as a solo piece, perhaps even as a choral piece, but not as communal song like folk song or hymn. If we tried to do otherwise, forcing the verse into a communal song, much of Shakespeare's poetry would be lost.

It should be noted that, at times, poems are successfully changed into songs. As an example of this, Dorothy Mackellar's "My Country" would come to the Australian mind; from much earlier times I seem to have a memory of two or three different attempts. The first verse of her poem has a regular rhythm that almost sings by itself.

More interesting here, however, is Ben Jonson, who was a contemporary of Shakespeare. His poem "Drink to me only with thine eyes" is today more likely to be recognised as a song:

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[65] In fact, a few weeks after writing this line, I heard Paul Kelly do exactly this. *https//www.paulkelly.com.au/music-seven sonnets-and-a-song*

[66] It was only after writing the current chapter that I discovered that Paul Kelly has performed the poem as a solo song *https://www.paulkelly.com.au/music-seven-sonnets-and-a-song*

Drink to me only with thine eyes,
   And I will pledge with mine;
Or leave a kiss but in the cup,
   And I'll not look for wine.
The thirst that from the soul doth rise
   Doth ask a drink divine;
But might I of Jove's nectar sup,
   I would not change for thine.

I sent thee late a rosy wreath,
   Not so much honouring thee
As giving it a hope that there
   It could not withered be
But thou thereon didst only breathe,
   And sent'st it back to me;
Since when it grows, and smells, I swear,
   Not of itself, but thee.

Though Jonson's text has the title "Song to Celia" it seems to have remained a poem for several decades of its life. When it eventually became a song it became very popular, perhaps because it lent itself to communal song – one can well imagine people grouped around a piano, glass in hand, enjoying somewhat vociferous singing, with perhaps a little lover's longing or repining. While no doubt beginning its life as a solo piece, it eventually found its natural place in many a community song book.

The poem seems beguilingly simple, but is more complex than first appears: according to Ian Donaldson, it draws on several ancient sources. However, Jonson has clearly made the poem his own.[67] The rhyming scheme, *abcbabcb*, is unusual and quite demanding for the poet. It is repeated for the second half of the poem, so that the poem could be divided quite clearly into two verses, and could become a song.

I have introduced this quite secular song into our argument here, because it gives a good example of a song which leaves room for the composer to add meaning to the song. The feeling of lover's longing or repining owes quite a bit to the music. The poem is in iambic tetrameter lines (four iambic feet) alternating with iambic trimeter lines (three iambic feet). It is a tight form which hardly encourages the poet to waste words,

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[67] Ian Donaldson, Ed., *Ben Jonson: Poems.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 101.

but neither does he use rhythmic complexity as does Shakespeare. Except for the very first foot, which is inverted (not short/long, but here long/short) Jonson in contrast with Shakespeare, keeps words which require stress on the stressed syllables of the iambic foot; it gives a relaxed movement to the poem, and it works for leaving room for the composer to add meaning. Shakespeare's is a fine poem. Jonson's is an enjoyable song text – especially, perhaps, if one is in a singing group around a piano with a wine glass in one's hand. But don't be deceived. It is quality writing. The point I am making here is, that *all stanzas of a hymn text need to be of the same stress pattern.* It is obvious of course, but sometimes ignored by hymn writers.

Other aspects of a hymn as a communal song

Of course hymns also are for a singing group: a church congregation at worship; so it would not be surprising if our discussion of the two poems above could offer some insights into the way communal song may work in worship. They may even give us insight into why some hymns should be engaging for a congregation, while others may fail to be so.

Isaac Watts commonly places stressed syllables on the strong beat of the iambic foot. If we glance back at his *O God, our help in ages past* in Chapter 1, and speak the words but without music, we may be forced to notice that they might actually have a somewhat plodding character. After all, Watts has the stressed syllables fall on the strong beat of the iambic pattern while the slightly more numerous unstressed syllables fall on the weak beat, and occasionally on the strong beat of the iambic foot where it is necessary just to fix up the syllable count. The main exceptions to this observation in Watts seem to be in lines which commence with an inverted iambic foot, such as

… **Time**, like an **ev**er-**rol**ling **stream**,

and this still leaves the rhythm of the remainder of the line intact. The effect of all this may be of a first impression of a plodding character to Watts's work, but that would be quite unfair; in fact it actually 'leaves room' for the composer – probably William Croft – to do his work, to add musical meaning to the text, and this William Croft does resoundingly with his tune St. Anne. The result is one of the greatest of English hymns. Plodding? Don't you believe it.

It seems timely to remember the earlier works, which were the predecessor of the English hymn; these are the metrical Psalms, of course, to which I gave some attention in Chapter 1. And rough-hewn they are. Instead of the few well known metrical Psalms which, like the 23rd Psalm have survived to the twenty-first century (perhaps because their roughness distracts us rather less than some of the other Psalms do) we will look at the metrical Psalm 47, of which I have no memory of singing. Here are the first three stanzas – which correspond to the first four verses of the Psalm in the AV.

> All people, clap your hands; to God
> with voice of triumph shout:
> For dreadful is the Lord most high,
> great King the earth throughout.
>
> The heathen people under us
> he surely shall subdue;
> And he shall make the nations
> under our feet to bow.
>
> The lot of our inheritance
> chuse out for us shall he,
> Of Jacob, whom he loved well,
> ev'n the excellency.

Now rough-hewn this certainly is. And it is four hundred years old, though perhaps there is a little editing, at least for more or less modern spelling. Yet it is basically modern English, and we can read it, albeit with a little difficulty, and perhaps with some amazement. In the first stanza *dreadful* has the full force of its earlier meaning, which, like *awful, terrible* and one or two other suchlike words, has become trivialised through overuse. The last line of the verse needs to rhyme with *shout*, which necessitates a somewhat strange place at the end of the sentence for *throughout*. In the second stanza *under us* should follow *subdue*, but the author needs *subdue* for a rather desperate half rhyme with *bow* – both words finish with diphthongs which have the same second element only (a desperate rhyme indeed) and *bow* actually does not syntactically need the infinitive marker *to* before *make*, though it would certainly be needed before quite a number of other verbs. Thus *cause to bow*, or *need to bow*, or *help to bow*, but not *make to bow*. Perhaps only a native speaker of a language could love this sort of thing.

Yes, it is quite fun to do a bit of grammar on this sort of seeming syntactic shambles. But be it noted that a good four hundred years later we can still understand these verses, however difficult they may be in terms of word order. They are, after all, more or less in Modern English, albeit with a few quirks. It can be said that modern English begins not with Shakespeare, nor with the AV, but a full century earlier with Tyndale.

However, it is interesting to note that there are two points where words may be described as obsolete, though that is only in pronunciation. In the third stanza the pronunciation of *loved* is disyllabic (*luv-uhd*) instead of our modern, monosyllabic pronunciation (*luvd* – or perhaps more accurately *luvt*). Singers in our time would slur the word over two notes. In the second stanza *nations* is trisyllabic (*nay-shee-uhnz*) since the *-tion* ending would have had disyllabic pronunciation, (*shee-uhn*). Naturally the older pronunciations are there fitting the verse form – and the tune. All the other strangeness – word order and the like – is the result of trying to fit very accurate translation of the biblical Hebrew into a very tight verse form in language close to modern English. Following the discussion in Chapter 1, this may be regarded as a new poem rather than a translation. However, the translators were not allowed to make a new poem. Strictly accurate translation of the Hebrew was required in those far off days, seeking to avoid controversy: we need to understand here something of the difficulty in translating the Bible, and to be aware of the context of political and religious conflict. Nevertheless it is of interest that Sir Walter Scott, describing the Scottish Psalter as a whole, says:

> The expression of the old metrical translation though homely is plain, forcible &
> intelligible and very often possesses a rude sort of majesty which perhaps would
> be ill exchanged for mere elegance.[68]

'Plain, forcible and intelligible'; that is a good general judgement of the Scottish Psalter of 1650, a good half a century before Watts's work; and to help it along let us look equally carefully at another metrical Psalm, the well-known and well-loved Psalm 121:

> I to the hills will lift mine eyes,
> from whence doth come mine aid?

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[68] H. J. C. Grierson, ed. "Sir Walter Scott, Letter to Principal Baird*", in *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott* in 12 Vols (London: Constable, 1932–37), V, 166.

My safety cometh from the Lord,

who heaven and earth hath made.

Thy foot he'll not let slide, nor will

he slumber that thee keeps.

Behold, he that keeps Israel,

He slumbers not, nor sleeps.

The Lord thee keeps, the Lord thy shade

on thy right hand doth stay;

The moon by night thee shall not smite,

nor yet the sun by day.

The Lord shall keep thy soul; he shall

preserve thee from all ill.

Henceforth thy going out and in

God keep for ever will.

Now this is a classic piece – although, of our three hymnals, it now appears only in the Anglican hymnal CP, unchanged from the Church of Scotland 1928 Revised Church Hymnary (RCH), and there are some interesting moments in it. First let us notice that the modern hymnal compilers take heed of some relatively recent scholarship, as Milgate notes:

> The second line [of the psalm] is now generally accepted by scholars as a rhetorical question, part of the answer expected by the psalmist being that my help does not come from 'the hills' but only from the God whose symbolic abode is on a particular hill – the Hill of Sion. [69]

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[69] Milgate, *Songs of the People of God*, 41

And the elegant solution – appearing, seemingly first of all in Congregational Praise (CgP), and in most if not all hymnals thereafter – is to place a question mark at the end of the second line. Simple, really.

There are, of course, some aspects of this metrical Psalm which may strike moderns not so much as being difficult, as being untidy. In the first stanza this could well be said of the use of *mine* as a possessive adjective: **mine** *eyes* and **mine** *aid*, but then **my** *safety* – the same as our rule for the indefinite article *a/an*: *a* before a consonant, *an* before a vowel; it is also thus for *thy* and *thine.* For *mine* (and *thine,*) the rule is now, of course, obsolete: present day English uses *mine* only as a possessive pronoun: "The book is **mine**." It is no wonder the first two lines of the metrical Psalm may strike moderns as a little untidy – though again we should mark well that it is by no means incomprehensible. And the forthright tone of the metrical psalter can be very engaging.

It is somewhat anti-climactic to end a line with the auxiliary of the verb, for auxiliaries are nearly always weakly stressed. This is obviously true of *will* at the end of the first line of verse two. However, this verse is greatly strengthened by the verb *behold* at the beginning of the third line, and also by the rhyming of the verbs *keeps* and *sleeps* at the ends of lines two and four of the verse: it is a powerful rhyme – a long vowel and two consonants – and its effect is reinforced by the repeated use of *slumber* at the beginning of each line.

A fascinating aspect of the metrical Psalm is that one can almost see language change happening – slowish change that it is. With *cometh* and the auxiliaries *doth* and *hath* in verse one, we have the old southern England *-eth* ending, which is being overtaken in the second verse by the northern *-s* ending, which we find in *keeps*, *sleeps* and *slumbers*. Being in the midst of this change is actually a help for the writer, who is given thereby the choice of a one-syllable or a two-syllable word ending – very useful when writing to a tight verse form. So we find *cometh*, not *comes*, but *sleeps,* not *sleepeth,* and they reflect the practical choice available to the poet in order to fit the line to the metre. To complicate the picture a bit more, we also find a use of *doth* as yet another form for present tense verbs: *doth come* in the first stanza, *doth stay* in the third stanza, but the change to *does* manifests itself more slowly, perhaps because of the widespread influence of the AV. Although this could also have been because its use

actually narrows down over time to negatives (He doesn't come) to questions (Does he come?) and occasionally for emphasis (He <u>does</u> come).

In the third stanza we find the verbs emphatically placed at the ends of the second and third lines, and in the third line, the marvellous *smite* – a splendid Anglo-Saxon verb which is greatly strengthened by the internal rhyme with *night*. Furthermore the first line of this stanza is also strengthened by the repetition of *the Lord*, which makes very emphatic the parallelism between the two half lines of which the line is constructed.

It is, however, true that the last line of the Psalm ends with another use of the auxiliary *will*, at the end of the last line of the Psalm – again rather desperate rhyme; and it makes for a somewhat limp ending to what is otherwise a very strong Psalm.

If we look at the first line of the fourth stanza, *The Lord shall keep thy soul; he shall*, we might seem, at first sight, to have another line like the first in verse two, where the line has been made to end on the weakly stressed auxiliary. But there is more interest to this example, for it sets up a literary ambiguity: if we take the first line alone, in itself, the phrase *he shall* actually adds emphasis to the preceding clause: *The Lord shall keep thy soul; he **shall*** ... However, if we think the first and second lines together, the clause beginning *he shall* and continuing into the second line *preserve thee from all ill*, emphatically forms a parallel with the previous clause. This ambiguity tightens and strengthens the final verse despite that slightly limp final line.

Perhaps we may, in our imagination, ask the view of a seventeenth-century literary critic, assuming, of course, that such critics existed in those far-off days – as indeed they did. (After all, literary criticism has existed in one way or another, I suppose, since the invention of writing.) Of course in the event of such a time lapse, I may well have received the following reply from the critic:

> Well, this stuff is a bit rough around the edges, rather untidy in fact. But it's a very accurate translation, which is really important these days. So the Church will probably use it for the next twenty or thirty years or so until we can get something a bit more like real church.

The metrical Psalm is certainly untidy but, for all its untidiness, it is pretty magnificent, rough-hewn but memorable, well deserving of Sir Walter Scott's

judgement, "a rude sort of majesty", and it has been sung for three or four hundred years. And sung perhaps, not only by Scots, for many of the metrical Psalms were written by English writers and sung by English Puritans.

However, while the English soon turned to the hymns of Watts and Wesley, the Scots continued with the metrical Psalms. Erik Routley insists that this was not a matter of Scottish conservatism, but that the Scots had some uneasiness about rule from London under the new United Kingdom – a tension that looked for strengthening, and found it in the Psalms. So Routley says of troubled times:

> … there was the more primitive and human fact that the Puritanism of seventeenth century England found in the Psalter just what it wanted.[70]

And it was perhaps more so for the Scots. Here it is, for example, in Psalm 46 to the stirring tune Stroudwater:

> God is our refuge and our strength,
> in straits a present aid;
> Therefore, although the earth remove,
> we will not be afraid.

and again, in Psalm 95, to the tune "Irish":

> O come, let us sing to the Lord:
> come, let us every one
> A joyful noise make to the Rock
> Of our salvation.

And just note in passing how the disyllabic *-tion* ending provides an extra syllable to complete the last line.

A very interesting aspect of the metrical Psalms may be found in Routley's discussion of the contribution that John Calvin's theology makes to the musical development of the metrical Psalms with a music that reinforces the strength and the simplicity of the new Psalmody. There are some remarks about the state of church music in the sixteenth century – a state of over emphasis on decorative ornament in much secular music, which had spilled over into church music, and was criticised by Catholic

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[70] Erik Routley, *Hymns and Human Life,* (London: John Murray, 1952), 59.

and Reformed thinkers alike. Routley points to the theological thinking of Calvin in this situation with the following crisp summary:

> … in Calvin, the most systematic of the Reformers, the following points are made with regard to music: (1) Music is for the people, so it must be simple; (2) Music is for God, so it must be modest; (3) These objects are best attained by the music of the unaccompanied voice. In other words, we are beginning to see a fairly well-developed doctrine of "sacred music". This is of great importance.[71]

Calvin already had the experience of Luther to draw upon when it came to hymn singing, and he valued it greatly. Luther was in fact very enthusiastic about the place of song in worship from well-nigh the beginning of his reforming work. The German church sang hymns from its earliest reforming days and some of the tunes actually came from quite ordinary secular uses. However, the considerable influence of Lutheran hymnody on the English hymn would come later in the hymns of poets like Robert Bridges and J. M. Neale, and especially in the great translation work of Catherine Winkworth, as we see in Chapter 4.

In the meantime, it must have been natural for Calvin to go back to theological first principles including theological consideration of the use of the Psalms.

In the first two of Routley's three points above, we find the theological thought that brought into being what would soon be seen as the normal Psalm tune, simple, spare, but strong. Calvin had fine musicians like Louis Bourgeois to translate these demands into music that was seriously fitting for worship, but humanly approachable, even for unaccompanied song.

Perhaps the most immediately interesting of the three points, made above by Routley, may be the third, that his first two points "are best attained by the music of the unaccompanied voice". Two pages later Routley makes a further comment on the musical structure of the metrical Psalms:

> Simple music is memorable music, and music which can be remembered by a musically unskilled congregation depends entirely on *form*. It must consist of

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[71] Erik Routley. *The Church and Music*, (Old Woking: Duckworth, 1967), 125.

familiar phrases and, if at all possible, must contain either plain repetition or intelligible development of these phrases.[72]

That is still good advice for hymn writers. A few years ago, and perhaps still, there was some concern, especially within our rather thinly populated state of South Australia, that some congregations could not find an accompanist for hymn singing in worship. Modern Protestants tend to think that we cannot sing a hymn properly unless we have proper accompaniment – organ, or at the very worst, as some would say, a piano. Various other suggestions seem to be possible: find a guitarist, find a flautist, even make tapes of various accompaniments. Perhaps the best suggestion might be just to sing together unaccompanied – *a cappella*, if one desires a musical term for it. It is not hard to do, just ask the Barmy Army (who were mentioned in Chapter 1). Perhaps one should start with hymns having short four-line verses. There are plenty of common metre, long metre, and short metre tunes serving the hymns of Watts, Wesley and others. Perhaps we could "go back to the future" and find beauty in unaccompanied song. Just a thought.

Well perhaps more than just a thought. As a teenage boy in the early fifties, Easter and Christmas meant scout camps and, among other mischiefs, singing around the campfire, usually raucously so, but later, as the fire burned low, to an almost hymnlike quality – unaccompanied, of course, and sometimes sung as a round:

> Campfire's burning. Campfire's burning.
> Draw nearer. Draw nearer.
> In the gloaming. In the gloaming.
> Come, sing and be merry.

And we did. And if early teenage boys can sing unaccompanied, anybody can. Incidentally, I doubt if anyone knew the meaning of *gloaming*; but we got the feeling of it. I admit to having to look it up in the OED – fairly recently actually, to be on the safe side. Shame on me, but I think that all the campers discerned something like the OED "evening twilight". *Gloaming* was from Old English (Anglo Saxon) actually, but seems to have been well taken up by the Scots.

Mind you, unaccompanied song has fallen on hard times, and is probably confined to "Happy Birthday" at a friend's party, or "Come on Aussie, come on" at the cricket,

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[72] Ibid. 127.

though, of course, we have had the Barmy Army, to make fun of. But there it is: the British have not quite lost the remembered pleasure of communal song. The deterioration of communal song is, of course, the result of the impact of recording and broadcasting at a popular level – top forty and the like – and this is not the business of our study – except to note that the deterioration of communal song is what has happened.

These common examples are a reminder of the element of shared fellowship in communal song. It seems arguable that this fellowship of song that came with the singing of hymns was one effect of Protestant worship in the eighteenth century. Indeed in churches of the mid-nineteenth century the "proper" instrument of worship, the organ, actually had to fight for its place in the architecture and practice of worship. Today it just occurs to me that some small, struggling congregations who are prepared to take up the challenge of unaccompanied hymn singing might just find themselves on a success story, and it could be beautiful.

However, the prospect of such success should also come with a warning. We need to be wary of what hymns we think we "know". We need to be wary of "old favourites" of dubious theological or artistic quality, or new-fangled favourites to "get in the youth": we need to think old and think new. We need to be very discriminating; and perhaps we need to help a new generation to savour group singing again – it may even need to be taught. In fact we need really good new hymns, and we need the best of the past. But if hymns of any age are fine art and real communal worship, they can work in the older context of unaccompanied song – but don't, of course, sack the band or the organist just yet. If people have learned to sing unaccompanied, they will especially enjoy sometimes being accompanied by real musicians. We do need to investigate and encourage various aspects of the way hymns have been changing.

In this quite long section we have looked, I hope with some care, at what is important for successful verse writing for song, in order for it to be used for communal singing. The substance of our conclusion must be that, while a good number of verse forms are available to the poet, he or she needs to accept the discipline of careful, though not totally rigid, placing of stressed syllables in the lines of the poem. The needs

of a poem written for song will differ from the needs of a poem written for speech, whose author is freer to exploit variations in the rhythms of the language.

How has Together in Song *changed Newton's hymn?*

To answer this question a good place to begin with might have been with a modern "song", or perhaps call it a "worship song" – if we must insist on avoiding the word "hymn", and just think of it from the point of view of style; for it is actually for worship. Of course it is a hymn we have seen before, but the modern pronoun has been substituted for the old. Is it now a worship song?

> Dear Shepherd of your people, hear,
> your presence now display;
> as you have given a place for prayer,
> so give us hearts to pray.
>
> Within these walls let holy peace
> and love and concord dwell;
> here give the troubled conscience ease,
> the wounded spirit heal.
> May we in faith receive your word,
> in faith present our prayers,
> and in the presence of our Lord
> unburden all our cares.
>
> The hearing ear, the seeing eye,
> the humbled mind bestow;
> and shine upon us from on high,
> to make our graces grow.

Is it a "worship song"? No. We probably would not think of this as a worship song. Perhaps there are still too many "old words" – as our common, rather stale explanations have suggested. However, one could almost believe this to be a worship song. Of course it is Newton's hymn again. And it is more than two hundred years old. But what is the effect of the change of *thou* to *you*? It seems that the text actually becomes rather more close and personal – the change from the older to the modern pronoun seems to have brought out a gentle, limpid quality in the hymn, which would make it very suitable for

a contemplative style of worship. It also seems that this quality would also be assisted by the prayerful quality of the set tune, Mendip, which fittingly complements the text in AHB and in *Together in Song* (TIS). It is all quite an achievement, assisted by that simple word change of the pronoun – which happens three times in the first stanza. And that repeated change itself also seems significant for alerting the worshipping mind to look for something a little quietly unexpected in the hymn.

So the change of the pronoun seems to work, almost to make a new hymn. Moderns may question the word *unbosom* in the original text, although we do understand what it means to "get something off your chest". However, *unburden* does seem a not unreasonable change in *Together in Song* (TIS). The word *bestow* may be questioned as archaic, but it has found its long-term place in the language with the help of the AV, and, considering its relation to *stow*, a fairly well-known word which could better be described as just a bit antiquated rather than archaic. (There are, of course, a lot of verbs that have the structure *be-* plus verb, e.g., *betoken*, *beguile*, *bedazzle*, etc.).

For the term 'archaic' tends to have developed a rather catch-all meaning – in the church anyway – simply as a word or piece of writing from an earlier time which may now seem a bit strange. However, we all know from our own experience that a reader coming upon , for example, *bestow,* as a word that is now little used, is likely to "have a stab at it" and get the meaning more or less right from the context, despite its slightly antiquated quality. And that after all is what we all do when we read, and come across a word, new or old, that we don't know. Of course, English teachers told us to get a dictionary. It's their job, and they are to be honoured for it, but native speakers are experts at their language, and I suspect that such a guess at the meaning of a word from its context is actually more often right than wrong. After all, it is how we learned our language. Among other native speakers of course.

A similar change in Cowper's hymn?

Unfortunately, the change from *thee* to *you* in the second person pronoun rarely seems as effective as it turns out to be in Newton's slightly-changed hymn above. This is certainly the case with Cowper's hymn, which seems rather less comfortable with the changes. Here is the version of that hymn given to us by TIS:

Jesus where'er your people meet
there they behold your mercy seat,
where'er they seek you, you are found
and every place is hallowed ground.

For you, within no walls confined,
are present in the humble mind;
such ever bring you where they come,
and, going, take you to their home.

Dear Shepherd of your chosen few,
your former mercies here renew;
here to our waiting hearts proclaim
the sweetness of your saving name.

Here may we prove the power of prayer
to strengthen faith and sweeten care,
to teach our faint desires to rise,
and bring all heaven before our eyes.

Lord, we are few, but you are near,
your arm can save, your ear can hear;
O rend the heavens, come quickly down,
and make a thousand hearts your own

We have already seen what a fine poem Cowper has given us – and bits and pieces of this quality do remain so. However, there can be no gainsaying that, in comparison, this version is a rather disappointing effort. We do not usually make our own alterations to the work of fine poets, and Cowper was a fine poet. It is crucial for our purpose that we seek to be clear about what is happening in this kind of endeavour.

Cause for disappointment is noticeable in the third line of the first verse, *where'er they seek you, you are found*. Here the obvious difficulty is the repetition *you, you* which does sound a bit awkward and a bit ugly to our English speaker's ear. For it is also syntactically just a bit difficult, and the reason is that the original pronouns *thee*, and *thou* are case-marked for accusative and nominative, which makes Cowper's line,

where'er they seek thee thou art found, straight forward to read. This is not so with *you, you* of the TIS version, which makes no distinction for nominative or accusative case. Of course our people are not language fools; they emerge from childhood with an innate expertise with their native language, and they will just re-read the line and go on with the hymn. But that does not stop the line being a trifle disappointing to the ear of the worshipper, who is hoping, not just for good, clear information, but for the beautiful. As would we all who sing hymns. That structure *you, you* is very ordinary, and not at all attractive.

So a feeling of awkwardness remains, and there are other more general reasons, although this is particularly noticeable in the first stanza. Unfashionable words like *where'er*, *behold*, *hallowed*, even perhaps, *seek*, actually help to create an abiding, out-of-time sense of otherness to the hymn. And the result is that obvious changes, like changing to the modern pronouns, introduce a certain dissonance between the new and the old which is not, one hopes, what either the original poet or the later editors, intend.

A similar effect heightens this dissonance in the second stanza. The opening phrase, *For you,* puts the pronoun in a highly emphatic position, the first stressed syllable in the stanza, and it emphasises the fact that a change has been made. The first two lines of the stanza also give the editors a further problem. The editors have decided to change *thou* in the first line to *For you within no walls confined,* but this has other consequences. It means that they need to remove also the second person singular *-est* ending on *inhabitest* in the second line, *inhabitest the humble mind*, which would break up the syllable count of the line – a simple technicality, but musically important.

At first glance, it seems that the changes have been achieved with some real ingenuity, but unfortunately it is also actually at the expense of the poetic. For in the original two lines there is a carefully worked metaphor for the indwelling of Christ: dwellings have walls, but the indwelling of Christ has no need of walls. The difficulty occurs because Cowper's metaphor is now not actually complete, because it cannot be understood without *inhabitest* in the second line, and the result is that a careful reader, who does not know Cowper's original, might well wonder what *no walls* has to do with a *humble mind*. The less careful reader, or indeed the reader who knows Cowper's

original, may think that the metaphor is still there, whereas actually *no walls* has just been left hanging.

The third stanza seems to work well for the editors of TIS, but it is worth asking why this is so, because Cowper's original stanza does indeed work quite well, for the reasons noted a few pages above. It seems that one helpful factor here is that, with the possible exception of *sweetness* in the fourth line, the vocabulary used in this verse is still in quite common use in our day; and the result is that the change to the modern pronoun is less intrusive. Another reason is that the new pronouns are all in unemphatic positions, and quite clearly so, for they are each followed by strongly stressed syllables.

We should note that the fourth stanza is unchanged from Cowper's original. Readers may be curious about the use of *sweet*: *sweetness* in verse three, and also *sweeten* in verse four. It would be wrong to say that the word has changed its meaning, though it does seem to have moved into more colloquial usage. We are probably less inclined to describe a person as "sweet", but I remember, with a certain delight, my teenage sister once describing a well-known, aged ecclesiastical gentleman as "a real sweetie", and, of course, my tennis mates sometimes discuss the "sweet spot" in the head of a newly-strung racquet.

It is the final stanza which especially justifies my opening remark above: a pretty disappointing effort. We have seen above what a superb stanza this is in Cowper's original text, with its careful use of parallelism and biblical allusion. In the TIS version it is the first two lines of the stanza that really do the damage, for the second half of the stanza is unchanged. In the first line there is an internal rhyme with *few* and *you* – seemingly unintended – and the result is that the two words, especially the second, *you*, become unnecessarily emphatic, because they now occur on stressed syllables, and rhyming further increases the emphasis. It may seem a minor point, but pronouns are normally, though not always, unemphatic; and they are best used with an awareness that this is so. It may be argued that though this effect may be noticeable in silent reading or reading aloud, this is not significant in singing. However, this judgement would be to ignore the influence of musical rhythm in song.

We have seen that Cowper's original second line of the stanza, *nor short thine arm, nor deaf thine ear,* is quite splendid, with its allusion to the opening verse of Isaiah 59,

and its striking parallelism between the two half lines. Indeed there is also a fascinating piece of ellipsis which makes the line even more dense.[73] On the other hand, the new second line of the stanza, *your arm can save, your ear can hear*, works quite smoothly in comparison with Cowper's superb line, which is anything but smooth. But this very smoothness can be deceptive, as it can cause the line to sound somewhat conventional – a bit of a theological truism – whereas it compares poorly in contrast with the original line.

"Thou" or "you"?

There actually seem to be linguistic reasons for this effect, unfortunate perhaps, because, without due care, they can deceive. Our normal second person pronoun, *you*, very frequently in our speech – in fact quite normally – has weak stress precisely because the English language proceeds with weakly and strongly stressed syllables, as was noted in Chapter 1. As a general rule, grammatically functional words like auxiliary verbs, conjunctions, pronouns and, indeed, prepositions, are usually weakly stressed – as noticed in Chapter 1. In fact, for an example in general speech, *you* is very often pronounced *yuh*, which is decidedly unemphatic. And we are not speaking of especially careless or uneducated speech; this is in general speech. It is actually the way we all speak.

This seems to be an appropriate place to give a short account of the change of the second person singular pronoun in English from *thou* to *you*. An imaginative reconstruction would run from about the beginning of the sixteenth century. The change from *thou* to *you* seems to have begun at the top of the social scale, with the honorific 'royal *we*', and thus with plural forms *ye and you* as a courtesy to the monarch. This little courtesy worked its way down the social scale, starting with the aristocracy, who thought that the courtesy rather suited them also; and it continued to move down, with each social level in turn deciding that the courtesy suited them also; finally any commoner, who addressed one of his betters as *thou*, ran the risk of being told curtly,

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[73] Without the ellipsis, the line would read *nor short is thine arm, nor deaf is thine ear*. The preceding clause *thou art near*, with its verb **to be**, *art*, allows for the omission of both following instances of the verb **to be** *is*. The fact that *art* and *is* look and sound different from each other (although both are of the verb **to be**) means that Cowper is pushing the language just a bit harder at this point. However, poets can do this and it works here. There is a very thorough discussion of ellipsis in Chapter 4 of M. A. K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan, *Cohesion in English*. (London and New York: Longman. 1976). 142 ff.

"Don't thou me." So the commoners decided it was safer to use *you*, initially perhaps, just among themselves, with a playfully upturned nose and a pretended posh accent. Finally, everyone was playing safe, just using *you* forms as the normal word instead of the *thou* forms. We should note that the language was changing and, as usual for language change, no one was noticing. That only came later. The point here is that ***language change is not something we imagine we can do, but something which just happens, generally imperceptibly***. This significant linguistic reality is clearly implied in comments made by Barbara Strang in her wonderfully detailed *A History of English*, where she notes that

> … though the Authorised Version of the Bible was published in 1611, its language was almost entirely that of Tyndale, whose New Testament appeared in 1525, almost a century earlier. The intervening years had seen many innovations, especially in areas that were, broadly speaking, grammatical. By 1611 the usage of Tyndale would be in these respects not archaic, but decidedly old-fashioned in flavour; for the most part Tyndale had chosen forms as being normal. Though the use of archaisms in heightened style has been known at all periods, if only as a consequence of the conservatism which poetic form tends to impose, this accident of the history of translation led to a very particular association between antique language and religious subjects or solemnity of tone.[74]

Furthermore, as a quick aside, we should be slow to imagine that using *thou* in hymns necessarily makes English difficult – a popular misconception, especially in church circles. Certainly *thou* is no longer in normal use but it follows a pattern which is quite normal in English: thou/ thee/ thy/ thine – I/ me/ my/ mine – they/ them/ their/ theirs – and so on: nominative/ accusative/ genitive/ possessive pronoun. *Thou* is not very strange, although the verb ending *-est* can be a different matter. (This is sometimes quite noticeable in the press when quite clever writers attempt to make a jesting reference to something religious by imitating AV language, but they then 'mess up' the *-est* verb-ending, seemingly because they don't 'get it', which suggests that this is indeed the more difficult part.) However, any children who have accompanied parents to church a few decades earlier have had no trouble; they get it, because normal language acquisition skills are in full flight for the young, who are coping with all those strange words in real speech from different people. These skills slowly die out from six or seven years of age

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[74] Barbara M. H. Strang, *A History of English* (London: Methuen & Co, 1970), 140.

onwards; thus, children can and should be exposed to the older pronouns. Indeed English teachers in high school, who have to teach Shakespeare and others, will bless the church for such – or they should do so. There is less need for "you" in cute "children's hymns" than might be imagined.

It is also worth noting at this point that in addition there has been a historically somewhat later change in personal pronouns. The second person plural, ye/ you/ your/ yours, lost the *ye* which changed to *you* in the second person nominative some time after *thou* had already been lost to *you*. For example, in the AV we find in 1 Cor 6:11 "but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified" which gives way in the RSV to "you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified".

It seems not unreasonable, on the basis of our observations of the two quite different hymns above, to give some more thought to comparing the effectiveness of using *thou* or *you* for addressing God, and to test our thinking on some of the hymns observed in the previous three chapters. Based on what has been discussed about the changes to the Newton hymn, it seems quite reasonable to suggest that the modern pronoun, *you,* tends, at its very best, to move the hymn toward a closeness that could be prayerful. However, the Cowper hymn has more complexity: certainly some sense of prayerful closeness is evident, but so too is quite a strong sense of an awesome distance. Indeed, this is the powerful conclusion of the last verse.

When a word is being used, not in a poem or novel, nor in that specialised poem which is a hymn text, there is a bare, plain meaning which may be found in factual, work-a-day use. Indeed dictionaries are published with the assumption that the true meaning of a word can be given in such factual terms, so we can't blame people for drawing that conclusion themselves. When that word is used in a poem, such as a hymn text, we discover, however, a penumbra of meaning around the word, which consists of the collective memory of ways the word has been used historically, socially, in formal use, in politics, in teaching, in novel, in play, in poetry, and, yes, in worship. When the word is used in a liturgy, in a hymn, in worship, this penumbra of meaning crowds in on the central meaning of the word and enriches its use. It is this which explains in a halting kind of way something of what we feel when we come across *you* in a text when we were expecting *thou*; and this is what we need to consider in the use of *thou* and *you* in

worship. *Thou* has a penumbra of meaning, but, with *thou* changed to *you*, the penumbra is gone - the meaning around it which has formed over the centuries. For *you* cannot match *thou* in this respect, not at least in the twentieth or early twenty first centuries. This is delightfully caught by A. N. Wilson:

> No one called their friends *thou* … But it didn't mean we were clamouring to *You* the Almighty.[75]

In the early nineteen sixties, with J. A. T. Robinson's *Honest to God* on our minds, many of us did clamour to 'you the almighty', with all the self-confidence to which only theological students can aspire. With my class's graduation imminent, John O'Neil, our New Testament lecturer – actually highly respected by ourselves – who later became New Testament Professor at London University, gave us a short lecture on why we should continue to use *Thou* for leading worship. He insisted that in English we now have, to our good fortune, "a pronoun which we use only for God", and that we should treasure it as such. I now suspect what I didn't consider then, that John O'Neil probably had in mind that the RSV used *Thou* only for God, and not for people. However, we all went our separate ways to separate placements, convinced that as we needed to use *you* in our various situations so it should be in worship.

All this does not mean that we cannot use *you* in modern hymn writing (or in any new liturgical material, for that matter). However, modern writers then need to find the solemn tone for hymn or prayer in various other ways which will almost certainly leave the modern pronoun in non-emphatic positions. Changing *thou* to *you* in great old hymns or prayers is probably not the way to achieve this.

Cowper's hymn is more complex than all that. There is some sense of prayerful closeness, certainly in the last two stanzas, but also with hints of that closeness in the *mercy seat* and the *hallowed ground* of verse one. The change from *thou* to *you* works very well for the simplicity of Newton's hymn, but much less so for the complexity of Cowper's hymn. And Cowper's is by far the greater hymn.

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[75] Lesley Brown ed, *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on historical principles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3752.

A further example of the change in the pronoun is to be observed in Wesley's great hymn, which we reviewed in Chapter 2, as it now appears in TIS with the modern singular pronoun:

Forth in your name, O Lord, I go,
my daily labour to pursue;
you, Lord, alone resolved to know,
in all I think, or speak, or do.

Each task your wisdom hath assigned
still let me cheerfully fulfil;
in all my works your presence find,
and prove your good and perfect will.

You may I set at my right hand,
whose eyes my inmost substance view,
and labour on at your command,
and offer all my works to you.

Give me to bear your easy yoke,
and every moment watch and pray,
and still to things eternal look,
and hasten to your glorious day;

For you delightfully employ
all that your bounteous grace has given,
and run my course with even joy,
and closely walk with you to heaven.

Now in the well-known version of Wesley's hymn there are three uses of *thou/thee/thy/thine* in each stanza, except for the first and fourth stanzas, which have two. So the change from *thou* to *you* is going to be very noticeable to worshippers who are used to the well-known version. The superb opening line in Wesley's text, is a case in point. At first glance it seems to survive reasonably well: the change of the "archaic" *thou* to *you* happens on a weakly-stressed syllable, so that the change may be thought to be more or less acceptable. However, it is quite otherwise in the third line: certainly *you only you* would be awkward, because the modern pronoun would not take the emphasis that the older pronoun does in *thee, only thee*. Part of the problem that the

117

revisers have is that, as we have noted on an earlier occasion, *you* is not marked for accusative case as the direct object of the infinitive *to know*. When Wesley uses the various t*hou* pronouns, he does so with learned precision. And we get it, as in Chapter 2, Ian Forbes' teenage schoolboys got it – with alacrity. The changes in TIS leave Wesley's hymn in rags and tatters. They weaken the verse, despite the fact that there is certainly some ingenuity in the solution, *you, Lord alone*, made by the revisers, who have recognised that there is a problem – it gets away from having to fall back on *you only you* – unmarked for object of *resolved* – so that it is not a good substitution for the emphatic touch of anaphora in *thee only thee,* which is clearly marked as the object. Be it noted again, as we have noted on other occasions, there is no such thing as a minor change to a great twenty-line hymn, and there are quite a few attempts at such changes in this hymn.

There are three uses of *your* in the second stanza, and they can be claimed to be relatively unemphatic changes; however, there are indeed three of them, and that puts them well on the way to becoming emphatic, or at least very noticeable. More significant, perhaps, are changes to the first word in both the first and the second line. In the first line Wesley's *The task* becomes *Each task*. Now the revisers' change is, in its way, perfectly reasonable, but Wesley's line is a bit more subtle: the definite article, *the,* is marked for particularity, (in contrast with an indefinite article like *a*) so that Wesley's line means by clear implication "the particular task thy wisdom hath assigned." The revisers' use of *still*, which is hardly emphatic, at the beginning of the second line provokes the question of why the word is chosen to replace *O* in the second line, *O let me cheerfully fulfil*, which functions quite reasonably as an intensifier for the petition which follows. Do we really think *O* is "archaic", and that people don't understand it? After all, in common speech it is not pronounced as *owe*, but as *o* in bottle, only lengthened to a drawl: "O, let's go for a swim."Thus, "O" is simply normal speech, albeit somewhat formalised.

We are beginning to see that there is a recurring pattern in Wesley's hymn, of the poet using the first word in each verse for strong emphasis, and also using emphatic variation from normal word order in the first line. The result of this is that the first line of each verse fits very well the first line of the tune Song 34, which was composed by Orlando Gibbons well over a century earlier. In fact it seems quite possible that Wesley

may have written his hymn with Gibbons' splendid tune in mind. Certainly in Wesley's original verse three, *Thee may I set at my right hand,* the pronoun *Thee* is placed in particularly emphatic position – and note incidentally, the biblical force of *right hand*. However, it is the very effectiveness of Wesley's line set to this tune that makes the change to *You* in the line the more lamentable. There is some ingenuity in the change from *see* to *view* for the sake of rhyming; however, *you* is there at the emphatic ending of the verse as well as at the beginning, and, unlike *thee*, it does not easily take this amount of emphasis, because, as we have noted, modern *you* is not marked for case, for subject or object, and this makes for a certain awkwardness in its use here.

However, by way of contrast, verse four does work, perhaps adequately: *your* is marked for possession with the genitive case in both the first and last lines of the verse; and in both lines the pronoun is in unemphatic position – an unstressed syllable near the middle of the line. It works as well as could reasonably be expected; and the contrast with the third stanza is obvious where the pronouns, unmarked for case, are uncomfortably located in emphatic positions.

Verse five is actually quite interesting. For *your* is in unemphatic position before *bounteous grace* in the second line, and it works quite well (for students will have no trouble with knowing *bounteous*: they have probably eaten lots of *Bounty* Bars – once a delightful student confection). A little more problematic is *you* in the last line because it is on a stressed syllable. However, the real problem is the first line of the verse. We know that *you* is in the accusative case after *for,* as a prepositional phrase, because we know Wesley's original line, *For thee delightfully employ*. However, a worshipper who does not know this could quite validly read, at the beginning of the stanza, *For* with its meaning of *Because*, and could quite validly read *you* as the nominative case, subject of the verb *employ* – and read a completely different meaning into the verse. One does not see this sort of thing very often, but here it is, and it is rather seriously ambiguous – it is by no means an intentional literary ambiguity!

In the TIS version we may well imagine, at least at first glance that, Wesley has got his grammar wrong in verse five. Although the verb *employ*! appears to have no subject, the prosodic skill of Wesley is evident. Verses four and five together are actually being treated as one syntactically complete sentence. (The semicolon at the end of verse four

should be a comma.) And there is some interesting ellipsis going on: except for the opening imperative, *Give,* and also *has given* in the subordinate clause, all the verbs are infinitives, but only *to bear* is actually marked for infinitive with *to*; for all the other verbs the infinitive marker *to* has been elided. This can be checked for the careful reader by imagining the marker *to* before each of the verbs in question – it only makes the two-verse-long sentence just a little easier to read.

Further evidence of Wesley's writing skills can be seen in the up-and-down line of the conjunctions, *and,* connecting the whole series of main clauses (but, quite correctly, not that subordinate clause at line two of verse five). A minor lapse may be suggested by the lack of *And* before the first line of verse five. And the reader or singer will possibly notice it with slight discomfort. Of course Wesley had to confine this line (as indeed all the lines) to an exact eight syllables, and probably, with the help of the verse break, thought he could 'get away' with omitting the *And*. This is probably true, and there need not be any change in our delight in Wesley's amazing control of written English. It really is marvellous.

Given the revisers' determination to modernise the hymn, there is not much they could have done better with all those pronouns, but the result calls into question that very determination. **The revisers' work is not badly done. The issue is that the endeavour itself is seriously mistaken**. And we are observing this determination time after time in TIS. Great hymns have a certain enchantment, but small, seemingly minor changes to the text can nibble away at that enchantment. And that, I suspect, is true of music as well: small musical changes can disturb; perhaps they are just a bit more difficult to effect.

We are beginning to see that "archaism" is a fairly blurred concept. TIS, to the contrary, could be described as being fairly fundamentalist about it. Or, to put it in a less pointed way, **people can have a fairly simplistic view of what constitutes archaism, and then can apply it to anything which seems just a bit old-fashioned.** By way of contrast, the OED, while accepting the concept of archaism, also appears to take the view that once a word is in the OED it stays there, so that, however aged the word may become, it may be picked up by any writer or speaker who cares to use it. Archaism is a blurred concept: occasionally it can strain understanding, but it can also offer enchantment. It

can help to create that "language of otherness" which is significant for the text of a fine hymn.

In order to think a bit more about archaism, let us return to Wesley's hymn with that emphatically placed first word, *Forth*. Could we not actually describe it as an archaism? Could we not? Outside of church worship, *forth* must be used very rarely indeed. But doubtless that little language engine in our head long ago made in us the connections with words like be*fore*, *forward*, or even *forego*; so that when the strange word *forth* came along, behold, we 'got it'. We understood it, even if we don't say it ourselves. And let us note that understanding a piece of language is also language use as much as speaking is obviously so. And we all understand more words than we actually speak ourselves. Certainly, archaisms can sometimes blur our understanding, but they can also sometimes give us enchantment. And as T. S. Eliot reminds us, the journey of faith includes "risking enchantment".[76] Yes. In a different sense, of course. But perhaps not in a totally different sense.

Now this has been a well-known and greatly loved hymn, and we can but wonder how things came to this pass. From Chapter 2, we recall Ian Forbes's tale of the secondary-aged boys who would sing this hymn with gusto, although we may feel that this no longer happens. It is true that people singing with gusto may be getting more pleasure from the music than from the words – that is possibly quite often the case. Maybe. However, that does not mean that no attention at all is being paid to the words. It is simply that good words "grow on people" more slowly than a good tune. That is why we need good tunes for our hymns – they help the word meanings to grow on us. And that is certainly an aspect of how we come upon enchantment in our hymn singing.

Walter Chalmers Smith's engaging hymn

Is my main point that we should normally use the modern second person pronoun *you* in new hymns – as in these days we almost entirely do? No. That point is true, of course – I do so in my own hymn writing. But the main point is then what do we do with our great older hymns? Answer: We leave them as they are, enjoy them as they are, for a few decades and probably more, while we can still worship with them because of the

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[76] The delightful phrase is in East Coker, the second of the Four Quartets. T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909–1962*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 199.

slowness of language change in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. And of course we will try very hard to write some hymns of our own and encourage the same.

But perhaps three or four centuries hence, some bright scholar will discover Wesley's hymns, and perhaps a few others, which may well be in a very strange old tongue; and he or she will translate them for the benefit of the twenty fourth or twenty fifth century church. Stuck as we are in the twenty first century, we will be thankful that we can still understand Wesley and others, and just occasionally, we may even try to improve them. But we must remember that small changes to a poem can change the whole poem, and probably badly.

However, changing a poem is not the same as changing prose with the same applying perhaps especially to a hymn text. Small changes can damage a finely wrought hymn, and almost certainly cause it to fall from use and be lost. An interesting example is Walter Chalmers Smith's hymn. If this is happening to Wesley's work, what will happen to something like *Immortal, invisible God only wise*?

Wesley Milgate notes that,

> Dr Smith's hymn was first published in ... 1867, [within the section] Hymns of the Holy Trinity ... The text there printed had a good many rhythmical irregularities ... Dr Garrett Horder persuaded the author to re-consider the hymn and make it suitable for singing by congregations; and the revised text appeared in Horder's Congregational Hymns 1884 ... We follow exactly the revised text in Horder's books, save for the omission of 'But' at the beginning of v.4, l.3.[77]

Here is that Horder's text as it is given in AHB

> Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
> in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
> most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
> almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.
>
> Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
> nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;

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[77] Milgate, *Songs of the People of God*, 56.

thy justice like mountains high soaring above,

thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all life thou givest, to both great and small;

in all life thou livest, the true life of all;

we blossom and flourish as leaves on a tree,

and wither and perish: but nought changeth thee.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,

thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;

of all thy rich graces this grace, Lord, impart –

take the veil from our faces, the veil from our heart.

All laud we would render: O help us to see,

'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee;

and so let thy glory, Almighty, impart

through Christ in the story, thy Christ to the heart.

Now this has been a very popular hymn. Everyone loves to have a good sing of "Immortal, Invisible". I learned it from sing-songs at the piano with my Presbyterian mother in my infant and primary school years in Geelong and Melbourne. My wife, a farmer's daughter, learned it at the Methodist church in the back-blocks of the Mid North in South Australia, just short of the Goyder Line. I think there would be a good many stories of where and when people learned it, and any congregation can still be relied upon to sing it with gladness. It is a very serviceable hymn.

A notable thing about the hymn is that without very much actual allusion to particular biblical texts, Smith is using a distinctly biblical vocabulary; note in the first stanza words like *name*, *wise*, *light*, *blessed*, generally without alluding to particular texts, although we should note, in this respect, *Ancient of Days*; and *angels ... veiling their sight*. However, the biblical allusions and vocabulary nevertheless draw the singer, as we say, into the world of the Bible. It is a very noteworthy achievement, and accounts for much of the hymn's charm.

However, real questions arise about the use of anapaestic metre, which has three-syllable feet – weak/weak/strong – in comparison with the iambic feet – weak/strong –

which are usual in hymns. Anapaests can be quite rollicking, so they particularly tend to be confined to light verse. A good example is the well-known, five-line limerick. Here is one I heard in my youth:

> There was a young woman from Clyde,
>
> who ate some green apples and died;
>
> the apples fermented
>
> inside the lamented,
>
> and made cider inside her inside.

The clever rhyming and rollicking make for some good fun and this example shows why anapaests tend to be used mainly for light verse. As Paul Fussell says:

> In the limerick, for example, the very pattern of short anapaestic lines is so firmly associated by now with light impudence or indecency that a poet can hardly write in anything resembling this measure without evoking smiles.[78]

So we can see why Smith is actually being quite adventurous using anapaests, and perhaps why hymns using anapaests are very rare. *Away in a manger, no crib for a bed* is one of those rare examples – one which I do try to avoid. Another is *To God be the glory, great things he has done* – ditto.

However, a music critic, such as Erik Routley, might have approved of the four-line musical setting of "St Denio": the melodies of the first, second, and fourth lines of the melody are identical, and make for simplicity, but considerable difference is found in the melody of the third line, thus avoiding dullness. The ¾ bars fit the anapaests neatly, with the largely unvaried lines of crotchets tending to 'iron out' the rollicking anapaests, and make the tune somewhat more 'hymnlike'. Another aspect of our limerick example above is, of course, its boisterous rhyming – if we may so term it – and one may even wonder if, in fact, anapaestic rhythms actually make rhyming easier.

Whatever we may think of all that, the rhyming scheme of Smith's hymn is really quite fascinating – and demanding on the writer. The eleven syllable structure of each line divides neatly into a five-syllable segment and a six-syllable segment, and these rhyme differently. Each six-syllable segment has single-syllable rhyming – the terminal rhyme of the full line. The two-syllable rhyme of the tight five-syllable line segments

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[78] Paul Fussell Jr. *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (New York: Random House, 1965), 15

constitutes the internal rhyme of each full line. The rhyming of the stanza is extremely tight, and it helps to make the hymn remarkably memorable, to which a few generations of worshippers from various traditions could bear witness. Everyone knows "Immortal invisible"! Just the first two words are enough to recall the hymn. Catchy it certainly is!

For our purpose here, of discerning what is happening to the Protestant hymn in general, the interesting aspect is to see how TIS deals with Smith's hymn, and to compare it with his original. *Together in Song* (TIS) retains the five-stanza form of Horder.

> Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
> in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
> most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
> almighty, victorious, your great name we praise.
>
> Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
> nor wanting, nor wasting, but ruling in might;
> your justice like mountains high soaring above,
> your clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.
>
> You give life to all, Lord, to both great and small;
> in all life now living, the true life of all;
> we blossom and flourish as leaves on a tree,
> then wither: but ever unchanged you will be.
>
> Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
> your angels adore you, all veiling their sight;
> of all your rich graces this grace, Lord, impart –
> take the veil from our faces, the veil from our heart.
>
> All praise we would render: reveal to our sight
> What hides you is only the splendour of light;
> and so let your glory, Almighty, impart
> through Christ in the story, your Christ to the heart.

There are a few flaws in the TIS version of Smith's hymn, but the first verse holds quite close to the original: the only change is in the fourth line, where *your* fits perhaps

tidily enough, being marked for genitive, and is unemphatically placed in the line. However, in each of the other four stanzas there are two or three places where we find the *you* pronoun (by which I mean the pronoun in its various cases).

The second line of the second stanza handles this apparently quite neatly by changing *thou rulest* to *but ruling*. However, the problem is that the verse now has no **no main verb** causing a serious loss of energy from Smith's *in might*. This loss of energy is an unintended, or just unnoticed, change in meaning, and is a rather serious flaw.

In verse three there are three uses of the unwanted *thou* pronoun to be cleared, and the poetic cost is just as great. The rhyming and striking parallelism between the two half lines, *To all life thou givest ... in all life thou livest*, is quite lost; and this tight structure and rhyming is a significant part of the energy of Smith's verse, and part of the pleasure a congregation finds in singing the hymn. A similar effect occurs with the second half of the verse: we lose not only the rhyme of *perish* with *flourish*, but we lose the striking contrast between perishing and flourishing as well. We also lose in the fourth line the emphatic contrast between our changefulness and the divine changelessness. The singer has actually paid a heavy price for the change from the *thou* pronoun to *you*. And that has happened in a well-known and rightly-loved hymn.

In verse four the internal rhyme (let me call it a **mid-line rhyme**) in the first couplet, *Great Father of glo*ry ... *thine angels adore thee* is an effective rhyme; the change to *adore you* makes it just an approximate rhyme, which is unfortunate, but perhaps just acceptable. These two-syllable rhymes which are used for the mid-line rhymes, are quite a difficult achievement for the writer, and they are part of the energy of the poetic line which is used in this hymn; and it is all treated with scant respect.

It is important to notice how frequently the *you* pronoun now appears in the hymn, for it has a significantly different effect on the hymn than does the *thou* pronoun: Of course there is a nearness: 'Call ye upon him while he is near' (Isaiah 55:6. AV). However, the danger is one of being 'too pally with the Almighty' as I have heard said on occasion. And we noted in Chapter 1, John Wesley's feelings on the matter, that "he did not like over familiarity with the Deity" (Milgate, p. 41). Be that as it may, it seems that the use of the *you* pronoun, at least in hymns, runs that risk of over familiarity, whereas the *thou* pronoun has a somewhat distancing effect, of respecting the

otherness of the divine: it helps to create a **language for otherness** – and that is important, because the almost playful, rollicking energy of the whole hymn can be turned into disrespect if that language for otherness is slackened.

Is this text now better than, or even as good as Smith's? One really has to wonder. Considerable changes have had to be made to other parts of a verse, in order to make the change in the *thou* pronoun. A hymn is not an essay where we can make minor adjustments to get the meaning we want; this is poetic writing and such changes run the risk of just degrading its meanings. Great hymns become so through a process of refinement, which may actually take much time. Having become so, they are unlikely to be improved by casual revision. There is, however, the truth that theological thought never stands still, and it may be reflected upon that there has been in our times a concern to bring greater attention to the work of the Spirit to strengthen awareness of the Holy Trinity in our hymns as Trinitarian praise. Therefore, I would want to break my rule, as I think the last couplet – which has not actually appeared in many twentieth century hymnals – should be changed from

> … And so let thy glory, Almighty, impart
>
> through Christ in the story, thy Christ to the heart.

to something like

> … And so to thy glory, thy Spirit impart,
>
> Through Christ in the story, thy Christ to the heart.

so that the marvellous last line, with its splendid rhyming half-lines, also completes a satisfying Trinitarian conclusion. This is only a thought, for once again I have broken my personal rule of not making my own suggestions for amendments. Anyway it is an amazing hymn, and everyone sings it gladly. And any child who is lucky enough to learn this hymn has probably discovered the grammar of *thou*, *thee, thy,* and *thine* – much like *I, me, my*, and *mine*, actually. Simple. Nobody give up on *Immortal, invisible*.

It may be that Smith's hymn also achieves something very different as well – quite unexpected: it almost seems to look forward in time to the coming twentieth century; and that would be quite an achievement. There seems to be a growing sense that something like confidence seasoned with a vague unease is happening in the later Victorian age, and Smith's hymn seems to relate to that unease, and to look forward to

it with strangely confident faith. The hymn, with a Welsh melody, has something of joyful observance about it, much of which comes from the anapaests used by Smith. It seems that people really liked this hymn and still do – it hears its late Victorian age; but it almost could be seen as a foretaste of some sort of hankering for a new type of hymnody, which might come in the twentieth century, but had to wait till after the agony of two world wars was done with. I just wonder. However, Smith's hymn gives us the feeling of matching a wise background of scholarship poetically joined to the promise of a yet confident Christian faith. And it succeeds superbly for plain worshippers. It is a considerable achievement. It is unlikely that the same could be said of the changes to the text in *Together in Song* (TIS).

Robert Grant's great hymn

Robert Grant's great hymn, "O worship the King all-glorious above" (AHB 67, CP 546) is another hymn which uses anapaests. It belongs to its time, yet continues through time as a great act of worship. A consideration of Robert Grant's hymn, mentioned above, offers a useful conclusion to the current chapter – almost a summary. It is written sufficiently earlier than the time at which Walter Chalmers Smith's hymn was written, so that it avoids the later developments brought to our attention by Paul Fussell above; there is not the slightest hint that Grant is taking a risky option by using anapaests.

> O worship the King, all glorious above;
> O gratefully sing his power and his love;
> our shield and defender, the Ancient of Days,
> pavilioned in splendour, and girded with praise.
>
> O tell of his might, O sing of his grace,
> whose robe is the light, whose canopy space;
> his chariots of wrath the deep thunder-clouds form,
> and dark is his path on the wings of the storm.
>
> The earth with its store of wonders untold
> Almighty, thy power hath founded of old;
> hath stablished it fast by a changeless decree,
> and round it hath cast, like a mantle, the sea.

Thy bountiful care what tongue can recite?

It breathes in the air, it shines in the light,

it streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,

and sweetly distils in the dew and the rain.

Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,

in thee do we trust, nor find thee to fail:

thy mercies how tender, how firm to the end,

Our maker, defender, redeemer, and friend.

O measureless might, ineffable love,

while angels delight to hymn thee above,

the humbler creation, though feeble their lays,

with true adoration shall sing to thy praise.

Robert Grant, a highly educated man, had a most successful life in law and politics, his last position being as Governor of Bombay from 1834 until his death in 1838. It was in this last period that he wrote the above hymn, of which Wesley Milgate comments:

> Sir Robert Grant's famous hymn begins as a free paraphrase of the opening verses of Ps 104, and develops as a 'meditation' (Ps 104:34) upon some of the thoughts of the psalmist.[79]

Milgate also informs us that the tune "Hanover" was so named as it was initially thought to have been composed by Handel; however, it soon came to be ascribed to William Croft, apparently with a fair degree of certainty.[80]

In Chapter 1, we considered some hymns which had what I called a Psalmic quality: the Psalms sing what we delight to say, what we need to say, and what we must say. One of the great delights of this hymn is the way, in pursuit of this quality, it just piles up the English vocabulary of wonder and praise in amazingly original ways. Enough of it is from the Bible, to bring us into the literary world of the Bible, to think, feel, and delight in the hymn's Psalmic quality: allusions like *tender mercies*, and *changeless decree*; expressions like *ancient of days*, words like *dust*, *light*, *tongue*, with all their biblical resonance. There are also words with no biblical resonance whatever, like *distil* which

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[79] Milgate, *Songs of the People of God*, 51.
[80] Ibid.

has been more or less taken over for scientific and technical use, though one can still manage to 'get the drift' here. There is a word like *canopy,* somehow used in a biblical sort of way with *space*, a word which seems to be used only for time intervals in the AV, but which here resounds with something of its modern astronomical meaning. There are two biblical words together, *chariots* and *wrath*, though they never appear together in the AV. There are two non-biblical words, *pavilioned* and *splendour*, joined together in seemingly biblical phrase; and two thoroughly biblical words, *might* and *love* with non-biblical, but thoroughly apt qualifiers – *measureless* and *ineffable*. And, of course, 'wings of the wind' in Psalm 18, as well as Psalm 104, becomes *wings of the storm* in the second stanza.

What an incredible bounty of English words it is, that our language has become. And there it is in this hymn, in seemingly unpatterned splendour. And then the penny drops, as they say; and suddenly we do see the pattern: the half line at the beginning of each verse, is actually the key to the rest of the verse. And it works perfectly in all the verses: in the first verse, *O worship the King*, in the second verse, *O tell of his might*, thirdly, *The earth with its store*, then *Thy bountiful care*, then *Frail children of dust* with its sombre biblical echo, and finally *O measureless might*. In themselves they give the hymn its structure, so that Robert Grant's hymn becomes a poetical tour-de-force. *Thy bountiful care what tongue can recite?* Absolutely marvellous.

A very interesting line in the hymn is the third line of the second stanza, *his chariots of wrath the deep thunder-clouds form*, which is an excellent example of literary irony. It is a simple subject-verb-object clause with the verb placed in unusual, rather emphatic, final position. But is the sentence now subject-object-verb? or is it object-subject-verb? Do the chariots of wrath form the thunderclouds? Or do the thunderclouds form the chariots of wrath? The answer is that, in an interesting literary irony, both meanings are mysteriously possible. And what an enriching thing that is. Literary irony can do that. Here it yields great concentration of meaning which spills over into the verse as a whole. For in the second line God's *robe is the light*; while in the fourth line *dark is his path*; and an awesome meaning is concentrated in the third line quite splendidly. It is also an awesome thing to read the early verses of Ps 104 after singing Grant's hymn, which is based on the Psalm.

The third stanza of Grant's hymn is also of much interest. Note the three present perfect tense verbs – *hath founded*, *hath stablished*, and *hath cast*. Now the auxiliary verb *hath*, or in its modern form *has,* is normally little emphasised. It is joined here to three different past participles to form an impressive line-up of verb phrases. However, the verb phrases are placed in different parts of its line: *hath founded* is near the end of its line, *hath stablished* is at the beginning of its line, and *hath cast* is at the middle of its line. One could have expected that any good writer would have worked out how to have the three verbs at the end of their line, in order to achieve some parallelism, or perhaps at the beginning of the line. Well Grant does not agree, and writes a splendid third verse to his hymn. I think we could add, however, that Grant is helped by using internal rhyming in each line of his text – internal rhyming with the line before or the line after. It all makes for a splendid verse, and it will be interesting to see how TIS treats the hymn.

One of the great lapses of modern English hymnody is surely the change of *lisp,* in the last line, to *sing*. It seems to be quite a modern development, and everybody does it. The original *lisp* is found in MHB, RCH, and even, showing the remarkable good sense of its Congregational editors, the later CgnP. Perhaps the well-regarded SOP (Songs of Praise, 1931) is actually the original culprit: Our three hymn books, AHB, CP and TIS, all make the change in the second half of the twentieth century. Wesley Milgate also writes in support of the change:

> We follow many other hymnals in changing the original 'lisp' in the last line to 'sing' ('humbler' and the repeated 'feeble' make the point less self-consciously).[81]

Now I must say that this really misses the point here. Certainly *humbler* and *feeble* make the poet's point in a factual sort of way – if that is what "less self-consciously" means – but *lisp* makes the point as metaphor. And a metaphor is not a straightforward factual statement. A metaphor works by taking our feelings about a certain situation and transferring them to the different situation which is the object of the metaphorical statement. Thus metaphor is about transfer of feelings, expressing something about the text which is otherwise inexpressible. That is why metaphor is of the essence of poetry.

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[81] Milgate, *Songs of the People of God*, 51-2.

Of course this is not a definition of metaphor – of what metaphor is – it is an attempt to speak of what metaphor achieves.[82]

What, then, can we make of this metaphor *lisp*? Well what are the feelings that people have when they meet a child who lisps? Perhaps for other children at school, amusement? For thoughtful adults, concern, maybe a silent compassion? For parents, anxiety? And still other feelings? Yes. And suddenly the poet, through his metaphor, loads all of these remembered feelings about lisping on to the last line of his hymn, and makes of it a splendid, emphatic line in which we contemplate the greatness of God, and see our own smallness and frailty before him. For all our hymns, all our great choral works, even the very worst and the very best of our poetry and music, are seen for what they really are before God, the mere lisping by *frail children* of their *humble lays.* But it is enough for the God of all grace to take it all up as *true adoration*.

What a strange but compelling expression it is, in this hymn, of our human frailty before the greatness of God, which is taken up as *true adoration*. In TIS (and the other modern hymnals) the change of language style from *lisp* to *sing* – from the metaphor to common factual language, in the emphatic last line of all places – makes for a serious diminishment of the hymn. For the monosyllable *sing* in the last line of the hymn now adds nothing to the meaning; it simply fills up the gap left by *lisp.* Singing is already there in the second to last line *feeble their lays* – their singing is already happening, but it is feeble. Why? In contrast, observe the high meaning of Grant's last line: our very own hymn singing, and the work of our beautiful soloists, and our great choirs, are nothing more in the divine order than the lisping of frail children – except they become *true adoration*.

Of course we can hardly blame TIS for making this change from *lisp* to *sing*. They are just following the crowd of twentieth century hymnals. However, our hymn singing needs to be the best that we can do – not because God needs our hymns, but because he desires our participation in the praise offered by the whole creation, and we need to join in that great chorus, with our humble hearts open.

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[82] A very thorough treatment of metaphor may be found in David Greenham, *Close Reading: the basics* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 37ff.

This brings us to the point where we must look with some concern to other aspects of the work of the editors of TIS. Here is their version of Robert Grant's hymn:

O worship the King, all glorious above;
O gratefully sing his power and his love;
our shield and defender, the ancient of days,
pavilioned in splendour, and girded with praise.

O tell of his might, O sing of his grace,
whose robe is the light, whose canopy space;
his chariots of wrath the deep thunder-clouds form,
and dark is his path on the wings of the storm.

The earth with its store of wonders untold,
Almighty, your power has founded of old;
established it fast by a changeless decree,
and round it has cast, like a mantle, the sea.

Your bountiful care what tongue can recite?
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light,
it streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,
and sweetly distils in the dew and the rain.

Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,
in you do we trust, nor find you to fail;
your mercies how tender, how firm to the end,
Our maker, defender, redeemer, and friend.

O measureless might, ineffable love,
while angels delight to hymn you above,
the humbler creation, though faltering their praise,
with true adoration shall sing all their days.

At first glance this may seem to be 'not too bad', as we might say; certainly the first two stanzas are unchanged from Grant's. After these two stanzas, some familiar problems begin to re-assert themselves. Although in the second line of the third verse,

the genitive *your* is in non-emphatic position, one cannot help a slight feeling, especially immediately after *Almighty*, that *your* is just a bit too friendly – "pally", John Wesley might have thought – as we have mentioned earlier in the current chapter.

The change, at the beginning of the third line, of *hath stablished* to *established* may seem at first glance to work satisfactorily. Since they are just two variants of the same word, meaning is little changed. However, the change in the verb is not without disappointment – and the native speaker does not need to be a grammarian simply to feel it is weaker. To understand this, we must recall, as previously written, discovering how the strength of Grant's third stanza is in the past perfect tense (*hath* plus past participle) which occurs three times in the verse. Now only two of those clauses survive. This tense makes for a strong formal structure, and is probably less commonly used than other tenses, so that the threefold use of the present/past perfect marked with *hath* in this verse is particularly strong. The change to the third line in TIS, to the simple past tense in just one of the verbs, leaving the other two verbs unchanged, while seemingly quite clever, is actually quite noticeable. It looks just a small change, but as with other small changes, it can just nibble away at a great text. Why did it need to be done? Because it was decided that *hath stablished* had to be changed to *established* – the modern word which we all know, or, as native speakers, could easily discover from the context – as we all did as children.

However, the worst change in this hymn in TIS seems to have happened because of the desire to avoid the use of *lays*, in the last stanza, a word which is presumably considered to be 'archaic'. Now the OED gives an amazing number of meanings for the word, but native speakers will find the intended meaning from the context anyway. Note that younger native speakers will likely guess the meaning from the context, and learn a new word. As we all probably did.

Mention of these various issues may make me sound like an elderly textual fusspot, but there is no such thing as an insignificant change to a small poem, and a hymn text is a small poem. Small changes have significant effects on small poems; sometimes changes are necessary and improve the hymn, but more often they can be a disaster for the hymn, and lead to its demise. In TIS, we see much of the latter.

I wrote above of the bounty of English words in this hymn, and yet comprehension of the hymn turns out to be not really the issue that we moderns are making of it. I started this thesis, assuming that there would be 'words that ordinary people find difficult'. That is how we are supposed to think. Instead, the old writers have turned out to be no fools: they wrote successfully for a largely uneducated, illiterate people; and uneducated folk have loved it and have sung it with enchantment.

Our so-called archaisms are more often just a bit of slightly old-fashioned language that can give us enchantment if we allow it to do so. The text of *O worship the King* is just such a marvel, and it is so well put together, so precisely so, that any change to it is likely to be of dubious value. Yet there is no sign of restraint on the part of the TIS revisers. We would not do this sort of thing to the work of a Shakespeare or any fine poet. Why do we do it to our finest hymn texts? I suppose it is because we are expected to sing hymns all together to help weaker singers. But does not unison singing of a hymn help us come to finding understanding of its text by doing just that – singing together? Of course it does.

The current chapter has mainly dealt with the issue of language use which involved older words, even archaic words, which were considered to require change of text. However, it has turned out to be more an issue of the use of *thou* for singular, and, just occasionally, *ye* for plural, in older hymns. We also noticed on occasion that another problem may actually be the second person singular verb ending *-est*, which is marked for singular with *thou*, while *you* in modern use is not marked for subject or object. Indeed it may be suggested that the common *all of you*, the equally common *you all*, or even the non-standard *yous*, may suggest a lingering desire for a second-person number distinction among present-day English speakers. Personally I have a bit of a hankering for the old *ye*, which is clearly marked for second person nominative plural, but requires no number marker on the verb

The fundamental methodology which we have used here was to examine carefully the "original" text of a hymn, (while acknowledging that it is often difficult to be quite certain of this) and to seek to understand how well the text works as a literary piece, perhaps with some passing reference to its musical setting – which is not, of course, to say that the music is unimportant, but simply to assert that what is being done here is basically a literary study. Recent changes to the text are then observed,

and their effect on the hymn critically noted, as we seek to answer an important question: *what are the principles and practices necessary for changing hymn texts, or writing new hymns?* In this we will be coming back to my hypothesis, that hymns should grant singers entry to **the world of the Bible**, and, in doing that, to find **a language for otherness**. And there be our two criteria again.

Chapter 4. *Together in Song* (TIS) – Aspects of an Inclusive Religious English

Search for an inclusive hymn language

In this chapter, the more pungent issue of sexist language, or non-inclusive language, or, as I recently heard, male-normative language, is discussed. I tend to pick and choose between these three expressions and will probably continue to do so.

As is well known, I believe, the inclusivist argument is that "non-inclusive language is language which purports to be addressed to its hearers or readers in general, but actually seems to be addressed to males rather than females". As Vivienne Faull and Jane Sinclair comment,

> Inside the church, just as outside it, feminists are not a closely organized, clearly defined group. They are a diffuse network committed to ensuring that the church will no longer be shaped and led only by men, and to encouraging the church to rediscover the inspiration of the feminine buried in its past ... Language is part of these agenda. Language is fundamental to the church's task.[83]

And there is much truth here. Faull and Sinclair go on to mention three main concerns of Elizabeth Stanton and her committee of revisers who produced *The Woman's Bible*, in the late nineteenth century USA context:

> ... firstly, language about the people of God .. especially language about the status and image of women ... secondly, language about God ... the feminine in the Godhead, equal in power and glory with the masculine ... then thirdly, the place of women in creating language ... its concerns are echoed a hundred years later, in our discussion of language and the church.[84]

A century later the issue does indeed look somewhat familiar, though probably not entirely congruent with 'second wave' thought. The argument now includes issues such as frequent references to males – *men*, *sons*, and *brethren*; male images of God – *King*, and *Father*; masculine forms of pronouns – *he*, *him* and *his*. A further issue is that

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[83] Vivienne Faull and Jane Sinclair. *Count us in – Inclusive Language in Liturgy* (Bramcote Nottingham: Grove Books. 1986), 4.
[84] Ibid. 4 and 5.

of women confined to stereotypical roles, though this last is perhaps less relevant for hymnody.

Lawrence Bartlett, whose foreword to TIS was quoted at the beginning of Chapter 3 above, further adds that,

> As for inclusive language, the general aim has been to ensure that references to human beings make it perfectly clear that men and women, boys and girls are all included. In the case of living authors, many have provided their own versions in inclusive language to be used in any new edition.[85]

A quick glance at the well-known work of the 'first wave' American feminist author, Julia Ward Howe, a worker for women's rights in a remarkably busy life, indicates how relatively recent is our concern with non-inclusive language. Her text for the well-known song, or hymn as we now think of it, "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord" (AHB 205, TIS 315, but not in CP) includes the resonant couplet, *as he died to make men holy,/ let us live to make men free* which seems to indicate that some aspects of inclusive language, as we now understand it, were not yet an issue, and would have to wait about a century to become a cause for 'second wave' feminists, and it is this last which will occupy much of our thinking in the current chapter.

Work of Catherine Winkworth

Catherine Winkworth, in contrast with Julia Ward Howe, was English born, and was much involved with the education of girls and young women, and also with encouragement of women's participation in community concerns, so that, like Howe, she had a remarkably busy life. Winkworth also came to take a considerable interest in the great Lutheran hymns of the German church, and made many translations herself. In fact Professor J. R. Watson describes Winkworth as 'the greatest of all translators of German hymns'[86]; (and let us recall once again the general truth that a verse translation is basically a new poem.) Winkworth did translations of many such hymns, and in TIS, for example, the only older writers who have more hymns included therein are Charles Wesley and Isaac Watts. John Bell and Brian Wren also have a few

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[85] Australian Hymn Book Pty Limited. Together in Song Australian Hymn Book II, (East Melbourne: Harper Collins,1999), vii
[86] J. R. Watson, *The English Hymn*, 413.

more hymns included than Winkworth, but time is perhaps yet to have its winnowing effect on their work.

Another interesting aspect of Winkworth's work can be seen in her determination to write to the German tune of the hymn on which she happened to be working – rather than going for an English form like common metre. For there is a considerable influence of German folk music, a concern which went back to Martin Luther. As Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen writes:

> Luther's contribution to, and espousal of, music as a means of doxology was to be significant for the whole development of liturgical life and the musical tradition in Protestant churches. Not only did Luther play the lute and compose hymns, but he wrote about music on several occasions, noting that 'next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise'. The human being ought to praise God through 'word and music'.[87]

Luther loved singing himself, and was a strong believer in the strengthening power of group singing. Thus we find in the Lutheran tradition strong rhythms and clear repetitions of musical phrases, which make a long melody more available to the German people than it may appear at first sight.

All this, taken up by Winkworth, made for a noteworthy enrichment of the British hymn repertoire: the long, though quite straightforward, German-based texts make for a considerable contrast with the tight four-line verses which had become common, and loved, in the repertoire of British hymnody under Calvinist influence – a form that grew out of the metrical Psalms and paraphrases, as we observed in Chapter 3.

It is also worthy of note again that Winkworth took great interest, as mentioned above, in the cause of the advancement of women's rights in the nineteenth century. Part of this interest manifested itself in the encouragement of the work of women hymn writers in the later decades of the nineteenth century.[88]

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[87] Thiessen, Gesa Elsbeth. *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 128.
[88] Milgate, *Songs of the People of God*, 345.

Winkworth's great hymn – "Now thank we all our God"

Perhaps Winkworth's best known hymn, at least in Australia, is *Now thank we all our God*. Here is Winkworth's text as it appears in CP 530.

> Now thank we all our God
>
> with heart and hands and voices,
>
> who wondrous things hath done,
>
> in whom his world rejoices;
>
> who from our mother's arms
>
> hath blessed us on our way
>
> with countless gifts of love,
>
> and still is ours today.
>
> O may this bounteous God
>
> through all our life be near us,
>
> with ever joyful hearts
>
> and blessèd peace to cheer us;
>
> and keep us in his grace,
>
> and guide us when perplexed,
>
> and free us from all ills
>
> in this world and the next.
>
> All praise and thanks to God
>
> the Father now be given,
>
> the Son, and him who reigns
>
> with them in highest heaven,
>
> the one eternal God,
>
> whom earth and heaven adore;
>
> for thus it was, is now,
>
> and shall be evermore.

There are some interesting effects which Winkworth uses in this hymn. One of these is the change from normal English word order in the first line, where the verb *thank* precedes the subject, *we all*, and the object, *our God*. It makes for a striking entry to the hymn, with an immediate assertion of the tone of thankfulness. Out of a

fairly simple vocabulary, Winkworth has created an expansive language, a language of otherness, aided by changes in word order and well-placed relative clauses – note at the beginning of three successive lines in the first stanza – *who* ... *in whom* ... *who*.

In fact the opening couplet of the first verse is also of considerable interest for reasons other than this. Winkworth uses the singular number, *heart*, and older hymn books follow, including *Songs of Praise* (SOP) but not MHB, nor CngP (Congregational Praise). Modern collections, including AHB and TIS – but not CP – change to the plural *hearts*. And indeed Milgate points out that this follows the German plural, *herzen*.[89]

However, this raises the question of accuracy in translation. How much does it matter? We expect a translator – working on a historically earlier work by, say, a great ancient writer – to show a measure of respect for his or her source, by a good degree of accuracy in translation. This would also be especially true, for example, of biblical translation, because of the Bible's place in the life and self-understanding of the Church.

However, translating a hymn for congregational use would seem to be an entirely different matter: the history of the hymn seems not to be of immediate concern to a worshipping congregation – what we want in Australia is a good poetic hymn in good English language style. It could well be asked if *translation* is the right word for the process involved in making a foreign hymn available, in such wise, to an English-speaking congregation. Perhaps the very concept of translation inescapably involves the idea of accuracy, and we should prefer expressions like *free translation* or *rendition* when it comes to changing a hymn for use in a different language. Certainly it is now necessary to see just how good is Winkworth's rendition (or translation) of this hymn. This requires literary judgement, but such can be assisted by the different discipline of linguistics, and here in particular by the linguistic distinction between count nouns and non-count nouns.

Count nouns and non-count nouns in a literary text

Coming back now to the opening couplet in Winkworth's hymn, plural *hearts* is certainly true to the German text, but the singular *heart* does not really feel wrong, may even feel better to our English-speaking consciousness. But why? Because some

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[89] Milgate, *Songs of the People of God*, 27.

of us are used to it? Maybe; but perhaps part of the answer is that the Bible frequently speaks of *heart* with some indefiniteness, as the location of strong, but not necessarily definite, feeling[90], and hence as a symbol, even as a synonym, for qualities somewhat like *courage* or *thankfulness*. When it comes to translation, is this use of *heart* all a matter of correct translation, even perhaps correct grammar, or is it a matter of some more English kind of quality?

Linguists can shed some light here. Quirk and Greenbaum point out that in English there are **count-nouns** and **non-count nouns**.[91] For example, *hand*, *voice*, *arm*, *thing*, and *gift* are count nouns – we can count them. *Courage* and *thankfulness* are non-count nouns: one cannot have *courages* or *thankfulnesses* in English; nor can we have *a courage* or *a thankfulness*. M. A. K. Halliday helps us to understand this distinction with slightly different terminology:

> English recognises a basic distinction of things into two semantic categories: (1) discrete and therefore countable, realized as 'count nouns'; (2) continuous, and therefore uncountable, realized as 'mass nouns'.[92]

Halliday actually makes the distinction between the two types of nouns slightly more detailed, and hence clearer; but I do prefer the count/non-count terminology and will continue to use it.

However, this count/non-count distinction is tricky and becomes more so: some nouns can function as either count nouns or non-count nouns. And *heart* is such a word. It can be a non-count noun: if we are in trouble, a friend may tell us to "Take heart," or when we were children, a parent could urge us to do something with "all your heart and soul". However, *heart* can also be a count noun: at a communion service, we are told to "Lift up your hearts." (Plural nouns must be count.)

What does this small piece of twentieth century linguistics have to do with our literary interest in Winkworth's art? Firstly we observe that both these uses of *heart*

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[90] There seems to be some uncertainty, even indefiniteness, about the use of the word *heart* in the Bible. Alan Richardson, in his *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, (London: SCM Press, 1957), states that "In our English versions of the Old Testament 'mind' generally represents one of three Hebrew words: *nephesh* (soul), *ruach* (spirit), and *leb* (heart). The precise distinction between these three is hard to determine and can be more easily felt than defined." p. 144.

[91] A well regarded text is Randolf Quirk and Sidney Greenbaum. *A University Grammar of English* (Harlow, Longman, 1973) 59 ff.

[92] M A K Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. (London: Edward Arnold, 1985) 190.

are syntactically correct English usage, and would seem to have been so at the time – Winkworth could have done it either way. Later hymnals (though not CP with its usual sound judgement) use *hearts* as a count noun in the hymn under examination here, but Winkworth has used *heart* as a non-count noun, and she is followed in the earlier twentieth century hymnals. But what difference does it make? Well it seems to be a matter of tone: the later version seems to give us the bare facts – *hearts and hands and voices*; however, Winkworth's work, with a poet's sensitivity to her own language, hints at a bit more by using non-count *heart* – a feeling, perhaps, of reminding her singing people of the thankfulness she feels in the first line, which is something she is seeking to share with her singers. It brings us to the beauty of the *countless gifts of love* from *our mother's arms* onward. And it carries over into the second stanza, the *joyful hearts*, and the *blessed peace*, with that great line-up of verbs, *keep us*, *guide us*, *free us*, which all have the repeated accusative plural pronoun *us* – another simple but nice touch of anaphora. Anaphora is probably not what one should normally do with pronouns – which tend to resist emphasis – but Winkworth makes it work. It is wonderfully joyful stuff – deep joy, not "happy-happy" joy – in amazing contrast, as Millgate points out, with the dreadful situation of war and plague with which the original German writer, Martin Rinkart, had to contend as pastor.[93]

In her verse Winkworth also seems to be very aware of the full-throated joyfulness of the melody; for she seems to be responsive to the melody, not necessarily as an intended poetic method, but as a background influence on the writer. In fact one may wonder about this in general: what difference does it make to the text of a new hymn in English by translation, when the "translator", who obviously has in mind the text he or she has been working on, also hears in the mind the music of the original hymn, as well as the text? What difference does that make to the new hymn text in English? It is an interesting question, and I think that having the melody in mind must surely be of some help to the poet, though we won't further pursue it here.

We can, however, reflect briefly on the complexity and interest in the harmony parts of "Now thank we all our God". Of course the melody itself has a clear simplicity: the melody for the first couplet is repeated for the second couplet; in the third couplet, the first line changes, to dominant harmony, I think, and the second line of the couplet,

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[93] Milgate, *Songs of the People of God*, 27

with a similar melodic shape, turns to its related minor harmony. (with my limited musical wits needing a stretch here.) The fourth couplet returns to dominant harmony, but ends in tonic harmony, and, through this, it brings out the joyful but strong quality of the words, (and keeps the singing people together). Yet it is not a simple joyfulness: it points to a deep joy, and the music seems to bring this quality into Winkworth's verse. It is a very fine hymn.

Other changes to Winkworth's text

But what has been happening to Winkworth's text in AHB and TIS? For a start, there is a very good alteration to the first half of the final stanza of the hymn which now appears in AHB as follows:

> All praise and thanks to God
> the Father now be given,
> the Son, and Holy Ghost,
> one Lord in highest heaven,

What can readily give us delight in AHB here is the clarifying of the Trinitarian ascription of praise, which has long been unclear about the third member, the Spirit. The lines, *him who reigns/with them in highest heaven,* do not name the Spirit with sufficient clarity for some singers (including myself in younger days).

Of course many will claim that *Holy Ghost* is also unclear, tending towards anachronism, and they certainly have a point. It is good that we now generally use *Holy Spirit* in worship; however, *ghost* is a good old Anglo-Saxon word which still has more than a toehold in the language, especially with words like *aghast* and *ghastly*, as well as the playfully spooky and seriously theological meanings. I imagine I'm fairly sure to lose on this one, but I must say that this change works perfectly well here. This is a classic hymn, yet the change is not out of place. For it is quite obvious that here, *Holy Ghost* actually matches the general tenor of Winkworth's long-standing text, despite the fact – almost because of the fact – that it is definitely the much older AV word. For *Holy Ghost* was still in common liturgical use in Winkworth's time, and it is at home in her hymn. In fact this seems to be the only alteration which AHB has made to Winkworth's text. It was necessary and very well done – good invisible mending – a term used immediately below by the CP editors.

Some would say, of course, "Isn't the whole point of rewriting the text that we get away from the general tenor of old-fashioned texts?" And that is a question to which people need to return every so often. After all, as we have noted earlier, we are not yet doing such a thing to Shakespeare, Milton and others. Similarly, many will feel that a hymn as great as this should not be "messed with", and surely they also have a point. I would claim that AHB's change here is a good example of what the CP editors mean by "invisible mending", a tailor's term I believe, which is explained in their preface:

> Mindful of the needs of the church in today's world … the committee has carefully looked at the words and music of each hymn. It has developed a conservative editorial policy for hymns written before 1900, respecting the integrity of the text, the author's known intentions, and the poetry of the original. Nevertheless, when words have become obscure, or changed their meaning, the committee has on occasion exercised its discretion and amended archaisms to produce a more accessible text. It has also been aware of the problem of gender-based language, and has gently sought to avoid this where appropriate by 'invisible mending'.[94]

The AHB has done good work on the third stanza of Winkworth's hymn, changing well what arguably needed to be changed – the weak Trinitarian formula – while otherwise keeping its hands off. The general tone of the verse is maintained, and the result is that the final couplet of the third stanza still brings the hymn to its ringing conclusion. It is actually a very good example of CP's useful metaphor, *invisible mending* – by which they seem to mean something like ***making amendments to a text while maintaining the general tone of the text as a whole***. AHB's change certainly achieves this. There are these two aspects of changing the text of a hymn, and a change in a text must satisfy both.

Another aspect of the hymn which is of considerable literary interest is that Winkworth has created vibrant threefold structures in each verse: there is the line-up of relative clauses in the middle of the first stanza ... *who* ... *in whom* ... *who*. In the second stanza there are the verbs, *keep us* ... *guide us* ... *free us* ... and in the final stanza we find the threefold structure *for thus it was, is now/and shall be evermore*.

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94 Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd., *Common Praise* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2000) ix

Perhaps this last should not be lightly commended; for repetitions like this of the verb *to be* (*am, is, are, was, were*, etc.) are generally unemphatic as noted earlier. However, Winkworth, in her skilled writing, manages to use the verb *to be* in creating striking emphasis, and triumphantly achieves a resounding final couplet for her great hymn.

It is not altogether so with TIS, whose editors, as we have seen in Chapter 3, are fairly unreserved about making changes. Here is the text as it has been revised in TIS 106:

> Now thank we all our God
> with hearts and hands and voices,
> who wondrous things has done,
> in whom the world rejoices;
> who from our mother's arms
> has blessed us on our way
> with countless gifts of love,
> and still is ours today.
>
> O may this bounteous God
> through all our life be near us,
> with ever joyful hearts
> and blessèd peace to cheer us;
> Lord, keep us in your grace,
> and guide us when perplexed,
> and free us from all harm
> in this world and the next.
>
> All praise and thanks to God
> who reigns in highest heaven,
> to Father and to Son
> and Spirit now be given:
> the one eternal God,
> whom heaven and earth adore;
> who ever was, is now,
> and shall be ever more.

We have observed above the effect of the singular *heart* in the second line of the first verse, with its hint of greater meaning than the change to the plural *hearts* could manage. And now we can also note the effect of the change from *his world* to *the world* in the fourth line of the verse. There is, of course, a clear inclusivist motive here for the TIS revisers– avoidance of the masculine pronoun *his* for God, to which we shall need to return later. The main thing to notice here is that having *world* governed by the definite article *the* does not work very well poetically, for it now just fills out the syllable count of the line, but adds little to the meaning of the line – in fact there is a real loss of tone at this point. However, it is not the inclusivist motive which is at fault; it is the way it has been put into effect that gives trouble. In clear contrast, either *this world* or *our world* obviously would have added some additional meaning to the text, as certainly did *his world* – God's world, that is – before being discarded for inclusivist reasons. This seemingly insignificant change to "*the world*" actually causes, again, rather serious lapse of tone in the line, which people will probably find quite noticeable without necessarily seeing why it happens. Thus, the general tenor of the verse deteriorates with two seemingly small changes. They are very visible, and not at all good examples of CP's "invisible mending".

Effects of language change over time

Another interesting aspect to observe in Winkworth's text is that she seems quite relaxed about having some different present tense endings for singular verbs: we have the -*th* ending in *hath* twice in the first stanza (and now rightly changed in TIS to *has*) but interestingly, we already find our own present tense markers on *rejoic<u>es</u>* in the first verse and *reign<u>s</u>* in verse three. It seems that rejoiceth and reigneth have already been superseded in Winkworth's own writing, whereas *hath* and *doth* survived rather longer, probably because of their frequent use as auxilliaries.

We have also come upon a rather unusual language change here, and Winkworth's text is there in the midst of it. Language changes tend to have begun in the south of the country, from London, the prestigious centre of government and commerce, and they have apparently spread outwards and northwards from there – political and commercial activity involves human movement, human interaction, human scholarship, and it stretches language use. Quite unusually, however, this

particular change came from the north of the country to the south. As Barbara Strang notes,

> The -(e)*th* ending was the indigenous southern ending, and had been incorporated into early standard usage. During the 16c a more northerly -*s* form, long familiar to educated London speakers, began to enter their speech; it has finally prevailed.[95]

Particularly important also in the early seventeenth century was the arrival of the AV on the scene in 1611, appointed by royal command, "to be read aloud in churches", as the frontispiece states. And it happened widely. One result was that the commonly-occurring auxiliaries of the sixteenth century, *hath* and *doth,* became associated with solemn usage – with worship – a good reason for precipitate change to be resisted; but another result of this seems to have been to leave an opening for change in everyday speech for the -*s* ending to make its way into southern speech – something which had already begun among writers. Strang remarks that

> … great care is needed in interpreting written forms, since there is abundant evidence that one was expected to read -*th* as the -*s* form in speech during the first half of the 17c.[96]

In other words, people kept writing the -e*th* form, but used the -*s* form in speech, except, perhaps in church, and especially with the reading of the AV. The result of all this seems to have been a careful use of the -*eth* forms in the eighteenth century church, and perhaps exaggerated use of these forms in the eighteenth and nineteenth century hymns, and in worship in general. The verbs *hath* and *doth,* both quite common because of their use as auxiliaries, seem to have withstood the change longer than other verbs. In fact in this hymn the auxiliary verb *hath* is the only verb which has the -*th* ending. (*Doth* does not appear in the original hymn).

To return to Winkworth

It seems from this fairly limited discussion that we have been, and perhaps still are in the church, in the process of freeing ourselves from the use of older forms. When we sing a hymn we may no longer read the old form, for example, *rejoiceth*, while saying

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[95] Barbara Strang, *A History of English* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1970), 145-6.
[96] Strang, ibid.

and singing the new form, *rejoices*, as apparently must have been done in the eighteenth century. However, from the nineteenth century onward, we have learnt to sing what is actually on the page and to read it and sing it aloud. If the hymn book reads, for example, *hath* or *rejoiceth*, with *-th* ending, then that is what people would say or sing – and thus it has worked, up till recent times, when we have decided quite definitely that we must write the language that people use now, which hence must be what they would actually say in today's speech.

We are now in the process of responding to a different kind of language change again – changing our wordings to take into account how we should say them in our own day – and our hymn books are attempting to reflect that situation, and this not only in the writing of new hymns, but even by changing well-known older hymns. Not surprisingly, we are finding all that somewhat unsettling in the church.

When we then add to all this our desire to use our language in a gender-inclusive way, it is not surprising that the task becomes even more demanding. For the church finds herself denied the use of old language, non-inclusive language, or even some quite learned language, and yet must try to communicate in persuasively poetic terms. It is definitely a challenge. It will take time – some decades, even up to a century or two – and some experiment; some failure, and some success is to be expected on the way. It calls for patience, for people don't consciously make language change; it just happens, and is not ultimately under anyone's control (which is why the role of the Académie Francaise can seem very odd.) Language change happens wherever people are young or old, clever or dull, rich or poor, educated or unlettered, and use language, and speak or listen, read or hear, and of course, are male or female And with all this going on, language change is of course, unpredictable, and just happens. And this implies a considerable challenge for the present inclusivist endeavour, and rather seems to demand an atmosphere of thoughtful, but not too ideological, struggle. What comes of it all is what the church will have to use – come what may.

We have observed above, the effect of the singular *heart* in the second line of Winkworth's first verse, with its hint of greater meaning than the change to the plural *hearts* can manage. Now we can note that the third and fourth lines of the verse are given as *who wondrous things has done,/in whom the world rejoices*, in which *his world* has given way to *the world*, presumably to avoid the masculine pronoun for God. Is it

a good change in this place? Well it certainly avoids male normativity, as inclusivist thought puts it – the effect on women (and indeed girls) of the male form being consistently heard as normal English. However, we also lose the quite strong hint, which the hymn writer plainly intends, that this is God's world; and losing that hint – as in *his world* – is rather unfortunate. In fact it is again a small yet distinct loss of the tone of the original. Yes, *his* is but a single word, but it is distinctly noticeable – a failure in making an "invisible mending" as the CP editors might have put it.

It seems that it may be good to suggest that we are looking in our times for something which is very difficult, but must be accomplished. I have been at pains to note that language change is something that just happens, and will happen, and not be noticed until it has happened, usually as a result of some degree of social change that has been taking place.

May it be that foremost, we need to become inclusive in **our general outlook on our times**, as we participate in things happening in our society? In our homes, in our, schools, in our businesses, in our press, arts, and entertainments, in our parliaments, and of necessity in our churches, there social change happens and our language changes. It is already happening – probably more than we realise – and over time, it both allows and causes natural language change to take place. Such is the way language change is always happening. But it takes its time.

A further unfortunate effect in the TIS version of Winkworth's hymn is that the definite article *the,* before *world,* does not prosodically work very well, for it now just fills out the syllable count of the line, but adds nothing to the meaning of the line – it is not good "invisible mending". In clear contrast, either *this world* or *our world* would at least have added additional meaning to the text, as indeed did *his world*, now discarded for inclusivist reason – too much male normativity. Now we may think these are small points, but they do add up. And, just in this way, Winkworth's great hymn is unfortunately beginning to look somewhat defaced.

On turning to the second stanza of Winkworth's hymn, we find considerable change in the whole verse in order to avoid once more the possessive pronoun *his* in line five – male normativity again being the problem to be overcome. The fifth line *and keep us in his grace* has been changed to *Lord, keep us in your grace* – a sudden change from Christian affirmation to Christian petition. This avoids the male normativity

involved in the masculine pronoun *his*, but it does seem, on the face of it, that nothing much has been achieved by the change.

However, something else has been lost. Winkworth's original second stanza is actually one beautiful, sweeping, conjoined sentence: the series of conjunctions *and* – all four of them – could almost appear awkward. (I remember being taught in an English class in late-primary-school days, that we should learn to avoid lots of short sentences joined by *and,* and to learn the use of subordination – very good advice, of course). Well the second stanza could indeed have been awkward, had it not been for the poet's skill in using the conjunction *and* to pile up, simply but with some variety, our different experiences of the fullness of the divine blessing. Quite a bit of this is now lost in TIS, because that long conjoined sentence, which constitutes the second stanza, has now been divided quite clearly into two sections, with the use of *Lord* starting a new sentence, and the effect is that the fullness of blessing which it seeks to call down seems somewhat divided and diminished. It may look like a small change, but it is not quite so.

There is, then, a good deal of change in the second verse, and it actually arises from giving priority to dealing with Winkworth's pronoun, *his*, with its male normativity, in the fifth line of the verse. This is certainly done with significant skill, but at the cost of making considerable change to the tone of the verse. Perhaps the least significant change is that of altering *his* to *your*, in the fifth line, which may seem to be not a particularly big change in itself – we again noted, as in Chapter 3, that pronouns are generally not emphatic, though they may become somewhat more so when they stray onto stressed points in the rhythmic structure of the verse.

Much less acceptable, however, is the change in the seventh line from *ills* to *harm*. It was sometimes said by teachers at school, as I recall, that pairs of synonyms are never exactly so. Well these two are even less so. Firstly, *harm* is a non-count noun, but *ills* is being used as a count noun – it is plural. Of course, *ill* is nearly always an adjective or adverb, which could expose its use as a noun to the charge of archaism, but Winkworth's use of the plural form *ills* does make the nominal use quite clear.[97]

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[97] It is quite normal English for words to move around between verbal, nominal, and adjectival use. Take *tax* – governments *tax* us; we pay our *tax*, though some have *tax* havens. Take *fence* – Farmers *fence* paddocks; they build a *fence*. Some of us are *fence*-sitters. Isn't English marvellous!

The real difference between the two is that, whereas *harm* suggests mainly some visible, material plight, *ills* can suggest an older meaning in addition to this – wickedness. And hence a strangely invisible, even spiritual, plight – Winkworth's use of the word is perceptive, and despite some quite clever work by the revisers, the second stanza in TIS ends up fairly seriously flawed.

Flawed also is the third stanza, but a rather surprising thing here is how the flaws seem to be of a more theological nature than a literary nature. The reason for this seems to lie in the revisers decision to change greatly the good theological work of AHB on the first half of the stanza. It is, of course, not surprising that AHB's *Holy Ghost* is gone; indeed this ancient relic was pretty well doomed to be discarded in the light of TIS's determined set against "older forms of the language" (TIS p. xiii). However, one result is that there is now not enough room for the definite article, *the*, before *Father* or before *Son* in this 67 67 66 66 metre(Six-syllable lines are quite short, even seven-syllable lines can be so, unless there are longer lines also in the verse form being used – as in often-used metres like Common Meter 8686). The result is that, whereas in verse three AHB reads

> All praise and thanks to God
> the Father now be given,
> the Son, and Holy Ghost,
> one Lord in highest heaven,

In *Together in Song* (TIS), this now reads

> All praise and thanks to God
> who reigns in highest heaven,
> to Father and to Son
> and Spirit now be given:

and we actually have a linguistic issue with rather serious theological overtones. The definite article in the AHB version gives a sense of particularity to *the* Father, and *the* Son. But not to **the** Holy Ghost? Not so; it seems reasonable to suggest that the definite article *the*, placed at the beginning of the line, governs both the Son and the Holy Ghost; or alternatively, that there has been an ellipsis before Holy Ghost. Indeed both explanations seem reasonable; and in fact they seem almost to suggest each other.

There is considerable theological significance here. The AHB version is a clear Trinitarian statement: the deeply mysterious three persons, one God. The TIS version tends to hint (unintentionally one assumes) at the theologically flawed idea that there is one God who has, not three persons, but three modes of being and action – a theology which, though plausible at first sight, tends to explain away the mystery of the triune God – a serious theological flaw exposed as **modalism** by the ancient Greek Fathers. Colin Gunton has described the flaw in these terms:

> … This raises the question of what is called modalism: that Father, Son and Spirit are different modes of the one being of God. And the problem with that is that it suggests that the real God is an unknown something lying behind the three agents but not really like any of them.[98]

Theological minds more astute than mine would surely have a lot to say about this. Suffice it for me to say that of course we don't use hymns to teach theology – well only indirectly; we use them for worship; though people certainly do contemplate their hymns and do learn theology from them; so letting hymns drift into dubious theology is not a good idea.

There is, of course, a certain tension here between worship and life, as there seems to be in John Wesley's well-known description in his book "A Collection of Hymns for use of the People Called Methodists", as "a little body of experimental and practical divinity". We need to be careful of those two adjectives, *experimental* and *practical*, for the meaning of both has been quite strongly affected since Wesley's time, by scientific use. For John Wesley, *experimental* could still refer to experience, and *practical* could refer to repeated practice. Wesley seems to be hinting at a similar tension between experience – the experimental, and the practical – the regular practice of worship.

Is this an example of my pettifogging? Well, one small flaw alone is enough to seriously deface a small poem, in this case, a hymn text. And, seemingly from 'second-wave' concern, this is being done to the work of a great 'first-wave' writer. Doubtless, revisers are needed to do their unenviably demanding work, but the TIS revisers do not appear to be at all daunted by the challenge. We need to reflect again on the challenge

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[98] Colin E. Gunton, *Father, Son & Holy Spirit: Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 79.

of hymns, for they are short poems; and I say again, *small flaws can have a big effect on a small text like a hymn.*

A less well-known Winkworth hymn

There is a splendid communion hymn, which has appeared in most, if not all our hymn books, a hymn which I have never used, nor indeed have I heard of it being used, although I, as a fine one-fingered pianist, may have played it once or twice on the piano at home. Catherine Winkworth, however, is a very fine female hymn writer. In our context here, it is fitting that a less well-known example of her work is next discussed.

Winkworth's hymn "Deck thyself, my soul, with gladness" hides itself away in every hymn book I can find – unsung as far as I can tell, except perhaps by Anglicans. Well, at least I had never sung it, chosen it, nor heard of it being sung, until the quite recent blessed day on which our organist, Peter Kelsall, brought it out for our monthly communion service at 11 am, where it "bowled me over". Anyway here is the hymn, as CP 295 gives it, with four verses. AHB 424 gives us just three verses, omitting CP's second verse, but leaving the rest unchanged. However, in order to facilitate a little discussion, I have followed AHB in capitalising the first letter of the first four lines of CP's third verse – it makes rather more clear the personification of *Sun*, *Light*, *Joy* and *Fount*, of which more below:

> Deck thyself, my soul, with gladness,
> leave thy gloomy haunts of sadness,
> come into the daylight's splendour,
> there with joy thy praises render
> unto him whose grace unbounded
> hath this wondrous banquet founded:
> high o'er all the heavens he reigneth,
> yet to dwell with thee he deigneth.
>
> Now I sink before thee lowly,
> filled with joy most deep and holy,
> as with trembling awe and wonder
> on thy mighty works I ponder:
> how, by mystery surrounded,
> depth no mortal ever sounded,

none may dare to pierce unbidden

secrets that with thee are hidden.

Sun, who all my life dost brighten,

Light, who dost my soul enlighten,

Joy, the sweetest man e'er knoweth,

Fount, whence all my being floweth:

at thy feet I cry, my Maker,

let me be a fit partaker

of this blessed food from heaven,

for thy good, thy glory, given.

Jesus, Bread of Life, I pray thee,

let me gladly here obey thee;

never to my hurt invited,

be thy love with love requited:

from this banquet let me measure,

Lord, how vast and deep its treasure;

through the gifts thou here dost give me,

as thy guest in heaven receive me.

There are a few points of difference between the CP and the AHB texts. Of course the most obvious is that AHB omits the second verse of Winkworth's text – a great pity, because this verse gives expression to a worshipful stillness, the *deep and holy*, a stillness which brings together the awesome and the joyful – an experience rare but beautiful. Readers might find the expression *sink before thee* a little strange at first: it is actually the same shade of meaning as in a saying like "the sun **sinks** in the west". Just so, just sometimes, do all our pretentions **sink** into the *deep and holy*. Well might we wonder why the AHB revisers have omitted this stanza. There is on AHB's side my 24-line rule in AHB's favour, but this is truly a very singable piece of music, as well as being splendid verse, so that CP's extra stanza is quite likely to be reasonably acceptable.

Perhaps somewhat more controversial is the change in the next verse, where in Winkworth's third line, *Joy, the sweetest man e'er knoweth*, the word *man* is changed, in CP, to *heart.* So the line now reads *Joy, the sweetest heart e'er knoweth*. Now this is

very clever; there is no attempt to find a synonym for *man*: the revisers rewrite the line so that now its meaning is something like 'Joy, the sweetest human heart can know' (but now there would be too many syllables, of course). Thus it is a good example of CP changing the word, as it wishes to do for inclusivist reasons, but, in the process, failing to match the tone of the line. In other words, it is a good example of CP's concern to make 'invisible mending' when a line is being altered. However, the singer needs to be a careful reader here to pick up on this change, despite it being quite cleverly done. Of course it does dispose of "generic *man*", the term, as I seem to recall, which earlier inclusivists used to refer to the male word being used for the species as a whole. Notwithstanding this, later inclusivist thought now seems to describe this more as "masculine normativity" – the undesirability of the masculine being treated as the measure of "normal".

Nevertheless it should be noted that the change from *man* to *heart* does make the line somewhat more difficult to read, in comparison with Winkworth's original line. It also prompts the question, do we actually know with our heart? Well I do remember being told at primary school that we had to learn our multiplication tables "off by heart"; and indeed biblical writers can talk of knowing God, or even of knowing something else, with the heart. However, it seems that they very rarely put the two together.[99] In fact it seems quite possible that we only find this new third line straight-forward to read if we already know the line as Winkworth actually wrote it. This does make the change of *man* to *heart* seem a little strange – just a bit tricky to read. Some might just prefer the ease of the original line, for it actually has a clear use of the generic *man* – with no determiner (which we considered in Chapter 3).

Another small but interesting difference which may be found between the two texts is in their use of capitalising. Of course both hymnals have abandoned the older practice of capitalising the first letter of each poetic line, now only maintaining it for the beginning of each stanza, or when the grammar demands it. However, the beginning of each line is capitalised in the first four lines of AHB's second stanza (CP's third stanza). This seems to be the deliberate intention of the AHB editors, perhaps a certain deliberate meaning-making, which seeks to emphasise and clarify Winkworth's

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[99] In the AV, Jeremiah 24:7 gives us "I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord", but the RSV gives "I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord."

own meaning. The capitalising gives a quasi-divine quality to *Sun*, *Light*, *Joy*, and *Fount*, which, in this respect is similar to its treatment – in both texts – of the metaphors *Maker*, *Bread of Life*, and, of course, *Lord,* which are capitalised. That this is Winkworth's intention seems clear from the use of the personal relative *who* (NB not *which*, nor *that,* but *who* – marked for person) in the first two lines of the verse, *Sun who …* and *Light who …* and though the personal relative is not used in the next two lines of the verse – it would be unnecessarily dull repetition – it remains clearly implied: *Joy, the sweetest …* and *Fount, whence all …* This is a splendid verse which Winkworth achieves with considerable prosodic skill.

The final verse of the hymn, unchanged in both CP and AHB, seems to have a direct simplicity that rounds off the hymn. And nor is it at fault for this. There is a certain ambiguity about the invitation to the "banquet" in the third and fourth lines, *never to my hurt invited/ be thy love with love requited*. Do the lines mean that I somehow invite the loving Christ to heal my hurt, though I never adequately return the love? Or do the lines mean that I never truly invite the Christ into my very being, and this is to my hurt? Or indeed a third possible reading could be that Christ's love invites me, without risk of hurt or disappointment, to return his love. We would not be wrong to see in this a certain literary irony: the three readings, all different, seem to be possible, and the irony makes mysterious a verse that might otherwise have erred on the side of easy simplicity. There is great richness in Winkworth's writing here.

Perhaps the main reason for this hymn's apparent neglect in worship, at least in the Uniting Church as it seems to myself, is that on the page it looks just a bit big and daunting – despite the fact that, at least in AHB, its three stanzas fit my fairly tight twenty-four-line rule. The German enjoyment of big verses perhaps matches ill with our own history, of mainly quatrains, for hymn texts – at least in our earlier Protestant history. However, we are reminded, on hearing the tune, of the use of repetition in German hymn tunes, which, as mentioned in the discussion of our metrical Psalms in Chapter 3, helps the not-very-musical singer.

The magnificent music of this hymn has a good deal of repetition. The verse is constructed with four rhyming couplets (*aabbccdd*) and the melody of the first couplet is repeated in full for the second couplet. The melody of the first line of the third

couplet contains a most emphatic piece of syncopation, which is an absolute delight, and is repeated in full, as we have noted above, for the second line of the couplet, so that the sung couplet is a superb climax to the whole stanza. The fourth couplet is new melodic material for both lines, but there seems to be very appropriate repetition of harmonic and melodic patterns from the first couplet, and it brings the melody to a satisfying conclusion. The result is a melody which lifts the text, and the worshipping human spirit, not less than skywards.

Influence of music on a text

In the section above we have hazarded a guess that the writer of a hymn text, as a translation of an earlier hymn text into a different language, could also be influenced by the original music setting, especially if it was intended that this should continue to be used. It seemed reasonable to suggest that Catherine Winkworth had this melody in mind as she worked on her English text; and that the splendour of her text, with its highly emphatic third couplet in each stanza, owes something to the influence of the music on the author at this point. In the third couplet of the stanza, at the very least, it feels as if she is writing her verse to the music.

One aspect of this influence is a necessary one, actually forced on Winkworth by the trochaic metre of the text: a *trochee* is a strong/weak poetic foot, in contrast with the weak/strong foot of the common English *iambic*, and each line of the text consists of four trochees. A significant result of this is that the poetic line always ends on a weak syllable, so that Winkworth is forced to use two-syllable rhymes. This is not particularly easy to do in English verse, but she carries it off with elegance – there is not any feeling that this form has been "forced on the poet, like it or not". In two couplets in the third stanza, Winkworth is able to achieve a trochee with a monosyllabic verb followed by a pronoun, and this is quite useful in this stanza. Indeed Winkworth's work deserves an even closer reading at this point.

More close reading of Winkworth's text

One of the advantages of having the OED on hand is that it sometimes saves scholars from making fools of themselves by using linguistic guesswork. Or at least, so it was for myself with the first word in Winkworth's text – *Deck*. I hear the word sometimes: my wife occasionally tells me she will be getting "decked out" to go to a special function

with friends. I had long assumed that the verb *deck* was a folk corruption of the Latinate *decorate*. But any similarity to the Latin word seems to be the result of pure coincidence: the OED tells us that the word, meaning something like "cover attractively" actually comes from late medieval Dutch.[100] I understand that linguists consider both Dutch and English as West Germanic languages, and hence we may expect some family similarity. This may explain why *deck* perhaps feels to us rather more ancient and English than it actually is – but, of course, it is a matter of the feeling of a word being that which concerns a poet. As a noun the word is also used for part of a ship where people might gather, and indeed for *decking* outside a house. And as a verb? Well, at Christmas we might think to "Deck the hall with boughs of holly" – especially if we are English and snowed in, or have tinsel and cotton wool for fake snow, if we are Down Under.

So *deck* is now a beautiful, strong English word, and as a general rule, it is all these associations which make the word so. And there it is in Winkworth's hymn: *Deck, thyself, my soul, with gladness*, in emphatic initial position in the first line. In fact in the first three lines the verbs are treated in the same way for a striking opening to the poem: *Deck ... leave ... come ...* And the literary fancy of having the singer address his or her own soul – *Deck thyself, my soul* – is quite engaging.

For the remaining five lines of the first verse, the verbs are now placed at the most emphatic part of the line – the line ending, of course. There they are: *render*, *unbounded*, *founded*, *reigneth*, deigneth. Furthermore the pattern of the verb, in terminal position in the line, continues right through to the end of the hymn. It is a very demanding pattern for it requires verbs which end with an unstressed syllable to achieve the two-syllable rhyme. Of course *unbounded* does not quite follow the verb pattern: it is actually a participial adjective – an adjective formed, OED informs us, from the non-finite part of a verb. But the effect of the verbs at the end of each of these five lines is to reinforce the *joyful render* of praise for the *grace unbounded*, the *wondrous*

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[100] The OED has many definitions of the noun which follows the basic meaning of *covering*: roof or floor, platform etc. Dr Maarten Ryder, a brilliant microbiologist and musician who composes the music for my hymn texts, was born of Dutch parents in Sydney a few years after the end of the war, so that Maarten ended up with two first languages, Dutch and English. He did a little research of the Dutch background for me, noting that the Dutch verb, *dekken* "is still in use in Dutch, meaning "to cover". The OED notes that the nautical sense of the noun "appears to be an English development". It is interesting to see that the meaning of the verb is given by the OED as "Cover or clothe in a rich or ornamental style; array, adorn. Frequently followed by *out.*" My wife's usage, *decked out*, a bit trendy as I did think of it, is actually already in use in the early sixteenth century.

banquet, and the incarnation – of the one who *reigneth high o'er all*, yet *deigneth to dwell* with us. It is a splendid introductory verse for a communion hymn; and not to be overlooked is the great music to which it is sung.

The second stanza changes our attention more fully to the divine, though God is not addressed straightforwardly by name, but by symbolic names which begin each of the first four lines – *Sun*, *Light*, *Joy*, and *Fount*. This structure imitates, almost parallels, the four-line structure of the first half of the first verse. It is at its most arresting in the second line of each verse: *Light, who dost my soul enlighten* in the second stanza is a good antithetic parallelism with *leave the gloomy haunts of sadness* in the first stanza. It is, perhaps, not stretching the point too far to see a hint of parallelism between *Sun who all my life dost brighten*, in the second stanza, and *Deck thyself, my soul, with gladness*, in the first. We may even see some parallelism between the couplets formed with the third and the fourth lines of the stanzas: *Joy the sweetest man e'er knoweth/Fount whence all my being floweth*, in the second stanza, and in the first stanza, *come into the daylight's splendour/there with joy thy praises render*. Am I pushing the parallelism issue too far? Perhaps just a little. But the antithetic parallelism between the second lines of the two stanzas is quite clear, and the very observation of this does tend to sharpen the reader's eyes to look at the other lines, and perhaps to observe some further hints of such.

The second stanza continues the device of placing the verb at the end of the poetic line. It is a difficult thing to do this continually, especially since the trochaic foot requires a weakly-stressed syllable at the end of the poetic line – and a two-syllable rhyme. However, after the success of the pattern in the first stanza, Winkworth seems loath to abandon the pattern. Of course we note that the rhyming *Maker* and *partaker* are nouns – but they are formed from verbs, by using the unstressed *-er* suffix to form the agent of the verb, so that any break of the pattern of the line ending finishing with a verb is barely noticeable. The noun *heaven* at the end of the seventh line is a more obvious break of the pattern of ending lines with verbs, but – well –*given*, at the end of the eighth line, is a somewhat difficult word to rhyme. Give Winkworth a break.

The third stanza splendidly maintains the device of ending each line with a verb, although using in the first couplet, as we have seen above, a trochee composed of a verb followed by a personal pronoun – *pray thee*/*obey thee* – which maintains the

force of the verb at the end of the line. This also happens in the fourth couplet in which we find the rhyme – *give me*/*receive me*.

There is, of course, something of an issue for moderns with the use of *measure* in the third stanza, seemingly as a rhyme for *treasure*:

> from this banquet let me measure,
>
> Lord, how vast and deep its treasure;

In our time, moderns tend to think immediately of our technical meaning of *measure,* which tends to have taken over from other possible meanings; thus, they find the couplet somewhat strange. However, the OED has nothing of the kind, providing among several available meanings of *measure*, "estimate the amount, duration, value, etc. (of an immaterial thing)", which admirably fits the context here – though in our theological context, we would probably prefer *ineffable* to *immaterial*.

In Together in Song *(TIS) – A new text for Winkworth's hymn*

Catherine Winkworth's hymn is a beautifully-controlled text, coupled with the splendid musical setting of Johann Cruger two centuries earlier – later arranged by Johann Sebastian Bach. Johann Franck's German text, of roughly the same age, has nine stanzas which were later reduced to six and were followed as such in Winkworth's text. Later she reduced her hymn to four stanzas – which are followed by CP – and eventually to three stanzas which is the text followed by AHB.[101]

It is of interest to us to compare the AHB text with that of David Arthur Schubert in TIS. Although copyright is claimed in TIS for Schubert's work as a "translation" – presumably of Franck's German text, his work is also described in TIS as a "revision" of Winkworth's text – presumably of her original text, for there are six stanzas in Schubert's text. In order to help with some comparison I have tried to use here just the three verses of his text which correspond with the AHB text. However, I note below, in smaller font, the three extra stanzas found in Schubert's text.

> Robe yourself, my soul, in gladness,
>
> leave sin's gloomy den of sadness,
>
> come where God in light is waiting,

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[101] Milgate, *Songs of the People of God*, 163.

come, begin the celebrating!
For the Lord brings me salvation,
issues me his invitation;
God most holy comes to win me,
comes from heaven to live within me.

Quickly let me go to meet him,
like a bride run out to greet him
With his grace he stands there knocking;
let me now, my doors unlocking,
open wide the way before him,
say to him, as I adore him:
Come, dear Lord, let me receive you,
do not let me ever leave you.

how I hunger, loving Saviour,
for your goodness and your favour!
Often has my heart been burning;
for this food have I been yearning,
often thirsting for refreshing
in this cup of life and blessing,
given by him who here invites us,
and to God himself unites us.

All our thinking, as we ponder,
cannot comprehend this wonder,
that this living bread is boundless,
though the people fed are countless,
and that Christ his blood is giving
with the wine we are receiving
What a mystery of God's planning,
past all human understanding!

Jesus, sun of life, my splendour
Jesus, joy, and friend most tender,
Jesus, source of all my being,
all my thoughts and actions seeing:
at your feet I fall before you;
make me worthy to enjoy you
in this feast that you have given
as my food, the food from heaven.

Jesus, bread of life, I pray you,

let me cheerfully obey you,

and accept your invitation

for my good, not condemnation.

Let me eat this supper, knowing

what great love, Lord, you are showing.

Now on earth these gifts you give me,

as thy guest in heaven receive me.

When one first looks at this version of the text, it is difficult not to feel some disappointment with the very first word in Schubert's text. We immediately feel that somehow Winkworth's *Deck* is a more satisfying opening than Schubert's *Robe* as a verb; and there is good reason for this: *Robe* suggests something of formal attire, while *Deck* seems to suggest getting dressed for an occasion of some delight. I prefer *Deck* for a communion celebration, though some may prefer the more formal tone of *Robe*, which certainly could suggest a deeply significant meeting. What is admirable is how, in the first stanza, Schubert follows Winkworth's emphatic use of verbs at the beginning of most lines.

As a hymn text, a fairly second-rate work

Unfortunately this tone is not continued in other aspects of Schubert's opening verse, and there are several reasons for this. For a start, his second line, with *sin's gloomy den*, suggests something like a smoke-filled interior with seedy-looking individuals therein. It is not really wrong, but it is unavoidably conventional. It is simply not comparable with Winkworth's *gloomy haunts*, which lure the singer into his or her own contemplation of the human condition, of the deep strangeness of sadness, and, though more hinted at than stated, of sin.

It is interesting that Schubert, following Winkworth, begins the first three lines of his hymn with verbs; and the repeated use of *come* in the fourth line of the stanza should be quite strong. Instead there is quite a sense of let-down: *come, begin the celebrating* seems to be written thus in order to make the rhyme. Why do we think this? Perhaps because *begin* should be the emphatic word, but it is hidden away, placed in unemphatic position in the line – we must remember that a rhyming scheme

is a system of emphasis – and *celebrating* does not take the amount of emphasis that its position in the line demands; *celebration* might be better, but that would spoil the rhyme, which is probably the main reason for the word – not, of course, a good main reason.

For a different reason, noticeably flawed also is the sixth line, *issues me his invitation*. The problem here is the use of *issues* as a verb. While it is fine to say blood *issues* from a wound, it would not, I fancy, actually seem altogether proper to *issue invitations* to a party or a dinner. Why not? Because this kind of usage often seems to be confined to conventionally formal legal or business functions, and to use it for God or Christ seems to be of somewhat dubious propriety. Furthermore the last two lines of the verse are certainly of theologically dubious propriety:

> God most holy comes to win me,
> comes from heaven to live within me.

The Winkworth hymn makes of this couplet a clear reference to the Incarnation; the Schubert text fails in this respect, despite, as we see soon, its good considerable interest in the figure of Jesus.

Although Winkworth's second stanza is omitted by AHB and CP, Schubert, in his full six-verse text, seems to have used it for the second verse of his own text, and it demands some attention at this point – particularly the first two lines:

> Quickly let me go to meet him,
> Like a bride run out to greet him.

Now there may well be a nice hint intended here of the church as the bride of Christ; there is perhaps an attempted allusion to the Song of Songs. But how many people have actually seen a bride *run out*? Wearing all that costume? Not many. Seriously, however, I hope this is not trite nitpicking. This seemingly minor flaw means that the metaphor, *like a bride,* does not actually work here. Of course, one might even read lines such as these in a book of poetry, and not notice the flaw, might perhaps even think well of a faulty metaphor. But the observant, thoughtful reader would notice such a flaw here, and, if he or she were a bit naughty, might even make fun of it. Even more so, I fear, is it with this couplet in verse three,

> Often has my heart been burning;
>
> For this food have I been yearning.

where the real effectiveness of the rhyming tends to show up and emphasise the relative weakness of the first few words of each line, despite experimenting with departure from normal word order. *Heart ... burning* sounds a bit like the conventions of cheap popular fiction. The verse is actually somewhat botched. There is a certain skill here in making the rhyming scheme work, but it seems to result in a certain naivety in the text, as if making a rhyme was all that had to be achieved. This hymn text suffers fairly badly in comparison with Winkworth's text.

Effects of hymn books and communal song – singing and pronunciation

A further point to be noticed in all this is that actually singing verse together, word by word, has an effect on the singers' experience of the language – especially for a hymn that is used quite often; and there are reasons for this. Communal singing, especially hymn singing, seems to make for rather more attentive reading. Apart from the serious situation of worship, and the emotional effect of the music, singing often causes the words to go past more slowly than with normal speech; and so they can be noticed with a little more attention, and such happens when singing a hymn. Furthermore people have hymn books, and hymns are likely to be glanced at, for a quiet browse before the service begins – even by those reluctant to sing, for whatever reason. A consequence of this is that the text of a hymn needs to be considered with great care before inclusion in a hymnal.

Other significant effects are also observed. In normal English speech, about thirty or forty common words are frequently contracted to weaker forms – not fully pronounced when they are non-stressed. This happens with some pronouns: for example *it* becomes *uht*, (I am using *uh* for the unstressed central vowel which linguists represent with ə) *them* becomes *thuhm*, *you* becomes *yuh*. It also happens with auxiliary verbs: *was* becomes *wuhz*, *were* becomes *wuh*, *have* becomes *huhv*, sometimes *uhv*, the infinitive marker *to* becomes *tuh*. This also seems to happen, though less often, with some other parts of speech. It is all part of the magnificent insanity of English – as it sometimes must seem to migrants, or to kids learning to write. However, actual singing changes this largely unconscious contraction of words, and because singing tends to slow the speed of language, at least in hymns, our voice

production of these kinds of words tends to bring them back towards their fuller, uncontracted form (which is also how we write them). All this adds up to hymn singing concentrating rather more of our attention on the language being sung than we might at first realise. We should note the advice of Charles Sherlock:

> In our visual, hyperactive age, I am convinced that words matter all the more – and that understanding how they work is crucial to receiving their content.[102]

This should be a great comfort and encouragement to hymn authors – but also a warning against ill-thought-out work. It brings me back to my research question: What makes a good hymn text? And it brings us back to those two points which are being tested here: firstly, a good hymn text brings its singers into the world of the Bible, and secondly, it requires a language of otherness. It seems fair to say that while Schubert brings to his hymn a good feeling of the atmosphere of the scriptures, he fails to achieve a successful language of otherness, perhaps a language for the holy. This seems to be, perhaps, because he is also anxious to create a hymn language which is quite simple to read, even a bit "catchy" for younger folk. Schubert is not alone in this; modern hymnody is littered with verse of this kind – simple to read but light on meaning. It is quite a contrast with our two criteria of the world of the Bible and a language for otherness.

It is also important to assert something like a third criterion – but somewhat different: the responsibility to use inclusive language. There is much anger and pain involved in this issue, as is well known, and we need to be clear about it. Language that leaves some people estranged from the fellowship of the church at worship is a pretty serious matter, and points to a serious pastoral concern. Our first two criteria are poetic criteria, the next is a general language criterion, which should cover all language use, and certainly hymn, for we expect people to sing communal song themselves, and hopefully not just to listen to it.

To return to Schubert's text, to which we have been giving consideration; it is written, then, for communal song – hymn singing – and this practice makes words more noticeable, even memorable in a sing-song kind of way; and may even be successful – for a season. However, the warning is that flawed work will eventually be seen for what

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[102] Charles Sherlock, *Words and the Word* (Preston, Aust: Mosaic Press, 2013), 161.

it is – and a badly written text will eventually run dry, while the fine text may last and last. The church, in general, has a good deal of responsibility for its response to new hymnody.

Churches need hymns that will last and last

Of course it is also important to stress again that the question here is not one of whether a text is an accurate translation of a great German hymn. The significant question is of whether or not the text in question is now a good hymn in English – a good hymn for English speakers to use for worship, *a hymn that will last and last*. We have to say that this is really doubtful for Schubert's text. There is also an insightful comment from the CP editors:

> There are many examples of contemporary hymns; but there are also many hymns from previous ages which are contemporary because they are timeless.[103]

They last and last. And this again indicates something of the CP editors' concern to accept older hymns that they expect may last and last. Their metaphor of 'invisible mending', mentioned above, seems a good description of the task of those who would mend hymn texts in order to get hymns which might last and last.

If we must change the text of a good hymn, and TIS is doing much of this, then the replacement phrase or two of replacement text must merge carefully with the general tone of the hymn as a whole. Such mending of a text should be, as the CP editors say – and I keep harping on this – "invisible mending"; and it requires poetic hymn writing skill. It is not a practice for poetic novices. Of course, all hymn writers start as novices, but that is a stage we need to go well beyond, before we start mending the work of great hymn writers.

We skip a verse to return to Schubert's fourth stanza, which seems to correspond with CP's second verse – fairly roughly, though this is not necessarily a fault: a hymn is not scripture, requiring some accuracy in translation. Neither is it a fault that Schubert seems to have received some help from Winkworth with rhyming in this verse; (we have noted that the work is described in TIS as both translation *and revision*). Nor is it a fault that the rhyming words are strongly emphatic – I once heard a rhyming scheme

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[103] Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd., *Common Praise*, viii.

defined in an English lecture by John Harwood as "a pattern of emphasis". I took due note, unforgotten to this day.

Another intriguing comment that Harwood also made, perhaps in the same lecture, was that using rhyming occupies the poet's conscious mind when at work, and thus it can leave the matter of the poem open to the potentially greater subtlety of unconscious inspiration and thought, perhaps achieving unexpected results in a poem, or even, dare I say, a certain "otherness", a beyondness in religious texts like liturgy or hymn.

The fault in Schubert's fourth stanza lies not in the rhyming but in the rest of the line: the language is really not very tight. It is as if the poet has worked out the rhyming words for each line, and then filled up the syllable count with enough words to complete the line. Of course that does sound a bit like a caricature; and indeed this kind of struggle must be what we all face to some extent if we are trying our hand at hymn writing: but rhyming is demanding – both to achieve and to make meaning out of it – as it is for all of us who would write hymn texts, or choose hymn texts for worship. For rhyming is also necessary in communal song: there is, as we have considered more than once, an unspoken, largely unacknowledged, expectation of rhyme among members of a singing community of English speakers, and woe betide the writer who does not satisfy this expectation. It can all lead to T. S. Eliot's "intolerable wrestle with words".[104] Schubert here has satisfied this expectation of rhyme, though not with the brilliance of Winkworth's work. The real fault is that he has failed to make enough meaning, not just of the end rhyme, but of the rest of the line – which is, of course, more easily said than done.

It is good to be able to say that this fault is less true for Schubert's fifth verse (corresponding to CP v.3 and AHB v.2). There is more substance, more "meat", in the lines: there are some nice emphatic touches of anaphora – *Jesus* at the beginning of the first three lines, and the repetition of *food* in the last line of the verse; and through them something of Schubert's passion for his faith is shared with his singing people, centring on Jesus: *sun of life ... joy, and friend ... source of all my being* ... and, although with a touch of redundancy: ... *at your feet ... before you*. I imagine also that Bach's setting of Cruger's melody must be greatly loved among Lutheran people; however, a

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[104] T. S. Eliot, "East Coker" in *Four Quartets* (in various Collected Works)

modernising motive seems to appear in Schubert's verse that simply does not work really well for him in creating a modern hymn text. It may well be that part of Schubert's motive was to create a text of some populist quality, perhaps for treating the hymn melody with a certain "pop" type of musical backing – not necessarily an undesirable aim. I seem to remember from my early days that people have sometimes done this sort of thing with Bach. If this were the case it must be said that Winkworth's text itself would not necessarily forbid such treatment; it is a fine hymn, and for that very reason would be flexible enough to be open to different musical treatments of its melody – that, after all, was what Bach, and others also, seem to have done to a hymn at times. (I understand that Bach would sometimes take over a popular melody for his own musical treatment.) I would not be surprised if Winkworth's text and Cruger's melody were a favourite among Lutheran people in Australia – Winkworth's love of German hymnody became her life's work. God bless her.

"Improving" old texts

Nevertheless something rather strange has happened in *Together in Song* (TIS). How is it that the revisers of AHB have settled for a change from a great text to another in TIS with such significant flaws? For Winkworth's hymn seems to have been changed here beyond all need for clarification that we have encountered above. A possible theological point here may be that Schubert's text, despite its literary flaws, reflects a strong Lutheran emphasis on the presence of Christ himself at his communion feast. Of course this is not altogether missing in Winkworth's text, which, however, may also exhibit some Anglican and Reformed emphases, while perhaps Schubert's text is looking to centre on Christ in a more clearly Lutheran sense. This would be a perfectly good reason for including Lutheran texts in TIS since there are now Lutheran members among the TIS revisers.

However, in TIS the loss of Winkworth's beautifully-written text (and Cruger's music) seems particularly unfortunate –yet Protestants like myself have somehow not missed it. Perhaps it could have been included in a different section of the book with the same music. (There are a number of tunes in TIS which are supplied to more than one text. *Wareham* is a good example – set for three different texts. *Jackson* is another; also set for three texts. This sort of thing is quite common in hymn books.)

Nevertheless we need to ask what other reason seems to have encouraged a desire, perhaps, for a "more up-to-date language style"? This would hardly explain why the text now points largely to the figure of Jesus instead of to the triune God. There are actually quite a number of masculine pronouns in the text, and inclusivist thought, which obviously was very significant at the time among the revisers of TIS, may have been attracted to a version which brings to the centre references to Jesus, who was actually male, so that words like *he*, *him*, and *his*, could be used without giving offence.

Language function of a determiner

The vexed issue of male normativity also appears in Winkworth's lovely line "Joy, the sweetest man e'er knoweth". It is actually a really well-crafted line, but seemingly intolerably male normative. How should it be dealt with? An interesting question appears to be "How do we know that man, the species, is intended here, and not man, a single adult human male?" Or does the reader just surmise this from the context? Modern linguistics can now inform us that there actually is a clear linguistic reason for it: If *man* is preceded by what linguists call a *determiner* – such as *a*, *the*, *some*, *this*, *any*, and a number of other words – then the meaning is "adult male"; but if there is no determiner, *man* means the human species, the human race. In other words we don't have to guess which meaning is intended; the English grammar actually gives it to us. An interesting example is in Job 4:17. Here it is in my copy of the AV:

> Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more
>
> pure than his maker?

Now *mortal* in the first sentence is, of course, an adjective; there is no determiner preceding *man* in the first question, and hence, according to the rule, *man* refers to the species. In the second sentence *man* is preceded by the determiner *a*, with the result that here *a man* means *a human male*. That is how the rule works – and it does so with real clarity. Of course no parent or teacher ever taught us this. We just 'get it' if we are native speakers of the language. However, the science of linguistics breaks it open for us – the collective meaning is indicated by having no preceding determiner.

It is not altogether clear to me exactly why the language works this way. All I can offer is that it seems to be related to the fact that where *man* means the species, the word is being treated as a non-count noun (it needs no counting) so a preceding

determiner is unnecessary. But where *a man* occurs, the article *a* implies a number, hence a count noun, albeit here a count of just one. I'm afraid that is all just my insufficiently informed guess.

We now can also note that this distinction does not work for *men* with the same clarity, for the plural *men* does seem genuinely ambiguous. *Men* can mean something like *people in general* (remember Shakespeare's "there is a tide in the affairs of men") but *men* can also mean *males,* plural; and so it is genuinely ambiguous, and seems worthy of inclusivist attention. For *men* is necessarily always a count noun, for only count nouns can be plural, so that *men*, plural, is always count. So inclusivists are correct to 'give it the *hoy*'. However, for a different example, the noun *mankind* cannot be plural and must be non-count. (We cannot have lots of *mankinds* – or *a mankind*.) So *mankind* unambiguously means the human species. I think it's the best word we have for our kind – for all of us, and we do need a word for the species. Otherwise we are stuck with *humankind*, and I have to admit that I find this increasingly common compound word rather ugly – a dull Latin-English mouthful. I sometimes use *our kind* – it is correct English, and inclusivists might prefer it – but it is not altogether satisfactory.

While we are thinking about word changing, I would like to indicate my use of the somewhat older plural for brothers – *brethren*, which we once used for solemn address, in worship, or perhaps in chairing a meeting. I actually use the phrase "Brethren and Sustren" – yes *sustren* is indeed an old word, (with *u* pronounced as in *put*) and nobody ever asks me about it. Because, of course, they get it – or at least they do if they are native English speakers. "He means sisters." Of course. It is easy to use, and nice for serious, solemn address.

The AV is actually much closer to modern English than it is normally given credit for, and in the above text this is particularly so. The RSV does little more than simply to lay out the above text in lines – as should be done for poetry. It actually varies the wording from the AV only slightly:

> Can mortal man be righteous before God?
> Can a man be more pure than his maker?

This time the first line, which has no determiner before *mortal man*, is clearly about man the species, while the second line, with the determiner *a* before *man*, is just as clearly about the single individual, albeit in general. Male of course? More pure than **his** *maker*? – as the inclusivist might well ask.

The NRSV, which is very particular about these things, would certainly have had something to work on there; and here is their version of the text:

> Can mortals be righteous before God?
> Can human beings be pure before their Maker?

Now opinion is going to vary on this one, so we need to make some clearer observations about this word *man*.

Man – *a potted linguistic history*

Firstly *man* is a very old word indeed. It seems to have come to Britain with the northern European invaders after the Romans left, so in English it is about fifteen hundred years old, and the result is that, despite that long period, and the language change entailed, it is a very old word with considerable resonance in the language, despite fifteen hundred years of language change.

The earliest meaning of *man* includes males, females, children and infants, or as the OED states it, "A human being (formerly explicitly irrespective of sex or age), a person." Unsurprisingly, the use of the word *man* for the species as a whole is also early, and quite inclusive. (The Anglo-Saxon compound *mankind* is much younger – a compound of two very ancient Anglo-Saxon words; it took somewhat longer to appear – sometime in the medieval period well after 1066.)

Returning now to very early first millennium *man*, we find the language also has *wif*, which meant *female*, and continued to do so (though it could also mean *wife*), and *wif* became joined to *man* as *wifman* – literally "female person" – and from this compound we get singular *woman* and plural *women*. And males? Well they were just left with *man*, which continued to mean everybody, the species, but by now was more often used for males, seemingly more or less by accident – eventually males were the only ones left for the word to mean. Language change had left males with the word for the language community as a whole – including themselves, but also including women

and kids. Of course this does not invalidate the present-day concern of inclusivists, but we do need to put language change into some kind of perspective: it is a good example of the general truth that language change just happens, and it is basically uncontrollable and unpredictable. There was never any intention to change the meaning of *man*. It happened by chance, and was unintended. In fact, intention to change language at any time is fraught with difficulty – not necessarily through failure, but through unexpected, uncontrollable results.

Just for a further look, a rather fun look, at language change, let us note the word *bloke*. My Shorter OED is remarkably terse with it. "Colloquial" – that is about all it says. My understanding is that *bloke* is considered a loan word from the Gypsies, who were thought at first to have come into Europe from Egypt, as the name *gypsy* seems to imply. If this is the case one would doubtless imagine that English workers probably picked up the word *bloke* and rather enjoyed it, perhaps in a teasing, fun-making way with each other. And soon, it would seem, lots of English blokes must have been using it of each other, and perhaps of themselves, probably to the disapproval of the higher classes, who eventually came to use it themselves anyway – perhaps at first, to mock the lower classes. But language change is like that: it is usually unnoticed at first, sometimes offensive –like the deplorable slang of our sons and daughters, which we somehow find ourselves taking up in fun – to our undoubted shame, of course.

In fact, as we have noted above, language change is a largely unconscious, unplanned, and unpredictable process – and we find it so with *man* which has been around for many centuries. We only understand language change in retrospect – and if we try to plan it, we are very likely to fail. None of this is intended to circumvent the real questions that concerned inclusivists have of the effects of certain aspects of present-day English, but again, it puts them into perspective, and it raises questions of how such issues might be approached.

Social change reflected in language change

Randolph Quirk and Sidney Greenbaum make a rather delightful comment in regard to language change:

> All societies are constantly changing their languages with the result that there
> are always coexistent forms, the one relatively new, the other relatively old; and

> some members of a society will be temperamentally disposed to use the new
> (perhaps by their youth) while others are comparably inclined to the old
> (perhaps by their age). But many of us will not be consistent either in our choice
> or in our temperamental disposition. Perhaps English may give rise to such
> fluctuation more than some other languages because of its patently mixed
> nature: a basic Germanic wordstock, stress pattern, word-formation, inflection
> and syntax overlaid with a classical and Romance wordstock, stress pattern,
> word-formation – and even inflection and syntax.[105]

In fact basically our beloved language is a bit of a shambles, though my earlier remark about its "magnificent insanity" is spoken with fair-dinkum love. The reference to Romance languages refers, of course, to those languages which developed from Latin after the collapse of the Roman Empire – especially, from the English viewpoint, French, but also, among others, Spanish, and Italian, whose influence on English has also been considerable. Yes. Our language is a shambles, a beautiful shambles, and don't I love it.

Should Bridges' hymn be revised?

Near the end of Chapter 2, I observed Robert Bridges' hymn, "All my hope on God is founded" and noted something of its Psalmic quality – of faith's awareness of the human condition under God, and faith's confidence in the greatness of God. We noted also some favourable elements of Bridges' achievement, but ignored the alterations made by TIS. It is now time to address these alterations. I have given below what I take to be Bridges' original text in the left-hand column, with the revised text in TIS on the right-hand column, so readers can more easily observe changes made in the TIS version.

All my hope on God is founded;	All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.	all my trust he will renew,
Me through change and chance he guideth,	through all change and chance he guides me,
only good and only true.	only good and only true.
God unknown,	God unknown,
he alone	he alone
calls my heart to be his own.	calls my heart to be his own.

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[105] Randolph Quirk and Sidney Greenbaum, *A University Grammar of English* (Harlow, Essex, England: Longman 1973), 9.

Pride of man and earthly glory,	Human pride and earthly glory,
Sword and crown betray his trust	sword and crown betray our trust;
what with care and toil he buildeth,	all we build with care and labour,
tower and temple, fall to dust.	tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power,	But God's power,
hour by hour,	hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.	Is my temple and my tower.
God's great goodness aye endureth,	God's great goodness lasts for ever,
deep his wisdom, passing thought:	deep his wisdom, passing thought;
splendour, light, and life attend him,	splendour, light, and life attend him,
beauty springeth out of naught.	beauty springing out of naught.
Evermore	Evermore
from his store	from his store
newborn worlds rise and adore.	newborn worlds rise and adore.
Daily doth th' Almighty giver	Daily the almighty giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow;	will his bounteous gifts bestow;
his desire our soul delighteth,	in his will our souls find pleasure,
pleasure leads us where we go.	leading us where'er we go.
Love doth stand	Love will stand
at his hand;	at his hand
joy doth wait on his command.	joy shall wait for his command.
Still from man to God eternal	Still from earth to God eternal
Sacrifice of praise be done,	sacrifice of praise be done,
High above all praises praising	high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.	for the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call	Hear Christ call
one and all:	one and all:
ye who follow shall not fall.	those who follow shall not fall.

Now there are copious alterations to this hymn, but firstly let us focus on the tense of the verbs. We must notice that the commonest tense of the verbs in the original text is the simple present tense (marked with the -s ending for a third person singular subject, but no distinctive ending for a plural subject). Strictly speaking this is not really a tense at all: our so-called simple present tense suggests not so much time, as habitual action. For example, these two statements "My wife, Denise Griffen,

meditates in the study" and "People meditate (no -*s* ending) in the church" both mean habitual action, not a particular time. If we do want a sense of present time, we usually have to use adverbs of time or our present continuous verb with -*ing* ending and auxiliary verb *to be*. For example: "Denise *is meditating* in the study" implies present time, and ongoing action.

Mind you, it wouldn't be English without exceptions to a rule: if you go into an Australian pub, and overhear a bloke 'spinning a yarn', it will all be in the simple present tense with – *s* or *es* ending on the singular verb: "This bloke go<u>es</u> into the bar, and he tap<u>s</u> his finger on the bench, and he look<u>s</u> the barman in the eye, and he say<u>s</u> to him ... etc. ... etc.". And if it is Saturday arvo, and the radio happens to be on, to pick up the footy or the races, there it is in plenty in the expert commentary – with our simple present tense in all its magnificence: "... and Fiddlesticks increas<u>es</u> his speed, and he shrug<u>s</u> off the opposition, move<u>s</u> up, lead<u>s</u> the field down the straight, and win<u>s</u> by a good four lengths." And there again are all those –s endings for the simple present tense – this time real simple present – as it is happening. A splendid English teacher in my impressionable early youth once described it to us as the "historic present". The term seems not to be around anymore – linguists would probably consider it inaccurate, or maybe my teacher's own invention. But I do like it – a nice flash of memory of Mr McCarthy, a really good English teacher – in my twelve-year-old's opinion, which has not changed over a good few years. I mean that teacher taught me that year, aged twelve, to love Shakespeare.

Much was noted about Bridges' text of "All my hope on God is founded" in Chapter 2, but a few more general remarks now seem apposite. Firstly, what is also important in Bridges' original text is the significance of tense. Let us notice in the original that, without exception in all but the last stanza, the verbs are in the simple present tense, with its strong sense of habitual action – except that for God we would prefer to say, that his purposes are reliable rather than habitual. However, that is just a matter of tone and terminology; but in Bridges' text it is a tone of utter dependence upon the reliable goodness of God. It is a feature of the hymn's Psalmic quality – which is part of the literary world of the Bible which the singer is entering, with a language of otherness – or might we say holiness.

Also of Psalmic quality is the second stanza with its sense of the utter serious-ness of the human condition before God, of all *pride of man* (no determiner there) *and earthly glory* that ultimately, *fall to dust* – simple present tense. For Bridges, it's happening now. In the fifth stanza the sense of the divine reliability, continues: although the verb *be done* in the second line seems to be an imperative or perhaps a subjunctive; the simple present tense indicative reasserts itself with the verbs *doth call* and *follow*. The point to be made here is that in the very last line of the final stanza, after all has been said of the divine dependability, the change, in the very last line, to the future tense *shall not fall* is sudden, striking, and particularly strong. It brings enormous emphasis to the last line of the hymn, and makes for a most powerful conclusion: *ye who follow shall not fall*. We shall see below, that bringing in the future tense earlier in the hymn – as the revisers have done – tends to weaken this last line. Anyway a page or so above are both the original and TIS's revised version of Bridges' hymn.

We have seen already that TIS shows a quite marked distaste for the old-fashioned word – occasionally described by some as archaic, and that not always accurately, especially when it is used for words which are actually just vaguely a bit unusual. Certainly the auxiliary *doth*, with its *-th* ending, seems definitely "archaic" by Bridges' time, as noted in Chapter 3, but it is a case in point. It is actually used five times in Bridges' text, which in itself makes for enough repetitions for people who don't know the word to 'have a stab at it' (an expression my mother used when we were learning to read) and they would surely just about get it right. This is something which native English speakers, faced with a huge vocabulary, do all the time, especially when they are children listening to speech, for such have considerable language acquisition skills – quite amazing, actually. David Crystal entertainingly puts it thus:

> From the time when parents listen out eagerly for their child's first word to the
> time when they plead for peace and quiet is a matter of only three or four years
> – and in that time children master the grammar of the language to an extent
> which would be the envy of any foreign learner. It is impossible to quantify such
> matters in any sensible way, but most children, when they attend their first

school, give the impression of having assimilated at least three quarters of the grammar there is to learn.[106]

This rate of language achievement tails off over just a very few years, but primary school kids would have this word *doth* sorted out in no time. Parents might take a little longer – if they don't already know the word. The point is that language acquisition by children, especially young children, is a much more flexible skill than is assumed in our thinking about it. And though it slows down drastically, perhaps it never quite leaves us. We can always 'have a stab' at a strange new word, disobeying, of course, English teachers who have told us to "use a dictionary" – quite rightly, of course; it's their job.

Nevertheless the TIS revisers take it to be part of their task of modernising the language to deal with unfashionable old words, such as the unwanted *doth.* However, for a start, we should notice that what is not adequate is simply to change to the modern *does;* for the modern word is by no means an exact synonym for the older form. The new form, *does*, in today's English is actually subject to some fairly clear restrictions: it is generally restricted to negatives (She *doesn't* work), and to questions (*Does* she work?), though in general statements it can actually be used for strong emphasis (She *does* like to work!). Unless some degree of emphasis is required, it seems that *does* is not able to be used as an alternative method of forming the present tense in the way that Bridges uses *doth;* in verse one *doth renew*, and in verse four *doth stand* and *doth wait* (and indeed *doth ... bestow,* which is broken in two by nearly two lines of text!). The TIS revisers have obviously discerned that a simple change from *doth* to *does* is not going to work well. It could be something like unnecessary emphasising of all those verbs. The TIS revisers need another strategy to deal with unwanted *doth*.

One strategy that the TIS revisers employ is to substitute *will* (or *shall* in verse four) for *doth*, thereby avoiding the difficulty. However, this causes considerable changes of meaning. For it clearly changes the time reference of the text from simple present to future, and unfortunately this only creates another damaging effect: it introduces future tense into the hymn much earlier than Bridges' desires. This use of future tense now occurs at several points, so that Bridges' arresting device, of

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[106]David Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of the English Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 28.

withholding the future tense till the very last line, loses much of its dramatic force. And loss of dramatic force is a considerable loss. ***For in poetry, feelings are meanings, as much as facts are meanings***. And so, we must remind ourselves in our times, are feelings of exclusion. (There seems no doubt that there are aspects of English language which leave women feeling excluded by some wordings in the church's worship.)

Other more far-reaching changes are also apparent. Discussion in previous chapters has shown how departure from normal word order can heighten emphasis in a poem, and Bridges uses this effect a good deal: in the first stanza the first three lines are independent clauses with the verb placed at the end of the line, and it constitutes a very strong beginning of the hymn. Hymn poets do this sort of thing.

What seems to be something of a key to a good critical approach to this hymn is the centrality of a tension between our time and God's eternity. It is there in the background all the time, and Bridges hints at it with his deliberate choice of what sounds like a somewhat older diction – he wouldn't normally talk like this, nor perhaps even normally write like this, but he fashions a distinctive language for the hymn by taking a single word and actually using it with one or two others to form something new, something like tight but comprehensible thought packets, which are echoed in the syntax. In Chapter 2, we noted tight phrases like *passing thought*, *bounteous gifts*, or pairs of nouns or pairs of verbs connected with *and*. We saw hints of this in Chapter 2, and now also tight phrases and half lines like *care and toil*, like *love doth stand*, that feed what I call the tension between our time and God's eternity, yet remain comprehensible, but somehow new, to Bridges' singing people.

All of this makes a reviser's work rather demanding. One can sympathise with the pressure for change that the TIS revisers must have felt, but Bridges' work tends to resist revision, and can fall to pieces when one tries to achieve change. For example it is poor revision in verse three simply to change *aye endureth* into *lives for ever (aye* is a Scoticism). At first sight, the change seems very clever. Factually it is close, which makes *lives for ever* very tempting for the revisers, but *endureth* also has overtones of not giving up, so that while the revision gets the syllable count and the stress pattern right, the change actually subverts the poetic passion of Bridges by causing a loss of the prevailing Psalmic tone which is part of his poem's meaning.

In this hymn, Bridges has created, out of an older vocabulary and syntax, a passionate, almost timeless prosody which is of lasting quality, and which resists easy change. Bridges is not using older language because that is 'what one does in hymn writing'. He actually uses both the new and the old to form such a prosody. It is brilliant stuff. And the twentieth century church has learned it and loved it.

And it resists change. What do we mean by this? We mean that the poem is so tightly written that any textual change would be likely to weaken it. For example, there are twelve uses of masculine pronouns – a significant inclusivist target – in the hymn. Ten of these uses survive: but in verse two we read *Pride of man* (no determiner) *and earthly glory* – a comprehensive poetic expression of sin on the grand scale, with just a touch of chiasmus – beautifully powerful, now changed to read *Human pride and earthly glory,* still true enough, but now more like the truth of a socio-cultural study. The change, well worked in its fashion, nevertheless diminishes a very fine poetic line – *man*, at least a millennium and a half in our language, gives way to the Latin loan word *human*, less than four centuries in the language (it doesn't even appear in the AV) and the result is a line which sounds more like formal sociological argument, and less like forceful poetry. It is a great shame, actually. I can share the need for linguistic change – and I do – but a great, classic hymn text is a literary treasure; and the church needs to tread carefully with such.

Much of the force of Bridges' language comes from his use of the Bible – not so much the use of clear allusion as we find it in, say, Wesley, but that in the Bible, he finds his vocabulary, and it gives the force of the 'good old words' to his hymn without actually seeming to do so, without necessarily drawing attention to itself.

A similar judgement could be made of the change in verse four of "Daily doth the almighty giver/bounteous gifts on us bestow". (CP gives *th' Almighty* to indicate the 'squashing together' of the two syllables to maintain the syllable count, which happens naturally when we become accustomed to singing the hymn; otherwise CP and AHB are identical texts) The line now reads in TIS "Daily the almighty giver/will his bounteous gifts bestow", – and again, it subverts the poet's achievement: we have noted above the problem with the change from *doth* to *will*, with its premature intrusion of the future tense, but there is also here just a slight move towards

information-giving style[107] – the socially "correct" language style of the radio announcer, the newspaper columnist, the school teacher, the University professor, or the economic analyst of the twentieth and the early twenty first century. The intrusion of this style into the language of hymn and prayer represents again a considerable weakening of Bridges' poetic style.

Similarly in the next two lines, Bridges' "his desire our soul delighteth/pleasure leads us where we go" gives way to "in his will our souls find pleasure/leading us where'er we go"; which, almost despite the revisers' use of *where'er*, is even closer to modern information-giving style, and clearly diminishes the poetic excitement of Bridges' delightful line. In fact, if for argument's sake, we were to ignore syllable count, and change *where'er* to *wherever*, the lapse into information-giving style would be obvious and complete. It is also quite noticeable here that the substitution of *will* for *desire* is unfortunate.

It is important for the church to understand that we have here a loss of poetic intensity in a great hymn, and that is a matter of utmost seriousness, for great hymns do not come along as often as we might hope. As a generalisation, it seems that whether the issue be old words as in Chapter 3, or non-inclusive words as in the current chapter, time after time the result is the same – the correction of these "faults" actually leads to a diminishment in the tone of the verse. For the translation of verse into verse, or even prose into verse, is much more demanding than translating verse into prose (like older translations of biblical poetry) or prose into prose (like much of the Bible generally). For CP, its term "invisible mending" expresses an intention on the part of the editors to ***maintain the poetic tone of a hymn text*** despite whatever changes of wording, old words or non-inclusive words, may otherwise be considered to be necessary. This actually requires considerable poetic skill, but it seems not to be understood as part of TIS's program. And a great fault it is. We would not do this to Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*: "There is a tide in the affairs of ***men*** /which taken at the flood ... " nor would we do it to the opening line of Milton's *Paradise Lost*: "Of ***man***'s first disobedience, and the fruit /of that forbidden tree ..." However, in TIS, even the very best Protestant hymns are affected in recent times by lack of poetic skill –

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[107] I deal with what I call ***information-giving style*** at some length in my MA thesis, *The English of Worship*, Flinders University, South Australia, 1988.

poetically clumsy, however worthy they are in other respects – and reasons can be found for this. We have noticed above how the writing of a poetic text is affected if the text is to be used for communal song.

Charles Wesley's great Christmas hymn

It has to be said, then, that if the CP revisers seem to be more aware of the danger of diminution of tone than the TIS revisers, we need to observe some more examples to check this assertion. Here is just the second stanza of Charles Wesley's great Christmas hymn "Hark the herald angels sing":

> Christ, by highest heaven adored,
> Christ, the everlasting Lord,
> late in time behold him come,
> offspring of a virgin's womb!
> Veiled in flesh the Godhead see:
> Hail, the incarnate Deity,
> pleased as man with man to dwell,
> Jesus, our Emmanuel. (CP gives Immanuel.)

Now this verse is a striking example of Wesley's technical skill. Note for a start the first couplet with which Wesley commences the stanza. It is a nice example of anaphora: *Christ*, the first word in the first line, is repeated at the beginning of the second line – strongly emphatic.

How Wesley must have loved that sumptuous three-syllable rhyme in the last couplet, with *man to dwell* rhymed with *Immanuel*. It is splendid technical workmanship, wonderfully emphatic. However, of almost as much interest is that Wesley is not concerned only with normal end-rhyming of lines – there are four rhyming couplets in each verse; but in the third stanza he also seems interested in using rhyming effects at the beginning of lines as well – which would have been more difficult. Apart from the rhyming of the final couplet, he makes a splendid, somewhat unorthodox rhyming at the beginning of these two lines – *pleased as* is rhymed with *Jesus*, for the conjunction *as,* after *pleased,* would be pronounced "uhz", perhaps even when sung. And the result is that the beginnings of the two lines of the same couplet also rhyme quite closely – *pleased as* with *Jesus,* though we tend not to notice such at

the beginning of lines. But there it is – more technical mastery to be observed in this couplet. The whole final couplet, indeed the whole verse is a very striking prosodic feat.

For there is more to observe in this verse: the third couplet also rhymes *Veiled* with *Hail*, at the beginning of their lines. In addition, while the emphatic repeated reference to *Christ* at the start of both lines in the first couplet is not, of course, a further initial rhyme; it is a nice example of anaphora. It all illustrates Wesley's interest in building striking poetic emphasis at the beginning of lines as well as at their ending.

It is now of interest to observe how TIS modifies Wesley's verse:

> Christ, by highest heaven adored,
> Christ, the everlasting Lord,
> late in time behold him come,
> offspring of a virgin's womb:
> veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
> hail, the incarnate Deity,
> pleased in human flesh to dwell,
> Jesus, our Immanuel.

Now there is only one alteration here[108], and that is to the second last line where Wesley's *pleased as man with man to dwell,* neither phrase needing a determiner, is clearly perceived as non-inclusive, and is altered to *pleased in human flesh to dwell*. There is just one alteration, but it affects the whole verse. Of course it is neatly done. But once more, there is a clear drop in tone, and a consequent tendency towards mere information-giving style. For there is a severe drop in tone in the altered line: Wesley's line gets to the deep meaning of the incarnation – the divine sharing of the human condition – while the altered line gives us human nature put on like an overcoat. It is a serious drop in tone – and a drop in theological orthodoxy: here is not the Chalcedonian consensus.

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[108] Wesley Milgate notes that a number of changes have been made to the text of Charles Wesley's hymn during his lifetime, and that this activity continued even into the twentieth century before general agreement with the text of the hymn was achieved. It is this text which am considering here.

A Scottish paraphrase: another example of the revisers' work

I conclude the current chapter with a look at the work of the three hymn books on some hymns of quite various style. My first example is from the *Scottish Paraphrases* of 1781. I was a Presbyterian before the formation of the Uniting Church, and I have a memory of the hymn book RCH divided into three sections: the metrical *Scottish Psalter*, the metrical *Scriptural Paraphrases* and the *Church Hymnary*. We have noted that the Scottish Kirk clung to the metrical Psalms much longer than English churches, for reasons which were discussed in Chapter 1. By the mid-eighteenth century, some interest was stirring in Scotland in communal worship song that was not from the Psalms – doubtless, it was a response to things happening in the worship of English Puritans. The Scottish Kirk was particularly cautious about the use of singing in worship that was "not of the scripture", although at first that meant "not of the Psalms". However, perhaps under popular pressure, the Kirk was gradually consenting to the use of paraphrases of various scriptural passages. The result was the Scottish Paraphrases of 1781, and this collection was good enough to satisfy worshippers while slowing the reception of hymns in Scotland – the Paraphrases were, after all, basically hymns themselves; they were just more closely tied to a particular biblical passage, and some were fine hymns. So it was a notable collection, and eased the eventual Scottish acceptance of hymnody.

The Paraphrases are of strong, affirming quality – something the Scots no doubt needed in the tensions of the eighteenth century. I found myself reading the Paraphrases over for pleasure quite recently, and suddenly recalled a thought which I heard years ago in a class on Scottish literature at Flinders University. It was just a few words about "the Scottish love of rhetoric", and suddenly I saw something of the fire in those old paraphrases that I was brought up on, along with the Metrical Psalms. It was not that the paraphrases were all written by Scots. Many, probably the majority, were of English origin, although some later amendments by the Scots would have been likely. But the point here is that the Scots took them up for themselves, and seemingly made them their own.

A good example is the paraphrase "Behold the amazing gift of love", which is based on 1 John 3: 1 – 3, and there is a bit of fire there from the beginning. Here is the scriptural passage in the AV on which it is based:

> Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure.

Well this is the AV well and truly "on song". And perhaps we must note again how easy to read and to hear this actually is. Four hundred years old it is; yet we cannot help noting that it is near enough to modern English, in syntax as well as vocabulary, for people to read it with ease. (the RSV here is very good indeed; but the NRSV, with its customary zeal for complete accuracy and understanding, tends to become just a little garrulous in the process).

Be all that as it may, here now is the paraphrase based on this passage as it came to appear in the Presbyterian hymnal, RCH 483, and a few remarks by Milgate suggest that this is the 1781 text, in accordance with AHB's policy of getting as close as possible to the author's original text. Our three hymnals all dislike *sense* in the last stanza. Both AHB and TIS change it to *guilt*. CP reshapes the line to *and purify us all from sin*. I must also confess that for some reason it took me a while to spot the change in TIS from *hath* to *has* in the first stanza.

> Behold the amazing gift of love
> the Father hath bestowed
> on us, the sinful sons of men,
> to call us sons of God.
>
> Concealed as yet this honour lies,
> by this dark world unknown,-
> a world that knew not when He came,
> even God's eternal Son.
>
> High is the rank we now possess;
> but higher we shall rise,
> though what we shall hereafter be
> is hid from mortal eyes.

Our souls, we know, when he appears,

shall bear his image bright;

for all his glory, full disclosed,

shall open to our sight.

A hope so great and so divine,

may trials well endure;

and purge the soul from sense and sin,

as Christ himself is pure.

Well there's fire in the belly here – of an ardent faith (which the eighteenth century Scots needed from time to time). The story of the hymn actually begins with Isaac Watts, who, Professor Milgate reminds us, made the decision to use the *short metre* verse form (6686).[109] The paraphrase went through several attempts at revision, but it seems to have been a young but talented Scot, William Cameron, who brought the hymn to its final form, after a change in the verse form to the well-worn common metre stanza (8686). The hymn certainly has a rugged ardour about it: we are in a *dark world,* and people will have *trials* they must *endure*; but hope can *purge the soul*, and the *glory full disclosed* is their promise. So the hymn has a vigorous passion, and it simply demands to be sung. AHB gives Abridge as its first tune, as does TIS, but I find the firmness of their second choice of Newington more strongly suited to that ardour, although both are a "pretty good sing".

The tone of Cameron's text is set from the start with the opening imperative *Behold the amazing gift of love ...* but the tone is actually firmly realised in the third and fourth lines:

on us, the sinful sons of men,

to call us sons of God.

Avoiding issues of inclusivity for the moment, let us observe that Cameron's couplet here is a good example of that "Scottish love of rhetoric", mentioned above.

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[109] Op. cit. p. 38. "In the present text only vv. 1 and 5 of Watts's original are at all closely represented ... The other stanzas were extensively revised in the draft *Paraphrases* 1745, and again in the version of 1781, the final (and much improved) text being the work of William Cameron."

The first verse sets the whole tone of the hymn from the start with its rhetorical force: not only is there the antithetic parallelism between the two lines of the couplet; there is also, in contrast with this, a touch of anaphora – the repeated *sons of* in lines three and four (as well as a touch of alliteration – <u>s</u>inful <u>s</u>ons). Of course there are issues of inclusivity to which we must return shortly, but the point being made here is that the first verse firmly establishes from the beginning the rhetorical force of the hymn. It sets the fire in the belly – when you get used to this sort of thing.

Cameron then proceeds to build on this rhetorical force in the verses that follow. He does this by noticeably varying word-order, presumably with the intention of creating emphasis; and he manages to achieve this while placing key phrases at the beginning of all the other verses: verse two, *Concealed as yet*; verse three, *High is the rank*; verse four, *Our souls, we know*; verse five, *A hope so great* – all are thus in emphatic positions at the start of its verse.. With these effects Cameron creates a passionate hymn that fervently both invites and celebrates a Christian life of considerable commitment and resolution.

It is perhaps an unintended compliment to Cameron's paraphrase that, despite its lively vigour, there is a good degree of similarity in its wording across our three hymnals, AHB, TIS, and CP. It is almost as if the very ardour of the paraphrase tends to resist change. Nevertheless there are in our three hymn books just a few changes to the text, which are interesting, if more because they are not altogether consistent, neither within themselves nor, more significantly, consistent across our three hymn books. It is the differences between the changes which are of particular interest.

The hymnal which makes the least change to Cameron's wording is AHB, which changes *sense* in the fifth stanza to *guilt*, while there are no other changes to the hymn. This suggests some uncertainty about how *sense* should be understood here – an issue we consider below. For now let us just note that AHB recognises the quality of the hymn, and deals with it as simply as possible without undue fuss – just the change from *sense* to *guilt*, of which more shortly.

Together in Song (TIS) (subtitled, *Australian Hymn Book II*) was published only about twenty-three years after AHB, but arrived to a quite different situation in Australian churches, and perhaps increasingly attentive to American thinking. The

second wave of feminism had clearly arrived in Australian churches and, thus, TIS, while accepting the AHB's change from *sense* to *guilt* in verse five, also puts, as we see below, considerable effort into dealing with the wording of that second half of the first stanza. Before critically continuing, we need to see what TIS does with this text:

Behold the amazing gift of love
the Father has bestowed
that we, though sinners, should be called
the children of our God.

Concealed as yet this honour lies,
by this dark world unknown,-
a world that knew not when he came,
ev'n God's eternal Son.

High is the rank we now possess;
but higher we shall rise,
though what we shall hereafter be
is hid from mortal eyes.

Our souls, we know, when he appears,
shall bear his image bright;
for all his glory full disclosed,
shall open to our sight.

A hope so great and so divine,
may trials well endure;
and purge the soul from guilt and sin,
as Christ himself is pure.

Here, of course, it is the third and fourth lines of the first stanza which are changed, forcing the passionate couplet,

on us, the sinful sons of men,
to call us sons of God.

with its feeling for the Scottish "love of rhetoric", now to read,

> that we, though sinners, should be called
>
> the children of our God.

which seriously diminishes the poetic force of Cameron's first stanza, which so forcefully sets the tone of his hymn. If we count the number of stressed syllables in the lines, this is quite clear: Cameron has three in both lines; TIS now has only two. Does this matter? Cameron's work obviously has greater density in meaning than TIS's version. A change from passionate fervour to dutiful clarity has also occurred. Which would we prefer to sing? Opinion will certainly vary.

CP was published in 2000, now well into the feminist second wave as it had influenced British churches. This was actually only one year later than the publication of TIS, but a nice illustration of the theological atmosphere in which churches were working in the 'old country' can be seen in this delightful example from Sara Maitland:

> This feminist-inspired business of creating (inventing? discovering? I am not sure
> of the vocabulary here) an inclusive language, a new grammar to speak about
> God, ought to be seen as one of the most interesting theological engagements
> that is being undertaken at present.[110]

Although TIS itself seems to have got its revising work under way earlier than CP, it perhaps had a harder road to travel than CP, or at least for a longer road in time. For most Australian churches participated in its production. This presumably involved a wider range of theological and artistic issues to be debated and dealt with – and much of this was happening during the nineteen eighties, with debate on inclusivity issues at its height. Again, here is a Trinitarian example from Maitland:

> ... many of us feel that the Trinitarian formula 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit' is not
> totally satisfactory because it appears to assign gender to God, who is of course
> without gender. It can even feel clichéd and lazy.

These are things which we certainly hear of in Australia, but I do like Maitland's theologically shrewd response to it:

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[110] Sara Maitland, *A Big-Enough God: artful theology* (Mowbray, London: Villiers House, 1995), 136.

> However the attempts to suggest non-sexist alternatives have demonstrated just
> how sophisticated that particular formula is, and how difficult it is to express
> differently. For instance 'Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier', probably the most
> popular of the new forms, may not assign gender to God, but it does allocate
> functions (jobs no less) to each of the divine persons. This divides their unity in
> a way which the original deftly avoids ... [111]

which sounds fairly orthodox and should remind us of comments by Colin Gunton mentioned earlier in the current chapter. Maitland, in her book, writes of an "extraordinary level of hostility"[112] in Britain, generated by the issues involved. (Incidentally, there is also much American influence in Australian churches – possibly more now than from Britain, though our study involves just the three hymnals – one British and two Australian.)

Early in this chapter, mention was made of CP's attention in its preface to aspects of its necessary commitment to awareness of the problem of gender-based language, and of seeking to avoid this "where appropriate", by "invisible mending" – a pleasing metaphor, actually, which suggests both necessary careful amendment to text (mending) while keeping to the general tone of the text (invisible mending). It is nicely put.

Now at first sight it may appear that this reflects a rather conservative policy, and that it explains why the first stanza of our paraphrase is virtually unchanged. Virtually unchanged? Well I have to confess with shame that it took me some time to notice that older *hath* in the second line of the first stanza has actually been changed – to *has*. Of course this is hardly a radical change, for as we observed earlier, *has* reflects actual eighteenth century pronunciation anyway, though *hath* was still used in writing, as we noted some pages above**.** However, the two verbs, *lies* in the second stanza, and *appears* in the first line of the fourth stanza, are actually present-day English, already in writing as well as in speech by the eighteenth century – as we have also seen above. Of course the CP revisers could well have suggested that the change in verse one from *hath* to *has* is a good example of their 'invisible mending'. That might, in this case, seem to be gilding the lily a bit, but the term 'invisible mending' nevertheless seems quite

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[111] Sara Maitland, *A Big-Enough God: artful theology*, 137.
[112] Ibid. 137.

useful. However, it might be useful to turn a critical eye on the CP revisions of this hymn.

The real surprise in the first stanza – in view of the CP revisers' stated concern with "the problem with gender-based language" – is that the third and fourth lines of the first stanza, *on us the sinful sons of men/to call us sons of God*, are actually left unchanged. Perhaps this should not be a surprise as it is a superb passionate couplet, as noted below. And CP editors tend to be well aware of such things. Cameron's text is a good century before CP's date of 1900, before which, we recall, priority is to be given to "respecting the integrity of the text, the author's known intentions, and the poetry of the original".

I have a wee hunch that the CP revisers include one or two literary critics: *Hymns–Ancient-and-Modern* people don't do things by halves when it comes to hymnals; and perhaps their critics have discerned the significance of these lines for the tone of the hymn as a whole, as we noted above. Certainly they must have suggested the lines be unchanged. One hardly needs any excuse for keeping key lines like this, with all their fervour and resolve, and given CP's approach to hymns written before 1900, it is a reasonable decision – albeit perhaps surprising to ourselves – but the paraphrase is a fine classic hymn.

However, two words, *soul* and *sense*, are used in Cameron's text which apparently have also been thought to give trouble to modern folk, seemingly due to a certain theological vagueness of meaning. People know the words of course, but perhaps find their meaning somewhat blurred. This could be especially true of *soul*, of which the simplest definition, out of a considerable number of alternatives that the OED gives, is "a person's spiritual as opposed to corporeal nature". *Soul* has a certain vagueness about it that smacks, perhaps, of something like theological incompleteness, so that we might wish to explain it, to tighten it up, or perhaps even discard it. Nevertheless, the OED's definition of *soul* is likely to be the one that most people would in some way recognise, even though they may find it vaguely indiscernible. Indeed it could be that vagueness, that strangeness, which makes the word right in this context. Let us be quite clear that *soul* is not, in any way, an unknown or misunderstood word; in fact it seems quite well known, and has been so for more

than a millennium. It is just that the meaning is unavoidably vague, and not clean cut, as we imagine we prefer words to be.

However, it would seem to be this very vagueness that could make *soul* the right word to use in this hymn. Cameron actually uses the word in two places, the first of which is at the beginning of his fourth stanza. It reads *Our souls, we know, when he appears*, and it is charged with promise – *glory full disclosed*. And it is here that CP unfortunately reads *lives* instead of *souls*. Of course we all know what *our lives* means – plain and simple it is, in contrast with that real vagueness about the word *soul* – a vagueness which is part of its meaning. It is the vagueness that should actually be there. There is after all, something indiscernible about ourselves being human under God. And this is lost from the hymn in a single word change: we read *Our lives* instead of *Our souls* – what we do, rather than what we be – the quality of the indiscernible is becoming lost. It seems clearly so, and we might wonder how our 'one or two literary critics', whom we postulated a couple of paragraphs above, could have missed this – for the change to *lives* is a fairly serious blemish on a very fine hymn – a descent into the ordinary. It is not CP's best moment, though their "one or two literary critics" may riposte to me that *soul*s is still "a bit too vague".

A similar blemish happens again in Cameron's last stanza. The term *soul* suffers again in a comprehensive change to the third line of the last stanza: Cameron's line *and purge the soul from sense and sin*, has that strong word *purge,* implying intense cleansing, with the strongly emphatic touch of alliteration – s̲oul ... s̲ense ... s̲in ... – and it now reads *and purify us all from sin*. – again a serious descent into the ordinary, if not the banal. For Cameron's fire in the belly would be a bit harder to kindle after such changes. And so it is here. There seems to be, perhaps, a theological reluctance to use the word *soul*; but in order to omit the word, we are given, in a somewhat desperate poetic ploy on the revisers' part, that new line *and purify us all from sin*, in which the little phrase *us all* is just an extra fill-in to mend the apparent difficulty of *soul*, and keep up the syllable count of the line. And once again we note the intrusion of modern information-giving style. It is no wonder that the line now sounds weaker and rather dull. It has not here been good 'invisible mending'. It is actually an unusual lapse for CP – though we may be able to sympathise with the plight of the revisers, who must have felt strong expectation to deal with this sort of change.

But let us be quite fair here: the use of *purify* by CP in that fifth stanza does come from the AV passage, and quickly and quietly it does bring the singing community into some touch with the Bible. However, Cameron's original phrase *purge the soul* is particularly strong and appropriate. *Purge*, with its suggestion of intense cleansing (through the forgiveness of sin) is no easy face-and-hands wash. Cameron's verse, indeed his whole hymn, brings us into the world of the Bible – the world of cleansing, for example in the water of baptism, or in Peter's "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Up to a point, so too CP's amended version at least brings the singer into the world of the Bible, as hymns generally should do. It should be said that the kind of flaws we find here are actually much rarer in CP than in TIS – so more surprising is it that they be found here.

But what do we make of that line about purging the soul from **sense**? Something like sensuality? Sense and sin? That seems almost too obvious, too conventional a reading. My own reading would take *sense* here to mean something like openness only to those things we can know through basic sense experience – mere "sense knowing". (Remember our meaning of *sense* as a verb – we might *sense* something.) therefore, purging the soul of sense could mean being cleansed for openness to the indiscernible in things. Is there something of a double negative there? Maybe. A demanding line certainly occurs in the hymn – *and cleanse the soul from sense and sin* – but I suspect that a few generations of Scots somehow 'got it' because they sang it together. Perhaps singing can somehow precede knowing, even encourage knowing. And maybe, for a general truth about hymn singing, **we can 'get it' because, time after time, we sing it together**.

In this is the experience and the work of hymn singing. As the British Methodist, Geoffrey Wainwright puts it:

> Singing is the most genuinely popular element in Christian worship. Familiar words and music, whether it be repeated response to biddings in a litany or the well-known phrases of a hymn, unite the whole assembly in active participation to a degree which is hardly true of any other component in the liturgy ... The memorability of hymns allows their substance to penetrate thought and life.[113]

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[113] Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life*, 200.

In other words, we 'get it' because we sing it together. Perhaps therein is something of the love of God which passeth understanding. Or as Sara Maitland says in a few words, "The only bits that stick with most people are the hymns, actually"[114]. And that surely implies that getting hymns right is supremely important.

I find myself pausing for a moment's reflection on this – that turns into an hour or so. Can it be that we should not actually be asking if people, especially children, can understand what a hymn means? Rather should we not be helping them to sing, and sing, and sing the great hymns – quite often over time – trusting that in the singing it will 'grow on them', that they, young and old, will come to 'get it'? I return to this weird idea and others in Chapter 5.

In the current chapter, I sought to observe and evaluate the choice of some of the hymns used in the three hymnals from a literary perspective, and to assess the effects of changes wrought thereon mainly from an inclusivist perspective. It has been necessary to make some fairly tough judgements, especially on the work done in *Together in Song* (TIS). The real problem for TIS is that, unlike CP, the revisers seem not to have realised what a challenge it is to make changes in fine poetic writing without causing real loss of tone. So loss of tone happens time after time in TIS. Of course TIS is a consciously pioneering effort, and up to a point, that is genuinely valuable, but there is also much to contemplate in the outlook brought to a similar task by CP – the need for "invisible mending".

There is in this an interesting perspective on our research question, *What makes a good hymn text?* Answer: the world of the Bible, and a language of otherness. As we have noted above once or twice, TIS is a consciously pioneering effort; and that is a fair comment to make concerning the achievement of TIS. However, an equally fair question may well be "Should pioneering effort be the actual task of a hymn book committee?" Is it not rather to distil both the past and present wisdom of the church for its ongoing worship in its fairly immediate future?

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[114] Op cit. Maitland, *A Big-Enough God: artful theology*, 134.

Chapter 5. Today's Hymns – Questions and Conclusions

In the journey through the preceding chapters, I have examined the story of the hymn in English – its successes – as well as changes that have supported or challenged those successes. In this concluding chapter, I now look to the future, and some aspects of what could become of the hymn in English. But first, I review the journey already taken in this thesis.

The journey began in Chapter 1 with a determination to be quite clear about what we mean by "hymn", and found that definition was not altogether as simple as might have been expected. Geoffrey Wainwright helped us to appreciate Augustine's threefold understanding of hymn: the "sung praise of God". Of course singing and praising needed to be understood with some care. Especially is this true of praising, for there are aspects of praise which are not as obvious as might have been expected. However, this also makes us view hymnody as a serious art-form: Anglicans seem to be good at this, if CP is any witness, for historically they have viewed the Book of Common Prayer and the AV as serious literary works, and perhaps that creates an atmosphere conducive to looking for such in their hymns.

But we went back further than this. Wainwright also drew our attention to a connection and a contrast between creeds and hymns. He speaks of the "first order", matter-of-fact language of creeds, and asserts that these seem to be the background from which the poetic language of prayer and hymn developed. For in that age of considerable expansion of the Christian church, and of the numbers of people desiring baptism, creeds began to be sung for remembering – so significant for those early centuries of the church. Wainwright can speak of a developing necessity for creedal hymns and, hence, of hymns for the sacraments, especially for the sacrament of baptism.

Our journey then took us to the Reformation and the early rise of the metrical Psalms and their use for including the people in the sung praise of God. This gave way to the rise of the Protestant hymn, its beginnings in the work of Isaac Watts, and its flowering in the eighteenth century, most remarkable for the work of Charles Wesley. Hymns continued to be very popular in the nineteenth century, but the quality of hymns were showing unmistakable signs of deterioration into sentimentality by the end of that century. We noted this quite early in our remarks on Ellerton's "The day thou gavest, Lord,

is ended", and in Erik Routley's remarks on sentimentality in Chapter 1, "emotional content backed by no solid truth, a show of feeling with no intention of consequent honesty".[115] Although there were signs of concern with this state of the congregational hymn, Europe had other grave challenges on its mind, so that it was not until well into the mid-twentieth-century that the state of the congregational hymn became more widely questioned.

An event that first seems to have created interest for Australian Protestants at this time was the arrival in Australia of the Twentieth Century Folk Mass by the Anglican Geoffrey Beaumont. At about the same time an Australian Anglican, James Minchin, set some well-known older hymn texts to jazz settings.[116] Palestrina's resurrection hymn *The Strife is O'er, the Battle Done*, translated by Francis Pott, has Minchin's jazz setting in AHB 287(ii). I have not found that either Beaumont's or Minchin's work has lasted; however, they helped to create an atmosphere in Australia which gave rise to other developments which were beginning to take place. The arrival of modern arts in worship, notably in "youth services", in the following decade or so, soon found older adults also interested in all this "new stuff" happening in their church. It was not long after this, indeed it was at much the same time, when new translations of the Bible were making their presence felt, that people were beginning to look for hymn texts in present day English also.

It was less than a decade later that inclusivist concern was also making its presence felt, soon with great clarity, for people, especially women, were feeling both pain and anger, in the church as well as in the secular world, as we noted in Chapter 4. As a result of both these issues, much has happened to the hymn in worship in half a century. The question we seek to confront in this final chapter is how these issues affect the hymn singing of people today, in our Australian early twenty-first-century times. Although they are commonly called "songs", I am holding to my definition of hymn, "a communal song for worship", as discussed later.

New hymns by Marty Haugen and Graham Kendrick

We initially consider two very singable hymns that have emerged in recent times. By a delightful coincidence their authors, the American, Marty Haugen and the Briton, Graham

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[115] Erik Routley, *The Church and Music* (Edinburgh: Duckworth, 1967), 179.
[116] These are my own clear, youthful memories of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Kendrick, are born in the same year, at the very end of the first half of the twentieth century, 1950; both hymns have five verses and refrain, which comprehensively break my twenty-four-line rule; and both authors have written the music as well as the words – historically not a common accomplishment, though seemingly more common in recent times. We look at Marty Haugen's hymn for a start:

Let us build a house where love can dwell

and all can safely live,

a place where saints and children tell

how hearts learn to forgive.

Built of hopes and dreams and visions,

rock of faith and vault of grace;

here the love of Christ shall end divisions:

All are welcome,

all are welcome,

all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where prophets speak,

and words are strong and true,

where all God's children dare to seek

to dream God's reign anew.

Here the cross shall stand as witness

and as symbol of God's grace;

here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:

Refrain

Let us build a house where love is found

in water, wine and wheat:

a banquet hall on holy ground

where peace and justice meet.

here the love of God, through Jesus,

is revealed in time and space;

as we share in Christ the feast that frees us:

Refrain

Let us build a house where hands shall reach

beyond the wood and stone

to heal and strengthen, serve and teach

and live the Word they've known.

Here the outcast and the stranger

bear the image of God's face;

let us bring an end to fear and danger:

Refrain

Let us build a house where all are named,

their songs and visions heard

and loved and treasured, taught and claimed

as words within the Word.

Built of tears and cries and laughter,

prayers of faith and songs of grace,

let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:

Refrain

Now there are some very satisfying moments in this hymn; it reads almost as exhortation (*Let us build a house*), but sings as praise *in this place* – presumably the church building. And the music has a strong sing-along quality that compels us to share it, and to worship with it.

At first glance, there seem to be verses of seven lines, until we realise that the refrain functions in two ways: firstly Haugen, as musician, actually uses the refrain to conclude each verse, with its emphatic refrain, *All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place*. But it doesn't really feel like a refrain set aside, because it also functions as a long, rhyming eighth line of the verse; for its final *in this place* rhymes with the sixth line **in every verse** – clearly deliberate on the writer's part, so that the hymn music also feels as if it has just five long verses. It is interesting to be able see these two aspects of Haugen's composition working together.

I highlight once again that a singer could well ask if hearts can *learn*, as in verse one. However, a good retort from Marty Haugen would be that if hearts can be *thankful*,

then hearts can *learn* – and of course, in Chapter 4, we found that in the Bible, hearts can feel and think all sorts of things.

I do like the sixth line: *rock of faith and vault of grace*. God is our *rock* – a dependable fortress, rock of ages; and we might also just remember Peter – Petros, "on this rock" (Matthew 16:18). *Vault* does not appear in the Bible – well, not in the AV, which uses *firmament*, nor in other translations on my shelves. However, a phrase in which the word occasionally appears in other literature from time to time is "heaven's vault" or "vault of heaven"[117], which is how grace appears to Marty Haugen: like the great overarching inverted basin of the sky.

Two lines in verse two need to be considered with some care. The first is the fourth line, which reads *to dream God's reign anew*. Now dream is a nice metaphor for what Marty Haugen desires his singers to think about – something like imagining God's rule taking place among us. However, today the terms *God's reign* or *reign of God* are often used instead of Jesus' oft-used *Kingdom of God* – seemingly for inclusivist reasons, the first syllable being the masculine syllable, *King*. However, this does seem to press the inclusivist case too far. For *reign* and *kingdom* are by no means exact synonyms: *reign* tends to relate to rule in time, but *kingdom* tends to relate to rule in some kind of space.

Kingdom is a strong, long-standing Anglo-Saxon word, with considerable literary resonance – notably so in the Bible; and though *king* is a male word, *kingdom* does not function as a gender word: a king has a kingdom, and a queen has a kingdom. This is a longstanding word and the use of *kingdom* in the gospels, has very strong literary resonance indeed – I note that the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) which shows little reluctance in dealing with non-inclusive language, nevertheless keeps the AV *Kingdom of God,* seemingly without exception. Of course the French loan *reign* is Haugen's word for this particular point in his hymn; and it is monosyllabic, so that it fits the line, while *kingdom* would not do so. That is true enough, and it means that the line would need to be revised – inevitably. But there is also a gentle reminder in this, that writing hymn texts is more demanding than writing prose texts, and hymn writers still have to labour over such. Finding the right word, and then having to fit it carefully into a poetic

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[117] A splendid Shakespearean example is in King Lear, Act V Scene III, "Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so/ that heaven's vault should crack". The 1971 compact edition of the OED has a good number of examples.

hymn text can be a testimony to this. Perhaps Marty Haugen's fine text needs a wee bit of "invisible mending" at this point.

The use of *symbol* in the same stanza also seems somewhat at fault: its meaning seemingly seeks to include a somewhat hidden, repetitive aspect of *witness,* in the previous line, so that its function ends more or less with just filling up the line, despite there being some nice sense of parallelism between the two lines. Perhaps the filler, *symbol*, should be replaced by a word that adds to the meaning by pointing further to the meaning or effect of *God's grace* in the hymn. With respect, for I really like this hymn, I would suggest that *symbol* could well be changed to something like *promis*e in this stanza, and that it would emphasise its meaning in time.

In the third stanza the second line, with its alliterative *water, wine, and whea*t, could seem a little problematic – seemingly because Haugen is looking for the rhyme with the fourth line *meet*. Perhaps this is problematic because there are many and varied biblical references to water, and the people will not necessarily connect *water* with baptism unless they have already had to connect *wine and wheat* with communion. With the well-known phrase, *bread and wine*, of course, they would make an immediate connection; but would this happen with *wine and wheat*? It seems less certain, unless perhaps, they first connect *water* with the sacrament of baptism. So there is room for a bit of confusion here.

Also in the third stanza, however, is that rhyme between *Jesus* and *frees us*. Of course it is clever, but maybe that is just a slight problem. Does it not seem to be a little too clever, too witty? Indeed, could it not be that it is just a bit irreverent with the second person of the Trinity? It is a question that should at least give us pause. This is not to forget, that I gave high praise to *pleased as* rhyming with *Jesus* in Wesley's Christmas hymn in Chapter 4. Indeed I did, but the position at the end of the line, in Marty Haugen's hymn seems just a bit uncomfortably emphatic, in contrast with that initial rhyme in Wesley's Christmas hymn.

I do not want to emphasise rather low-level faults, for the hymn is real delight. It is quite possible that this hymn that could just last and last. It is a very good modern hymn indeed, but small faults could work against it, unless a little more work were put into the

text. It is certainly worth checking Haugen's text against my two criteria for good hymn text – entry into the world of the Bible, and a language for otherness.

Firstly a very good rule for any hymn writing is that it brings the singer into the world, the imaginative literary world, of the Bible; and this Marty Haugen does admirably: we are encouraged in this hymn to *live the Word* –the Word with its biblical allusion, and the Word that "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). And the hymn invites us to see *the outcast and the stranger* as, like all of us, bearing *the image of God* (Genesis 1: 26, 27). There are also single words, I think, that simply hint at the biblical world: *grace, seek, feast, banquet, vision, saints*.

And another effect of being close to the biblical world, our first criterion, is that this can also help to create a strong sense of a language for otherness, which is our second criterion. Yet even words that are not quite up to that seem to have been brought into the biblical force of Marty Haugen's text and enter into something like its language. The line *loved and treasured, taught and claimed* in the final stanza is a nice example.

Graham Kendrick's hymn

After analysing Marty Haugen's splendid hymn, here is the text of Graham Kendrick's hymn:

The Refrain is sung after verses 2, 4 and 5.

1. Beauty for brokenness,
   hope for despair,
   Lord, in the suffering,
   this is our prayer.
   Bread for the children,
   justice, joy, peace,
   sunrise to sunset
   your kingdom increase.

2. Shelter for fragile lives,
   cures for their ills,
   work for the craftsmen,
   trade for their skills;
   land for the dispossessed,
   rights for the weak;

3. Refuge from cruel wars,
   havens from fear,
   cities for sanctuary,
   freedoms to share,
   peace to the killing fields,
   scorched earth to green;
   Christ for the bitterness,
   his cross for the pain.

4. Rest for the ravished earth,
   oceans and streams,
   plundered and poisoned,
   our future, our dreams.
   Lord, end our madness,
   carelessness, greed;

voices to plead the cause	make us content with
of those who can't speak.	the things that we need.

God of the poor ...

God of the poor
friend of the weak,   5. Lighten our darkness,
give us compassion, we pray;   breathe on this flame
melt our cold hearts,   until your justice burns
let tears fall like rain.   brightly again;
Come change our love   until the nations
from a spark to a flame.   learn of your ways,
                         seek your salvation
                         and bring you their praise.

God of the poor ….

In Chapter 1, I was critical of some weaknesses in Kendrick's rhyming. I commented that this was so, as people have quite a strong expectation that community song should rhyme, and this should be true also of hymns; and it is unfortunate when this expectation is not satisfied. It should be noted that in the verses of this hymn Kendrick has done well, although it may not seem so at first glance to be the case. Although the rhyming appears to be only at every second line, they are quite short lines. In singing Kendrick's tune, the strong feeling is that, although they appear as eight-line verses on the page, they actually sing with a feeling of four-line verses which rhyme *abab* – (remembering that Kendrick, like Haugen, is both author and composer). Such a quatrain structure would certainly have long lines, but not longer than some hymns, mostly later in the history of the English hymn; (the well-known *Be thou my vision* comes to mind – ten-syllable lines with some irregularities but rhyming *aabb*) Perhaps Kendrick originally wrote his hymn in this four-line form, but later decided on a change to the eight-line form in order to make the rhythm of the hymn clearer with its shorter lines. (Perhaps also, the TIS editors wanted to fit the hymn text into half a page, since the musical setting required one and a half pages. Such things can happen).

There is actually some effective rhyming in Kendrick's seven-line refrain *God of the poor* – despite the fact that only two lines come very near to rhyming – the fifth line *rain*,

and the seventh line *flame*. Are they actually close to rhyming? Well vowels are louder than consonants, even louder than, say, the voiced consonants like *b* and *d*. But *rain* and *flame* both end with nasal consonants, which are particularly soft; (the mouth is closed off so that the sound has to go through the nose; the soft *m*, *n*, and *ng* are our only nasal consonants – and not strongly distinguished). The significance of this here is that the long *a* vowel at the end of the third line is also heard as rhyming with the fifth and seventh lines, and the rhyming helps to draw the refrain together very well. And is that the only rhyming in the seven-line refrain? It may actually be enough. The rhyming words get strong emphasis not just for themselves, but for giving a firm structure for the whole refrain. Kendrick's structure may look a little unusual on the page, even rather strange, but we can't say that it doesn't work when the hymn is sung.

Of course there is some room for a bit of negative criticism. Does the hymn bring the singers into the world of the Bible? Really only here and there. But let us be fair; this hymn is basically an intercessory prayer, so that it would probably be most helpful in worship before or after the intercessions. However, the hymn does have that Psalmic quality – there is the awareness of the human lot and the trust in the divine mercy. For it sings a triumphant underlying trust in the God who hears the prayer of a caring, interceding church – and surely hears it also as praise. So we can sing it with a full heart. And we do. It's a lovely hymn.

Terminology: hymns or songs?

Now it would be common to refer to pieces like these two by Haugen and Kendrick as "songs" – I seem to find people who are talking about "songs" often have the music in mind, or at least as foreground to their thought, as long as the text is inoffensive, and in "the language of ordinary people". However, I continue to use the term "hymns", or more rarely, "Psalms", for, as far as Christian worship is concerned, the underlying criteria, for judging the success of a written text for communal song in worship, are surely much the same criteria, whatever the age of the piece – two years, two hundred years, or two millennia. An insistence on talking about "songs" or "worship songs" seems to run the risk of overlooking the significance of the new hymn, or wrongly dismissing the great old hymn, or perhaps both. They are choices we don't have to make, for the church collectively does so in its Sunday by Sunday worship. We need the best of our good new hymns, and the best of our great old hymns. And let us call them all "hymns". There is a hint of pretention

in our expressions like *Songs* or *Worship Songs* – that somehow they are inherently better than the older hymns. As an old juke-box song once said, "It ain't necessarily so".

Of course *hymn* is an ancient Greek loan word, and such words can take a long while before they feel as if they really belong in English, but *hymn* now seems well on the way to becoming embedded in our language – especially in the worship of the church. Of course *song* is an Anglo-Saxon word and it is thoroughly embedded in our language, while *hymn* comes from Greek, whence a good number of our useful specialised words have come, and *hymn* may still sound somewhat specialised. However, the church has hallowed the word *hymn* by its now quite long usage in English, as well as in different European languages and cultures, and it actually goes well back to ancient times.

Both the above hymns are, in their different ways, quite passionate praise. Marty Haugen's piece has more biblical allusion, and some theological wisdom. It is actually exhortation, but Geoffrey Wainwright would assert that praise is an implicit background to the hymn. Wainwright asserts that

> we should want to add, from our own perspective, that the public praise of God is *eo ipso* witness before the world also. By the same token, a hymn of witness must be allowed to count as praise. Moreover, praise must here include the various moods or attitudes ... confession of sin and prayer for forgiveness; self-offering and dedication; invocation of the divine help, presence, advent or rule. All these are doxologically motivated, even though they may not be so overtly 'praise'.[118]

Similarly Kendrick's hymn is clearly prayer, but praise is also its implicit background, for it is the hymn's clear belief that God may be trusted for even the most deeply urgent intercession. Both hymns have music and melody that heighten the feeling that behind the song there is high praise of God. In other words, both hymns are a good engaging sing. And we should call both of them *hymns*; to do otherwise is to create a theologically unreal distinction between older and newer praise, older and newer hymns.

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[118] Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life*, 198- 9.

George Garnsey's hymn

In considerable contrast with these two hymns is this hymn by George Garnsey, which appears in *Songs of Grace*, a very recent supplement to TIS, 836. Tune: Dominus Regit Me.[119]

> In Jesus Christ God makes us new,
> and with us, all creation.
> In him we find our nature true,
> he offers us salvation.
>
> His cross makes God's forgiveness sure,
> our reconciliation.
> God's world made whole for evermore,
> we join in celebration!
> The Spirit's fruits are love and peace,
> embracing every nation.
> From Law too harsh God brings release,
> For sadness, consolation.
>
> To you, O God, so patient, kind,
> beyond imagination
> we offer gifts of heart and mind,
> ourselves in consecration.

There seems to be something about structures of the English language, perhaps of our stressed and unstressed syllables, which help to explain the frequent use of four line stanzas in popular song; although the nature of Western music would also be part of the explanation. I certainly think "*The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs*" is of interest in this respect; it contains the melody and texts of seventy songs, and has forty eight of its pieces in four-line stanzas.[120] It seems unsurprising that four-line stanzas also occur frequently in our various hymnals. Common metre (8686), long metre (8888) and short metre (6686) are forms which occur often, but other four-line metres are also used although rather less

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[119] Australian Christian Resources. *Songs of Grace (*Australia: Australian Church Resources, 2018), 103.
[120] Ralph Vaughan Williams and A. L. Lloyd. *The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959).

frequently. Indeed, TIS has eighteen somewhat newer hymns in 10 10 10 10, which is, of course, iambic pentameter – a favourite of English poets. We think immediately of Shakespeare's plays and sonnets, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Wordsworth's *The Prelude* among others.

It does seem strange that hymn writers today appear to avoid the four-line stanza: it is interesting that *Songs of Grace*[121], the supplement to TIS, which contains fifty-four new hymns, only has ten hymns in quatrains – a much lower proportion than in our hymn books. It seems that common metre quatrains and suchlike are taken to be rather old-fashioned, whereas the stanza really seems to suit the rhythms of the English language itself. However, it does seem noteworthy, although it is outside our interests here, to consider the effect of popular early jazz in the USA. It can be noted that there does seem to be some kind of reaction in our hymnody, going on unapprehended, against older prosodic assumptions. I must say that I did find for myself that I started hymn writing with thinking up quite different verse forms; and good, though serious, fun it was – and, occasionally, reasonably successful. Eventually, however, I found myself returning quite frequently to the four-line verse. We may note in passing that the hymns by Haugen and Kendrick above have big verses, but behind them lurk something like an old four-line form doubled up – especially does this seem true of the eight-short-line stanzas of Kendrick's hymn.

It would be very easy for people to take one look at the older form and say that the iambic tetrameter is obviously old-fashioned, out of date. It is not so. It is long-standing, of course; but it plays on the stressed and unstressed syllables of English speech that have been persistent in our language right back to Anglo-Saxon times, and have been tight and hard-wearing through a period of long but quite slow language change. The quite frequently used eight-line stanza is commonly the four-line stanza doubled up. (And also, there it is in Haugen's hymn, with the eighth line worked into a cleverly done refrain.)

I note that in Songs of Grace an editorial comment with the hymn informs us that Garnsey's hymn received

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[121] Australian Christian Resources. *Songs of Grace (*Australia: Australian Church Resources, 2018), 103.

I do like the changes from normal word order in Garnsey's hymn that create some of the emphases of poetry: *nature true* in the third line, *Law too harsh* in the eleventh line. The implied ellipsis of *we offer* from the beginning of the last line gives that strong, compressive ending to the hymn.

There is, I think, a very minor, ignorable quirk in the first line of the second verse – the pronunciation of *sure*. I suspect many Australians, including myself, say something like "shoe er" while others might say something like "shore". The OED gives both pronunciations. The first, "shoe-er", hardly makes a rhyme with *evermore*. It is an ignorable flaw, of course: and the rhyme works perfectly with the other pronunciation, "shore" – which, at a guess, could even be that of George Garnsey himself.

However, one flaw in the hymn may be rather serious, for it seems to affect the hymn as a whole. The -*ation* ending, found in Latin and French loan words, is very common in English. So it is easy to rhyme, and George Garnsey has used the rhyme in the second and fourth lines of every stanza. At first glance it looks clever, at least at the skill level, even ingenious, but its effect on the hymn over time might be unfortunate. For repeated use of the rhyme could become to some extent, dull, even tedious; and this could affect the way even a well-intentioned congregation perceives the hymn in the long run. I do hope it will be otherwise, for Garnsey's work here has a nice eloquent directness, although I am not altogether satisfied with his choice of the John Bacchus Dykes tune *Dominus Regit Me*.

A Hymn by Don Bell and Maarten Ryder

In this study, I believe I have made reasonable literary analysis (with care, I hope) of the hymns of several writers. It thus seems appropriate that I should attempt to apply with special care the same sort of analysis to examples of my own hymns, that is, of my texts, of course. It also gives me the chance to raise some other issues which I would like to raise for other hymn writers. The music, as mentioned in earlier chapters, is that of Maarten Ryder, and he has this to say about his approach in his foreword to our hymn collection. (And I do like his comment about the density of my hymn texts.)

> ... My aims have always been firstly to complement the words and secondly to write something "singable". Community singing has always been at the forefront of my approach to writing the music for these hymns ...

> Over time, Don's words have become more dense ... This has usually meant writing a relatively plain, unadorned melody, with the musical complexity residing more in the chords, the chord progressions or occasionally changes in time signature.[122]

An interesting example below is this Trinitarian hymn, which is an example of my poetic and theological concerns being coupled with Maarten's amazingly broad musical skills. I begin by first disposing of any question of the size of the hymn It looks at first sight like four eight-line verses, thirty two lines, which is well over my ideal of twenty four lines. However, each verse has four full-length lines and four half-length lines making twenty four lines in all, with a syllable count of 8844 8458. In fact, Maarten quite clearly has four bars for each full line, and two bars for each half line.

1. Not by measure sends the Father
   Spirit treasure through the Son;
   in such splendours
   comprehends us,
   claimed as children for his own;
   past all fancy
   named as family,
   breadth, length, height and depth to fathom.

2. Emptied of the Father's glories,
   servant-formed, in humble guise,
   Christ so daring,
   cross enduring,
   there transfix our wayward gaze;
   and that likeness,
   Spirit, live in us,
   till God's image in us glistens.

3. Spirit to our spirits' travail,
   groaning under fears and cares,
   bear your witness
   deep within us;
   cry us "Father!" Christ's own heirs;
   sons' and daughters'
   aweful dauntlessness
   pledge us for our pilgrim travel.

4. Great Creator, mighty Saviour,
   one in truth, our troth be now;
   grace forfend us;
   make us; mend us;
   wonder, love and trust renew.
   Holy beauty,
   Thou community,
   Father, Son, and Spirit ever.

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[122] Bell, Donald, and Ryder, Maarten. *Hymns for Times and Seasons.* (Adelaide: MediaCom, 2016), 2.

Firstly, let us consider the theological structure of the hymn. It differs somewhat from what is a very common, and perhaps natural, structure for Trinitarian hymns: first stanza on the Father, second on the Son, third on the Holy Spirit and the fourth stanza on the Trinity, so the reader doesn't come to the Trinity until nearly at the end of the hymn. Watts's "We give immortal praise" (AHB 38) is a good example. Wesley's "Father in whom we live" (CP 417) is another. And, of course, this comment is not to be dismissive of their work.

I have attempted to follow this basic structure, but with some differences, which serve to make every verse Trinitarian. The first verse is Trinitarian, but emphasises the Father; the second is Trinitarian, but emphasises the Son; the third is Trinitarian, but emphasises the Spirit, while the fourth verse emphasises the Trinitarian oneness.

Challenge of Rhyming in English

On my own part as a hymn writer, there is also a fair amount of prosodic experimentation happening here. Rhyming is a demanding skill in English, and not without frustrations. In Chapter 2, I noted how Old English verse did not rhyme, but used alliteration as the principle of its poetic line structure. I understand that English poets learned rhyming from the Italians in the medieval period. However, it seems that normal full rhyming is much easier to use in Italian language than in English. In fact I understand that if the hand of a blindfolded person was plunged into a sackful of different Italian words, and two words were taken out, there would be about a one-in-four chance that the two words would rhyme –quite amazing for us in our English experience. One imagines the same test on a sackful of English words would have a one-in-several-thousand chance of success – a bit like "taking a ticket in Tatts" as they say. (And like most English speakers, I can't resist a bit of alliteration.)

We should not wonder, then, that rhyming has its difficulties for the English-speaking poet. Finding rhymes for a word that one wants to use can be, we must say, demanding and frustrating. However, a hymn text with no rhyme is very likely to eventually be laid aside – rhyming is a memory device, as well as a decorative, verbal-emphasis device. Hence the discovery of a rhyming dictionary would sound like a great boon, until one discovers in it how many English words have very few useful rhymes anyway – as if we did not know that already. Incidentally, I think that this is a major

difficulty with George Garnsey's otherwise useful hymn. One gets this feeling that some of the rhymes have been used endlessly by other hymn writers and could become a little humdrum; it would be tough to blame George Garnsey for this. However, it is a problem for hymn writers that they don't have the option of blank verse (i.e. poetry without rhyme), for, as we have noted earlier on several occasions, we still have people's expectation of rhyme for communal song.

Thus, we must make rhyme work. This will not be easy, but the *Songs of Grace* collection is an indication that hymn writers sense that rhyming is "the right thing to do". A few hymns have been included in which the poet has abandoned rhyming altogether, but there is something like a halfway solution – the use of minimal rhyme. The eight-line verse seems quite popular among some writers in this collection: a good number of hymns use this, and rhyme second/fourth and sixth/eighth lines – quite a reasonable half-way solution. However, it seems that, for rhyming, writers may need to look elsewhere.

A different approach to rhyming – consonant rhyming

About half a century ago, Frances Stillman published *The Poet's Manual and Rhyming Dictionary.* The *Rhyming Dictionary* itself would seem to be useful to the hymn writer, who has the immediate challenge of rhyming for a situation in which the worshipper is expecting verse that rhymes. *The Poet's Manual*, the opening section of Stillman's discussion, seems concerned, however, to introduce to its reader different ways of working with the challenge of rhyming. Her main interest in the Manual seems to be the use of *consonant rhyming*, or in Stillman's terminology, *consonance*:

> Consonance, or the use of identical consonant sounds both at the beginning and
> end of a word, is often used in place of rhyme, and is a very successful device.
> For example, one might end lines with lack, lake, lick, like, lock, luck, look, and
> Luke. Consonance is particularly effective in the irregular patterns of
> contemporary poetry ... The vowel sounds, in consonance, seem to modulate
> from one key to another as they change, giving a musical quality to the lines that
> no other device gives. [123]

I experienced a serious learning moment upon reading Stillman's essay, noticing in particular the phrase "either used throughout or mixed with other kinds of rhyme". I still

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[123] Frances Stillman, *The Poet's Manual and Rhyming Dictionary* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1966), 85.

use full rhyming on occasion if the opportunity arises, but I often use vowels and consonants in varying ways to get some of the emphasis of rhyming by mixing like vowel and like consonant sounds.

In order to clarify a little more, let us find some consonant rhymes for, say, *Lord*. Here we go: *lad, lid, lard, lead, led, laud, lead* (the metal), *load, lied, lewd*; and how about *land, lend,* or even, the last syllable of words like *aloud, allowed, allied*, *relied,* or even, if we were particularly desperate, multi-syllabic words like *liquid, limpid, landed, located, elicited*. There has been a certain new-found freedom about it all, and I took to it with some delight. And, yes, I draw attention to this kind of rhyming, for it could be useful for hymn writers. Within singing congregations there is that expectation of rhyme that we need to respect, and I try to make rhyming happen in varying ways – to fulfil this expectation, while still keeping open the kind of verse writing that can be brought into song successfully. Sometimes, of course, full rhymes come out by surprise, and I usually accept them with thankfulness.

Now let us use this information in order to make some observations of my text, two pages above, *Not by measure sends the Father*. We begin with the second verse, for therein are some quite clear examples of consonant rhyming. Note the consonant rhyming of lines two and five, *guise* and *gaze,* using the consonants g and z. Of course the *s* in *guise* is pronounced *z* – it is the sound that matters, not how the words look on paper, although the latter is not altogether insignificant; for people do read the text as well. In lines three and four, **so daring/enduring** makes a very strong two-syllable consonant rhyme with two repeated consonants, *d*, and *r*, and there is also the repeated *-ing* ending, which makes for a very clear rhyme. However, in lines six and seven, note the two syllable/three syllable consonant rhyming in the words <u>like<u>ness</u></u> and <u>live in us</u> – consonant rhyming working rather well – I was quite pleased with that one. I would argue that having three rhyming consonants would be nearly as strongly emphatic as having a vowel rhyme – remembering that vowels are significantly louder than consonants. Note also that in verse two we observe the first line having consonant rhyming with the last line: <u>glories/glistens</u>, which has the effect of bracketing the verse as a whole – although the distance in the poem of seven lines between the two words could arguably be rather a test for singers' observation, but this is a small point. I think I should call this approach of mine **loose rhyming** or **approximate rhyming**. I doubt if either is original.

Another aspect of my loose rhyming approach in this text is that I decided, **mainly as an experiment**, that in the couplet consisting of lines six and seven in each verse, I would attempt to have two-syllable/three-syllable rhymes, as in the first verse *fancy/family;* two syllables/three syllables. I found it unexpectedly challenging to achieve, but there they are: in the second verse *like<u>ness</u>/<u>live in us</u>*, in the third verse *daugh<u>ters</u>/<u>daun</u>t<u>lessness</u>*, and in the fourth verse *beauty/com<u>munity</u>,in which t*he sounds *b* and *m* are not obviously similar, but are actually both bilabial consonants (i.e. formed with the two lips) followed by *u*, and the rhyming sounds are *beauty/-munity.* Yes, it was an experiment, and I should "come clean" and note that my use of loose rhyming is greatly assisted by a little study and reading I did on English linguistics. This loose rhyming was more demanding to execute than I expected; but I think that it works for creating emphasis as rhyming should do; and Maarten's music, to his credit, is more than merely helpful in this regard, these couplets are high points in each verse for the singing people. He reads and attunes my texts very well indeed – as boldly says this non-music-critic.

Let us now observe what is happening in this hymn as a whole, beginning with the first verse of the hymn. The obvious place to start is the rhyming of lines three and four: with the echoing of sound to be heard quite strongly as emphasis (the extra *s* in *comprehend<u>s</u> us* is not a problem; it's the rhyming effect). So now let us observe the second and fifth lines: the rhyme is more like *through the <u>Son</u>/for hi<u>s own</u>:* note that the <u>z</u> sound in *hi<u>s</u>* runs into *own* without a pause, as happens in normal speech – *hizown,* so that *-zown* is close to a consonant rhyme with *Son*: (The two sibilants have some similarities, and both words end with *n*, so that the two lines are quite close to having a consonant rhyme, and it works effectively). The sixth and seventh lines of the verse are definitely an experimental couplet. I had somewhat daringly decided to try a two syllable/three syllable rhyme, and **fancy/family,** two syllables/three syllables, was the result, and it works. The reader needs to hear the sounds rhyming in their own way. So please think "aloud" if you are just reading the text quietly.

After this I had to make the two syllable/three syllable rhyming idea work in every stanza. In retrospect I'm not sure that I would go to such an effort again. It was hard work, though I do think it succeeds very well – here, and in the other stanzas. But let us check them. Perhaps, at least for this poem, they are worth the effort.

The consonant rhyming seems to work well in the second stanza. We have already noted *guise* and *gaze* in the second and fifth lines; note also *daring* and *enduring* in the third and fourth lines. And note again *glories* and *glistens* in the first and eighth lines; for this is a fair example of consonant rhyming: the two words sound *gl* at the beginning and *z*, at the end. The two syllable/three syllable endings, *likeness/live in us,* make for a clear consonant rhyme, and work well with Maarten's musical setting.

In the third verse *travail* and *travel,* at the end of the first and last lines, make a good consonant rhyme to bracket the whole verse and help to firm up its structure – a good consonant rhyme. An unkind critic might perhaps say to me "It's a bit obvious". "But isn't rhyming supposed to be obvious?" I might respond. However, I have a special liking for the two syllable/three syllable rhyme *sons' and daughters'/aweful dauntlessness*, which is surely very strong in its assonance as well as with three *aw* sounds in three syllables. Yes, it does look like the wrong spelling of *awful*, but *aweful* seems to have been invented for AHB, and is retained by *Together in Song* (TIS). It makes a point about being filled with awe – for the dauntlessness of the saints shames us into awareness of the deeply aweful. Of course here we could use awesome instead, but by now this word seems to be on the way to being well-worn young people's usage for anything that has earned their approval – a reminder that language-change is always happening, with the young commonly leading the way – much to our octogenarian disapproval, of course.

In the last stanza there is a consonant rhyme – an internal consonant rhyme actually – in the second line, *truth* and *troth,* the latter being a medieval variant of the former, but now meaning something like pledge, as in the old marriage service, "plight thee my troth". There is nice alliteration in the fourth line – *make us, mend us*, and there is effective vowel and consonant rhyming, in the second and fifth lines – *be now/renew.* In the third and fourth lines of the verse we have the use of full rhyme *forfend us/mend us* – a nice reminder that full rhyme is good, very intense, and if it works for the verse, we certainly should use it. I am not against full rhyme.

Apart from seeing in all this something of the effect in this text, of exploring the various possibilities of rhyme, I think we can see some confirmation of Frances Stillman's assertion, just two pages above, that "The vowel sounds, in consonance, seem to modulate from one key to another as they change, giving a musical quality to the lines

that no other device gives." There is in that a delightful metaphor which may help us to connect the sounds of the language with a musical quality in the text. Maarten Ryder would, I think, agree; and his melody gives the hymn a surprisingly simple music that is yet strikingly singable and beautiful, and looks to a connecting of music with meaning. I would also add that the connection of the text to the Bible gives the singing people an entry into the literary world of the Bible, and, as seen in earlier chapters, this can make for a good hymn text. Something of this is seen in the text of this hymn.

Don's hymn text – a Trinitarian patchwork of biblical allusion?

It is that idea of the connection between hymn text and biblical text that has been for me something of a theological principle for hymn writing. It seems to have been particularly important for the writing of this hymn to the Trinity. By chance I happened to be browsing in John's gospel, and by pure chance I read "he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for it is **not by measure** that he gives the Spirit'' (John 3:34, RSV). And there it is, the opening couplet of this hymn. For that triune God is known not by what he is, but by what he does, and that "not by measure", an emphatic opening, reinforced by the internal full rhyme *measure/treasure*. We are included in the work of the Triune God, and let us note that the three persons are given significant mention in every stanza of our hymn. And let us note also how the world of the Bible is feeding the hymn text as a whole.

All that not-by-measure quality in the first line becomes an overflowing quality in the rest of the first stanza: the Father <u>includes</u> us – that is the less common meaning in English of *comprehends us* – includes us, that is to say, in an utterly <u>comprehensive</u> love – all as children *for his own*, reminding us of 1 John 3:2: "Beloved, we are God's children now" (RSV). It is *past all fancy*, that is "above all that we ask or think" – as the AV unforgettably puts it in Ephesians 3 – that we are *named as family.* Those two very short, rhyming couplets in the first stanza, are very emphatic about it. The whole of verse one is devoted to that overflowing quality of the divine love, to the "breadth and length and height and depth'' of it all, as Paul gives us in Ephesians 3:18. We are certainly being brought into the literary world of the Bible. Is it also pressing us towards a poetic language for otherness? That is my hope. *Father/fathom* is not my best rhyming effort, but I think it is good enough.

The first line of our second stanza, *Emptied of the Father's glories/ servant formed* *...* reminds us of the well-known Philippians 2: 5-11, where Christ has "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (RSV). Now let us leap to line five, to that word *transfix*. Coming after that sharply emphatic, alliterative, <u>*Christ*</u> *so daring /*<u>*cross*</u> *enduring*, we pray for the Spirit to live that likeness of Christ in us, to pin to the cross our *wayward gaze*. For something like that is the implication of *transfix*, we dare to pray Christ to *transfix* that *wayward gaze* of ours upon the Cross, by piercing it through in order to hold it there with sharps; so that we can pray the *Spirit* to *live in us – till God's image in us glistens*. And that line is, if I may say so, a pretty good example of <u>assonance</u> – of rhyming vowels, but not consonants; and vowels are louder than consonants. There they are: *t<u>i</u>ll*, *<u>i</u>mage*, *<u>i</u>n*, *gl<u>i</u>stens* – four *i* vowels in eight syllables. I'm rather pleased with that one. It's an emphatic conclusion to verse two, for we have the Spirit to live that image in us. Of course it is made in the image which is God's creative work (Genesis 1: 26) and we want that image to *glisten* in us. So in all this we see the second stanza continuing to use the biblical writers in various ways to engage with the Trinitarian themes.

The third stanza opens with much allusion to Romans 8, with its references to the creation "groaning in travail", and is so known in our spirits also. The reference in verse 16 to the Spirit's *witness,* a quite frequent biblical word, hints at the work of the Spirit who, "helps us in our weakness"; (and how about that strong consonant rhyme, *witness* /weakness?) so that it further draws our attention to quite common, though somewhat varied, biblical use of Spirit in the hymn text – we note also in Galatians 4: 6, "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" And there it is in the hymn, *cry us Father, Christ's own heirs*. (Am I being a bit naughty there, using *us* as a dative after *cry*? Well it works.) However, we do find in Titus 3: 5, 6, 7, "regeneration and renewal in the **Holy Spirit, which he poured out** upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life". So again we have in the same verse those strong, short-lined couplets. Especially "sons' and d<u>au</u>ghters' /<u>awe</u>ful d<u>au</u>ntlessness". Yes. I do love those thrice sounded ***aw*** vowels.

The fourth stanza is different from the first three; the high degree of biblical allusion in the first three stanzas may, on first sight, appear to give way to a certain hackneyed Trinitarian theological and liturgical correctness. That can happen with hymns to the Trinity, but I don't think it is a fault here. There is, of course, a certain necessary summing

up to ensure this final stanza can be theologically credible, but I don't think it sounds hackneyed. The celebrative biblical force of the first three stanzas is now focussed in a final, fully Trinitarian affirmation. In this last verse the internal consonant rhyming in the second line *truth/troth* is very intense. The latter word, *troth*, is an old version of *truth*, but its meaning has changed over the centuries to something like the noun "pledge", as in the old marriage vow "plight thee my troth". And perhaps it is fitting for the "marriage supper of the Lamb". Once more, the short couplets in the verse are very forceful as in the other verses; the first of these couplets, *grace forefend us;/make us; mend us,* has good full rhyming, *forefend us/mend us*, while its rhyming second line is strengthened by the alliterative *make us/mend us*. But what about this word *forefend*? Well it isn't a common word, but it yields up its meaning with ease – as it did for me when I first discovered it. I love the hymn which packs so much meaning into a tight Trinitarian structure: years later, I still read it and sing it to myself with something like joy. Much structured poetic language is to be found in the hymn. Is it a language for otherness? The hymn writer can only give it to you in hope.

In the last stanza the complex rhyming between the second and fifth lines – *be now / renew* – leads us strongly into the last three lines: *Holy beauty, Thou community,/ Father, Son and Spirit ever.* Now the third of those last three lines gives us exactly what we would expect – an emphatic Trinitarian ending. However, it is the rhyming couplet *Holy beauty/Thou community* which sets up that ending. The great beauty of the Triune God is his singularity, *Thou*, and his plurality, the three-person *community*. Hence that strange "Thou community". We worship a single mysterious *community* of three divine persons, whom we can address in the singular pronoun *Thou* – one God. Of course, they say we can't do that anymore – using *Thou*, which is banned. But I just wonder. We couldn't really say this with *You community*, for this second person pronoun, You, is ambiguous with respect to number in modern English (it may be singular or plural). A bit sad it is at times, that we feel compelled to make such a change in older hymns. So be that as it may, I have used *thou* here for a special literary effect. I hope that, if only for that reason, it will find some acceptance for our hymn. Just occasionally the good old word is the very right word. After all, as noted in an earlier chapter, our children are still expected to read Shakespeare in school – and the least of their troubles is understanding *thou*. I love this hymn – and I hope my readers do too – to Maarten's incredibly simple but strangely satisfying tune.

Finally – a hymn on the church's behalf

I need to keep faith with my promise above to deal with one more hymn. Here is one from Maarten's and my collection, and it seems fitting that its subject should be to do with being church in the world:

> Still your gift of church you offer,
> still, O Jesus, willed in hope,
> ever judged, forsaken never,
> Father's household, Spirit home.
>
> Not by might but by that Spirit
> here, a baptized folk, we stand,
> table fed and onward speeded,
> church to this world's time-worn end.
>
> Be her saving health in weakness;
> in dissension be her judge.
> Strengthen yet her failing witness;
> make her yet your holy church..
>
> Help her love this world you purchased,
> feel its woes and heal its wars,
> greet its claims with faith and patience,
> meet with angels unawares.
>
> Make your church peculiar treasure,
> chosen race and royal priest,
> once no people, now your pleasure,
> dearly priced but dearly prized.

In the first paragraph of the 1992 Edition of the Uniting Church Basis of Union, there is a clause which, at the time of union, was often referred to in various Uniting Church contexts: "that unity which is both Christ's <u>gift</u> and <u>will</u> for the Church". And I could not resist it. So there it is in the opening couplet of our hymn:

> Still your ***gift*** of church you offer;
> Still, O Jesus, ***will***ed in hope.

It may be thought that I have mangled that oft-repeated line from the Basis of Union simply for the sake of an opening couplet for his hymn. However, the line from the Basis is too well known to be seriously damaged by the process. In fact, at least in the Uniting Church, it should serve to bring its memory to praise. After all, we should notice *Still,* at the beginning of both the first line, and the second line, with the result that the opening couplet is intensely emphatic and, with that background, quite memorable. In the second half of the verse, the church is

> … ever judged, forsaken never
>
> Father's household, Spirit home.

Notice that, while *hope* and *home* at the ends of the second and fourth lines are not strictly rhymes, the use of *ho,* at the beginning of both words gives a clear feeling of rhyme, a useful rhyming effect – a "rhyming trick" we could call it – because the final consonants *p* and *m* are both quite soft sounds, *p* because it is unvoiced, and *m*, though voiced, has the lips closed. Thus, the initial sound *ho* is decidedly foreground in both words: it is not a formal rhyme, of course, but nevertheless quite a good rhyming trick.

And speaking of rhyming tricks, note *offer/never* being treated as rhyme. Of course the final *-er* is the same in both words, but *f* and *v*, are they rhymes? They are close to rhymes, with both being labiodental fricatives (friction of breath over lip and teeth) while *v* in *never* is voiced and *f* in *offer* is unvoiced. So again, the two words *offer* and *never* are near enough to be called a loose rhyme.

Note also how the third line *ever judged, forsaken never* forms a very tight chiasmus with its two half lines, and the intensity of the line is heightened by that internal rhyme *ever/never*, but the line also recalls biblical phrases like "a city not forsaken" (Isaiah 62: 12) and "persecuted, but not forsaken" (2Corinthians 4: 9). Note also the parallelism in the two halves of the fourth line, *Father's household, Spirit home*, as well as the biblical echoes (*household of faith* in Galatians 6: 10 and *household of God* in Ephesians 2: 19). It is a tight first verse, not only in the use of biblical words, but in hints and ideas behind them. For example, it is also good to notice that while the three persons of the Trinity are found together in the first verse, this is not intentionally a Trinitarian hymn. Other important things are our interest in the hymn, but there is always a place for just a hint of the significance of Trinitarian focus as well – and so it is here.

The first line of verse two, *Not by might but by that Spirit*, is, of course, an allusion to Zechariah 4: 6, and I confess to being pleased with the rhyme of <u>onward-speeded</u> with <u>by that Spirit</u>. The *d* at the very end of *speeded* actually sounds as *t*, quite involuntarily in actual speech, so that there is close correspondence of pronunciation between *speeded* and *Spirit* at the beginning and the ending of the two words. It is clear rhyming, but probably not to be found in textbooks.

My rhyming effort with lines two and four, *stand/end*, is hardly exemplary rhyming in Australia, although the two words share that *nd* consonant cluster and would actually rhyme quite closely if spoken in British received pronunciation (RP), in which short *a* and short *e* are actually very similar vowel sounds.[124] The first verse has set the tone for the hymn pretty well, and the second verse follows – not actually as forcefully as the first verse – but there are the sacraments, the baptismal washing and Eucharistic feeding of the church to *this world's time-worn end*.

Of course the *Basis of Union* is more expansive and puts it more clearly. With a few more words from Davis McCaughey, we may be

> … mindful that the Church of God is committed to serve the world for which
> Christ died, and that it awaits with hope the day of the Lord Jesus Christ on which
> it will be clear that the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our
> Lord, and of the Christ, who shall reign for ever and ever.[125]

The church in its humanness, however, is still "on the way", and verse three begins with a good chiasmus, "Be her saving health in weakness; / in dissension be her judge". (I think I'm in quite good form there.) There is also some interesting parallelism in the next couplet: *"Strengthen yet her failing witness/make her yet your holy church".* Notice that the repetition of *yet* becomes unexpectedly emphatic, with its suggestion that somehow the church is incomplete. There are also interesting consonant rhymes: *weakness/witness* and *judge*/*church* (The sounds *dg* and *ch* are another voiced/unvoiced pair).

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[124] Don't let anyone tell you that Australian speech is slovenly. Australians separate these two sounds, a short *a* and a short *e*, very clearly. For our convict ancestors had to shout over acres of empty ground or dense forest to make themselves heard and understood, and the result of all this, within thirty years of the first settlement, was the beginnings of an Australian accent. It had to be clear. G. W. Turner discusses this in *The English Language in Australia and New Zealand (*London: Longmans, Green and Co. 1966)

[125]J. Davis McCaughey, *The Basis Of Union – A Commentary (Introduced and Edited by Andrew Dutney),* (Sydney: The Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, 2000), 35.

In the fourth stanza, *purchased* reflects Paul's repeated line in first Corinthians, "you were bought with a price". Was *purchased* a slightly desperate choice of a rhyme for *patience*? Perhaps so, but it clearly works as consonant rhyme, and I do rather like it. Of course it comes from the repeated *patience and faith* of the saints in Revelation 13: 10. Moreover there is a lot of other word play going on in the verse. There are two internal rhymes in the second line: *feel/heal* and *woes/wars*, the latter pair of which also forms another consonant rhyme with *unawares* in the last line of the verse (which takes its inspiration from Hebrews 13:2). Notice also the initial rhyming *greet/meet* in the third and fourth lines. There is a lot of word-sound play in this stanza.

The fifth and last stanza draws its inspiration from 1Peter 2: 9 and 10, and makes a good deal of use of its themes. The hymn as a whole begins with praise, but from verse three onwards it moves to prayer. The fifth verse continues the prayer, but after the first couplet it moves to praise and thanksgiving. That word *peculiar* is actually the AV word; it is more succinct than our later usage, but it does seem to have undergone some change in meaning. We can note also how the touch of alliteration – *race/royal* in the second line, helps to hold the line together, as do the adverbs *once/now* for the third line. Furthermore, the last line of the verse and the poem is surely a pretty good final line: there is a certain antithetic parallelism with the preceding line. And therein is some ambiguity: the divine cost is highly emphatic through the repetition of *dearly*, and the strong internal rhyming of the last line: *dearly priced but dearly prized*.

This hymn is obviously very structured language, perhaps even more tightly so, I think, than my other hymn, *Not by Measure*, which we observed immediately above. There are various aspects of writing that can make a poetic text memorable. Among these we have noticed verse structure with its formal shape and rhyming with its formal emphasis. In general, these are part of anything written for communal song, and it is difficult to evade them. "They are crafted lines," was said to me once by Bruce Prewer, to which I would now respond, "Thanks mate".

Conclusion – concluding remarks and some questions

When it comes to hymnody we find allusion to passages of scripture, and some simple borrowing of particular biblical words which translators have found useful; and they help to bring the singer into the world of the Bible – its literary world. And it matters, and

should be helpful, because hymn writing is a literary activity. We find structures of varying formality, like anaphora, parallelism, chiasmus, and some others, which tend to distance the hymn from normal language use, and so to hint at a language for otherness – dare I say, for the holy. At least in this we have our two criteria which have come to our attention in this discussion from time to time: the world of the Bible, and a language for otherness; for what is also important in all this is to remember that hymn singing is for public worship. And in that, there is both a seriousness and a strangeness.

It has seemed somewhat strange to have included my own hymns for comment in the study, but I was assured that this would be a good thing to do. And so it has been, and I am very grateful for the suggestion. It was not without some hesitation that I came to turn the tools of literary criticism onto my own work, but it seems in retrospect that I discovered more about what had happened in my new hymns than I had yet realised. Strangely, I didn't expect that. But it suggests that the church has it right: There is a strangeness, an otherness, a place for the holy, always there in the church at worship, always in some need of explication, and so it must be, in its words and its song.

At times such can come to the notice of church ministers and leaders, perhaps in writing prayers or a sermon. However, other things can also happen, for we can be influenced by the culture in which we are leading and teaching. It quite often seems that the dominating message for hymn writers in some way contradicts that culture, and yet it reflects that culture, and for modern hymn writers that message seems to have been something like "Keep it Simple" – without much reservation. I do not believe in making things unnecessarily complex, but I do believe that people can actually read, and "catch on" over time, especially through the communal character of hymn singing, its unexpected help for memory, and the fact that hymns may be repeated time after time.

A fairly thin line exists between keeping hymns simple and making them trivial. We see that line crossed fairly often with new hymns – or "songs". Indeed I seem in my past to have found myself somewhat complicit in this keeping-it-simple trend, especially in somewhat earlier times. However, I increasingly find myself theologically alarmed at ways in which both the verse and the music of hymnody in modern Protestant worship seem to be in the process of becoming trivialised by general consent, even by encouragement from Church leadership. Of course there has been an unfortunate persistence of aspects of the

influence of the later nineteenth century taste in hymns – something like hymns tending toward folk-song. It is no unfair comment to say that preachers and teachers, who have not been drawn to writing hymns themselves, have often been interested enough to insist that new hymns are necessary for the church's future. And they were not altogether wrong in this. But I do think there has been an unfortunate influence on "keeping it simple" in our expectation of new hymns. I do not think I am alone in this; I draw my reader's attention to the passage from Nathan Mitchell in *The Expository Times*, quoted in Chapter 1, commenting on modern liturgy. His remarks could equally apply to that part of liturgy which is modern hymnody: I quote it again for the reader's convenience:

> I suspect that the sensory impoverishment and deprivation of so much liturgy today results from our rush to make intelligibility the centrepiece of reform and renewal. The unintentional consequence is a liturgy which "explains" rather than evokes, speaks rather than sings, drones rather than dances, and skulks rather than soars.[126]

I decided to approach this situation with the tools of literary criticism. With a background in literary criticism, I have been able to evaluate, sometimes positively, sometimes negatively, examples of Christian hymnody, and also examples of the ways hymns have been written, altered or edited in recent times.

I was also able to evaluate "modernising" of verse in our three hymnals, involving comparison of the "original" version of a hymn with the revised version in the hymnal. Of course the meaning of "original" in this context means different things for different hymnals. In AHB it seems to mean "the author's original as far as we know it". In CP it seems to mean "the best-known version used in the church generally." (CP is clearly Anglican in background, but it has a most commendable openness to hymns from other traditions.) *Together in Song* (TIS) seems to honour AHB's intention, but out of its concerns for inclusiveness, has been much more prepared to make changes itself – not always successfully. It seems that the main issue has something to do with bringing holiness and beauty together.

But what of the theology of it all? How can a beautiful work of art, perhaps like a Barth listening to Mozart, perhaps something like a congregation caught up in singing a

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[126] Ian Paton, "Sacrosanctum Concillium: Fifty Years On", *The Expository Times*, 125/4 (January 2014)

beautiful hymn – how can it bring people of earth into the very presence and worship of the holy God? If we are standing before some beautiful music, painting, poetry, or ritual action, are we before the holy in worship?

Once in my long-ago teaching days, for the school summer break-up, parents and friends' night, I taught most of the school's students the "Hallelujah Chorus" – a not unusual choice in large high schools at the time. However, I taught in a very small high school and had to teach the parts painfully note by note. The students were amazing – the result was that they could sing it unaccompanied. Two or three days before the break-up concert, our special accompanist arrived at the school for a rehearsal. I remember saying to the students, "I think you know this. Let's see if you can put it all together with the piano". They did so splendidly to the amazement of the accompanist and my relief. A small group of the youngest girls in front of me gasped, "O Mr Bell", in a half cry-half sig. I think of this incident as students in their very early teens experiencing beauty in a big way! Were they, perhaps, just for a moment, before the holy in worship? In retrospect, this seemed to me to be the case.

The well-respected Dutch Reformed theologian Geradus van der Leeuw, in his splendid *Sacred and Profane Beauty: the Holy in Art*, made a study of the various arts – dance, drama, poetry, architecture, and music – as they are manifested in the worship of various religions and cultures around the world, and as examples of art and worship working together. The title of the book was enough to make me think it would be important; and so it was. Near the end of his book, van der Leeuw likens religion and art – the holy and the beautiful – to being on two different rivers, always different, until in time we may just come to their joining together:

> As soon as we pray to beauty or pray for beauty, it is clear that we have left the land of art and of beauty; simultaneously, we have left the land of religion. We stand in faith. Perhaps we stand just at the confluence of both rivers, there where both, which have been unable to come together, unite, and are now borne together in faith.[127]

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[127] Geradus van der Leeuw: *Sacred and Profane Beauty: The Holy in Art* (London: Weinfeld and Nicolson, 1963), 339.

I think the writing and singing of hymns is a bit like that. Just a bit. Maybe just sometimes. We want our work as hymn writers to be true, but in that, are we not wanting such work also to be beautiful? And that reminds me of Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn*:

Beauty is truth, truth beauty, – that is all

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.[128]

It is perhaps here that my two criteria, bringing singers into the world of the Bible, and finding a language for otherness, can look for a place in a hymn book.

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