

Telling Truth Through Tearful Songs

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My theme is the relationship between preaching and song. I am thinking of songs sung *by* a congregation, and songs sung *to* a congregation. I invite you to meet songs that offer new opportunities for preaching. They are “tearful songs”—songs of questioning, grief, and lament. Their music is an indispensable part of their meaning, and experiencing them is essential for full appreciation of what they can do. Because space forbids printing both words and music, our meeting is one-dimensional. Yet the words are powerful enough to begin with. When preparing to use these songs in worship, preachers and musicians will need to work together.

Unprepared Congregational Utterance

Some songs of this type can be used in the traditional manner, as sung response to scripture or preaching. Most such usages are *unprepared congregational utterances*. The song is announced (“Hymn number so-and-so”), or printed in a worship bulletin and introduced, unannounced, by an instrumentalist. The unstated assumption is that the song can be appropriated by the congregation, immediately and without preparation. An example is Ruth Duck’s paraphrase of Psalm 10, “Why Stand So Far Away, My God?” [See page 29 of this article.]

However, many tearful songs are too particular, or too demanding, to be used without explanation.¹ They need someone to introduce them. Who better than the preacher?

Preliminary Questions

Before I elaborate, let me look briefly at one type of tearful song: the lament. When we lament before God, we do something which many have not done in public, and which therefore needs preparation. Middle class Protestant traditions, for example, are not known for the intensity of their lament.

It would be fascinating to explore the historical roots of this neglect. It is reasonable to assume that early Christianity had no theological space for its Jewish heritage of lament. The experience of the Spirit, the glow of Easter, and the expectation of Christ’s imminent return birthed joy in community and a fervent expectation extended over time as hopeful endurance. Jesus’ own proclamation was “good news,” qualified only by his cry of abandonment on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” found in only two of the gospels (Mark 15:34, Matthew 27:46).

Another possibility is that the suppression of lament has been exacerbated in Reformed traditions by their emphasis on the absolute sovereignty of God. In popular theology, the argument is a slam dunk: since God’s sovereignty is absolute, suffering cannot be questioned. It must be God’s will. Thus, when evil and suffering overwhelm us, the last thing we permit ourselves to do is complain, still less rage against God. Instead, we “trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.”² Hopeful endurance withers into bleak acquiescence.

Our culture suppresses lament. Success is the goal. Lament is for losers. In today’s

America, even after the shock of September 11th, 2001, "Praise Choruses" remain popular, but there is no market for "Favorite Laments."

Whatever the explanations may be, lament is absent from large swathes of Christian tradition. Our hymnals have myriad hymns of assurance, but few that express doubt, questioning, or lament. Though recent Methodist, Presbyterian, and United Church of Christ hymnals have extensive Psalm sections, they are modeled on the common lectionary, which omits many Psalms of lament and lament sections of Psalms.

If lament is to re-enter Christian worship, it will need help from preachers. Preaching can shape a theological space for it, until congregations give themselves permission to utter it. The preacher can show, first, that lamenting before God implies covenant, not contract. Contractual thinking says, "You broke our agreement. I'm out of here." Covenant relationship says, "Where are you? I'm not leaving, so show yourself!" Lament signals a longing for, and implicit acceptance of relationship with God, and refuses to withdraw into apathy and disbelief.

Second, preaching can show how lament is, at times, the only approach to God open to someone who is suffering. Lament suppressed distances us from God. Lament expressed can bring relief, even when there is no resolution.³

Third, preaching needs to show how biblical lament almost always puts vindication and vengeance in God's hands. In our merciless, vengeful culture, it is hard to overemphasize the importance of this aspect of lament, and our need for it.

Finally, preaching can make space for corporate lament as counter-cultural witness. Because lament voices our weakness, mortality, need, loss, and descent into chaos, it contradicts our culture's myth of success and anxious, problem-solving, demands for quick resolutions of grief and despair. Lament says no to the premature, timetabled "closure" that sufferers are pressured to achieve during our mass media's short attention span.

To put the above poetically, a preacher can lead the congregation in prayer, as in this hymnic response to Psalm 88.⁴

God, give us freedom to lament
and sing an honest, aching song,
when faith is twined with discontent,
and all is empty, wrecked, and wrong.

Give us the candor to complain
when pain attacks without reprieve,
and evil rages unrestrained
while you are absent, or on leave.

The hymn ends with a commitment to stay in covenant with God:

We'll walk beside you, come what may,
to your hopes and hearts belong,
and when we've nothing else to say,
we'll sing an honest, aching song.⁵

Texts for Proclamation

"Tearful songs" can be welcomed to the pulpit in at least four ways: as texts to aid proclamation, as poet in residence, as conversation partner(s), and as visiting preacher. As an example of a text to aid proclamation, consider Dan Damon's hymn, "Strong, Gentle Children" (p. 30). When children, their needs, and their gifts, are the preacher's theme, this hymn offers several statements worthy of quotation and explication: the assurance that "God made you beautiful"; the words of encouragement to victims of abuse ("though you are wounded, *know you are not to blame*; cry out your story till truth is revealed"); and the recognition that God calls children to give leadership, and their elders to receive it. Used in worship, such a hymn is a public utterance, in the probable hearing of both abused and abusers. Its public use is risky, but can be a work of liberation. Public utterance also functions as a creed or "policy statement" by the worshipping congregation.

Another example of a hymn that can assist proclamation is "Speechless in a World that Suffers" (p. 31). I offer it—and other hymn poems of mine—with a cautionary note. Though what I say ought to be useful, it should not be privileged as the "real" or only meaning of the text. Once a hymn poem is put before a readership, audience, or congregation, it acquires public meaning and significance. The author's comments, however valid, should not preempt the interpretations of those who hear, read, preach from, and sing it.

"Speechless in a World that Suffers" was written for a lecture series given by German theologian Dorothee Sölle in Eugene, Oregon. Looking back on the Nazi Holocaust, her theme was "After the Shoah: Half a Century Later—Theological Reflections on Remembrance, Pain and Hope."⁶ Though intended for congregational use, the hymn needs a context where similar issues are being addressed. It is written for a haunting Welsh tune named BRYN CALFARIA ("Hill of Calvary"),⁷ which magnifies its painful, insistent questions, and whose 'weeping, falling' melody in the penultimate line perfectly fits the cry in stanzas 1 and 3 ("Why, Oh Why, Oh Why, Oh Why?" and "'Why, oh why, am I alone?"). Where this tune is unknown, it is important that the congregation hear it three or four times before being invited to sing it, and that initial singing is modeled by soloist(s) and/or choir on the unison line. Because of the hymn's density and length, it is best sung with variations: by having some stanzas sung solo, alternating stanzas between choir and congregation in classic Lutheran style, or having stanzas 2 and 3 spoken by a solo speaker over quiet organ improvisation. Obvious scripture readings include all or part of Mark 15: 25-39, Psalm 22: 1-21, Psalm 88, and Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Preachers must decide whether their exposition of what follows needs more than one sermon.

The first stanza summarizes the human situation. On both the neighborhood and global scale,⁸ suffering and evil sicken us, with two opposite yet conjoined effects, making us speechless, stricken, and dumb,⁹ yet impelling us to cry out to God. The questions are insistent and impassioned: "Are you loving? Are you listening? Hear our hearts, crying, 'Why, Oh Why, Oh Why, Oh Why?' Will you help, or pass us by?"

Such questions ultimately demand an answer, but only boneheadedness or anxiety would try to meet them, at this point, with reasoned explanations. The "why!?!?!?" of lament and grief is not a request for information, but an appeal for a listening ear. In pastoral situations one listens. In preaching, this point can be illuminated with stories. Anyone who has spent three hours listening to a friend sadly and angrily detailing how

she was pushed out of an associate pastor position or heard a man cry “NO!” and “Why?” as he weeps for his murdered brother, will know that little can or should be said. Perhaps God also knows better than to interrupt, too early, with explanations.

Because cool, reasoned answers would disrespect the intensity of our cries, the hymn continues with questions. In the second stanza, two questions focus on God’s story with Israel, from Sinai through settlement, kingship, exile, return, and oppression. Though I believe that faith ultimately says “yes” to both questions,¹⁰ that yes is costly, embodied, and evangelical: evangelical because it offers good news, embodied because it must be lived as well as spoken, and costly because it is an affirmative not merely of agreement but of commitment.

The first section of stanza three invites preachers to journey into the Hellenistic mindset of the second century and beyond, whereby it was a cultural given, a belief incontrovertibly obvious, that God could not possibly suffer. My inclination would be to show respect for the communion of saints by trying to arrive with my congregation at the point where we can say, if only for a moment, “So *that’s* why they thought that way!” By doing so we can segue into a critique of these views, and of their offspring, still alive and ill in any popular theology, prayer, and hymnody that paints a portrait of God as serene and changeless, “aloof and uninvolved.”¹¹

Though I believe that the second question, focusing on the cross, invites the answer, “No, the Source of all things is stricken beyond our imagining when the Word in flesh suffers on the cross,” such an answer will be more persuasive when struggled for and arrived at, and when our preaching models that struggle and arrival.

Stanza four is reverent speculation. It invites a wonder-filled meditation tracing God’s knowledge (yet not control) of “*all* the choices, *all* the chances, *every* if and why and where” of human existence, and what it might mean to know “joy and grief beyond compare.” The stanza’s concluding question is better posed than answered, so that hearers try to answer it themselves.

I read somewhere of a book that gives twelve attempted explanations of the problem of radical evil. Faithful preaching could explore some of those attempts, the better to arrive at stanza five’s conclusion, that “reason ends with broken answers.” All explanations fail, but the attempt to explain is perennially necessary, because in making it we proclaim, to others as to ourselves, that somehow, ultimately, God will help us make sense of it all.

The concluding stanzas give, not answers, but the threads of a faithful, enacted response. Such a response will be Christ-centered and communal, as we “pray and hope to find, through each other, joined together, Christ alive, caring, bearing evil, giving joy that the world cannot destroy.” Stanza six gives a series of word pictures inviting the preacher to add stories of “grief undaunted, telling truth through tearful songs,” and to illustrate how anger can be channeled into loving action. The theme song here is not, “make me a channel of your peace,” but “make your peace the channel for my anger.”

Poet in Residence

Sometimes a preacher can serve the congregation by treating a “tearful song” as if it were written by a poet in residence. The sermon can “interview” not the poet but the text, with a close reading that deepens appreciation when the song is thereafter sung.

By way of example, let me visit a hymn already mentioned, Ruth Duck's paraphrase of Psalm 10.¹² She begins with the blunt, perennial questions of lament (Why?....Why?) followed by a deft description of abusive power: "The proud, unbridled, chase the poor, /and curse you in their greed." Straddling the middle of the line, the word "unbridled" delays, and thus highlights, the verb "chase," which suggests a pursuit that is energetic, relentless, almost gleeful. The choice of the word "unbridled" is exact: it is deregulated power that becomes relentlessly greedy and knows no bounds. Preaching can illustrate and exemplify this point.

The second stanza repeats lament's question ("Why do you hide?"), then describes the "chase" of the poor in a metaphor drawn from the Psalm: "They wait to pounce upon the weak as lions stalk their prey." The repetition of the question is doubly effective: it states the hymn's opening theme in different language, and thus rings true as lament, because lament says "why?" not once, politely, but again and again, incessantly: "Why, O why, O why, O why?"

The third stanza again repeats question and comment, but in reverse order, varying the pattern and putting the question in the other most emphatic part of the stanza, at the end: "Why, in these cruel, chaotic times, cannot your face be seen?" Previously, the word "why" was followed immediately by its verb. This time the verb is delayed, and the "why?" reverberates, like a note struck on a piano and held, instead of immediately being superseded by the following note. Word choices fill out the portrait of the powerful as arrogant and self-centered: they "strut" and "preen," as proud as peacocks.

Four times the question has been asked, and three times the situation described. Now, in stanza four the hymnist follows the psalmist, and turns for hope in the only possible direction: the memory of God's love in times past, from which we implore God, also, to remember. The verb *remember* is used in its full, biblical meaning: when God remembers, God acts on the memory. As the question was reiterated, so is the prayer, in an action sequence: first, "Remember," then "Arise," then having arisen, "Come!" The hymn ends with two vivid images. The bleeding wounds of the oppressed depict both individual suffering and social devastation: the blood-flow is not a trickle but a hemorrhage, enfeebling and life-threatening. In the final line, the final verb reminds us (and God) that the problem is not a headache but a migraine, not anxiety, but intimidation: "Let terror reign no more!" Though the word "terror" could be applied to the terrorism that vexes America, preaching should emphasize its primary meaning in this hymn, namely, the terror experienced by the poor and weak, intimidated by the ruthless and powerful.

Conversation Partners

A hymn poem cannot do systematic theology. What it can do, at best, is explore and express a particular theological theme. A poetic exploration gains power from being single-minded, and rarely has room for exceptions, contradictions, modifications, and alternatives. A preacher, on the other hand, can bring together contrasting poems in such a way that they modify each other without losing their power and integrity. As an example, consider Shirley Murray's "God Weeps," in conversation with my hymn, "When All is Ended" (p. 33).

In this conversation, "God Weeps" speaks first. Preferably, it is sung, by a soloist or choral group. The tune, named HIROSHIMA by composer Carlton Young, both expresses and heightens the anguished power of the lyric.¹³ The poem hangs on four

powerful verbs: God weeps, bleeds, cries, and waits. Each stanza has three objects of its verb, in short lines and vivid images, for which an imaginative user of PowerPoint can find suggestive expressions or analogues. In the first stanza, for example, “love withheld” could be a face turned away, or hands outstretched toward arms tightly folded, while “strength misused” could be rendered with images of military force or economic power. Alternatively, or if no PowerPoint is available, invite people to make their own “Economy Power Point,” by turning to each other in threes and fours, and brainstorming images for particular stanzas. The congregation then becomes a partner in preaching, whether or not there is time for findings to be shared. Some phrases in the hymn invite meditation and explication by the preacher. How, for example, does one exegete “till we change the way we love” or “till we change the way we win?”

“God Weeps” makes a powerful statement. Its first three stanzas poignantly portray the vulnerability of God revealed in Jesus Christ—a worldview away from the impassible, untouchable, unmoved mover of Hellenistic philosophy. The concluding stanza presents God’s eternal, inexhaustible patience, in a way both essential and incomplete. Precisely because it is unqualified by other things that God does, this concluding statement presents a divine patience both awesome and formidable, as a question mark that interrogates the singer. If God waits until stones melt, peace takes root, compassion becomes a habit, and *until we understand the Christ*, our response cannot be tabled or delayed. For we are a people called to understand Christ, by living as Christ’s disciples, here and now, as we seed peace, melt stones, and practice compassion.

Yet God does more than wait and wait and wait and wait. God also endures, exhausts evil, triumphs, brings new birth and new life, and births a new creation—themes expressed in the hymn’s poetic conversation partner, “When all is ended.” The word “also” is important. To say, “God weeps, *but.....*” would diminish the strength of that weeping, and of Shirley Murray’s rendering of it. Say instead, “God weeps, *and....* God also endures, etc.”

“When All Is Ended” should first be spoken in its entirety, as a poem heard by the congregation. It begins with a question: “when all is ended....shall all be mended, sin and death out-cast?” to which the immediate response is not “yes!” but a song of hope. From this starting point the hymn builds a case for its concluding affirmation, in stanzas that gain from a preacher’s brief commentary and explication. What lightning flashes of goodness are known to one’s own congregation (stanza 2)? What signs can we point to, in our time, of “wars ended, peace declared, compassion shown, great days of freedom, tyrants overthrown” (stanza 3)? What “dream-worlds in the sky or in the head” lull and delude the poor and hungry (stanza 4)? What are the characteristics of the “earthy” faith that sings a heaven-bound song (stanza 5)? What is suggested by God’s power (stanza 6) to bring evil to exhaustion, rather than smash and destroy it? Finally, the hymn is sung. Two tunes are available. The first, Vaughan Williams’ SINE NOMINE (Set to “For All the Saints” in most hymnals) is widely known, but a notch too bright and triumphant for the tone of the lyric. The second tune is William Rowan’s YOGANANDA (see source details on p. 34). Composed for my lyric, it moves from an open-ended beginning, onward and finally upward to the extended Alleluia at the end of each stanza. If the first three stanzas are sung solo or chorally, most congregations will have begun to claim the tune by the time they join in on stanza four.

Visiting Preacher

Finally, a songwriter can be welcomed into the pulpit, and invited to preach, with the help of his or her host, thus allowing the congregation to hear a different pastoral and/or prophetic voice. The host preacher probably spends less time than usual in preparation, but doesn't get a Sunday off. Accepting a poet as guest also demonstrates that though preaching is usually a solo voice, it is not a solo performance.

In this case, our visiting preacher is John Bell, a member of Scotland's Iona Community. He is a Church of Scotland Minister, lyricist, and composer. Though I single him out for convenience and impact, he comes with his colleague Graham Maule, and with the members of the Community's Wild Goose Resource Group, who all contribute to Bell and Maule's remarkable collection, *When Grief Is Raw*, containing twenty-five songs for "times of sorrow and bereavement" (for details, see p. 34). Let us invite John to preach through three of those songs (several others could also be fruitfully selected).

In welcoming him to the pulpit, we follow the rules of etiquette for hosting any visiting preacher. First, let the preacher preach. Don't follow the visitor's sermon with a lengthy and anticlimactic explanation of what the preacher really meant. Second, introduce the visitor, saying enough to offer a welcome and sketch this person's humanity, without submerging him or her with lengthy praise or extravagant expectations. Third, briefly connect the visitor's message with one's own context. This is hard for a visitor to do, even when physically present. In this case, the host preacher also has the advantage of knowing what the visitor will say! Connections are best sketched and hinted, so that the congregation participates in making them.

As host preacher, we can introduce our guest with a summary drawn from the Introduction to *When Grief Is Raw*, where Bell and Maule describe three factors that have prompted the collection.

One is the dearth of suitable material for singing at funerals and memorial services. In Britain, the default choices are "The Lord's My Shepherd" (Psalm 23) or Henry Francis Lyte's "Abide With Me, Fast Falls the Eventide," with the addition, in recent years, of "Thine Be the Glory" as an alternative to the former two or as a counter-attraction to "The Old Rugged Cross." Though (unlike the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion), ceremonies surrounding death are offered by the churches to everyone, "minimal attention has been paid to what is both accessible and representative... for those who mourn."

The second factor was the Wild Goose Resource Group's discovery of "the immense range of emotion in the Psalms." They surmise that "limp musical settings of these ancient texts or presumed over-familiarity with them" have dulled our sense to the "direct, raw pleading and complaining which is as necessary for a healthy faith as adoration." In Scotland, the events of Wednesday 13th March, 1996, when sixteen primary school children and their teacher were killed by a gunman in Dunblane, highlighted the need for songs of lament, and the lack of them.

Third, the songs arise from interaction with many people, in particular situations. The songs in *When Grief Is Raw* were not written with an eye to publication. Instead, the book is "the consequence of songs resonating in situations other than that for which they were first intended." The authors record their gratitude "to those who have discussed the scriptures with us and shared those sorrows which informed our words."

There follows some important advice on performance practice, especially in

situations where the depth of shared anguish makes the common voice weak. The introduction concludes with the hope “that these songs may enable God’s people to speak honestly to their Maker when grief is raw, just as other songs enable their praise to be represented when joy is deep.”

Our introduction can be preceded, or followed, by the first song, “We Cannot Measure How You Heal”(see p. 34). Set to a Scottish folk tune, YE BANKS AND BRAES [OF BONNY DOONE], this song is—of the three—the most suitable for congregational singing, aided perhaps by a choral or solo rendering of the opening stanza. The song needs minimal comment and is well worth quoting in prayers and other parts of the service.

The second song is sung to the congregation by a soloist, group, or male-female duet. Entitled, “A Cradling Song,” “We Cannot Care for You the Way We Wanted,” it is a poignant expression of grief and parting. It springs from the recognition that “the death of a child in the womb during pregnancy, or the birth of a stillborn child, or the gradual fading from life of a tiny baby brings feelings of anger, desolation and deep disappointment which have no parallel in the grief over a friend whose life has run its full course.”¹⁴ Though such a song is for particular people and situations, it is important to have it sung in a faith community, in order to assure sufferers that they are not alone; recognize and acknowledge their suffering (especially important when people and culture ignore or downplay it); and prepare ourselves, so that when and if we need to, we also can hear this song.

Similar considerations apply to “There Is a Place,” written in the aftermath of the Dunblane school shootings described above. When introducing it, brief mention may be made of the all-too-many similar incidents here in the United States.¹⁵ It is best offered as a solo, or chorally led, in which the congregation is explicitly invited to join, as the song flows on. When the song has been heard and sung, the host preacher may appropriately comment, briefly, that the song raises for all of us a deep, personal question: what is “heaven,” and what is our hope beyond death? (Perhaps that can be the theme of the host preacher’s next Sunday sermon).

In suggesting that preachers invite poets as visitors, I want to underline the importance of the host. If we love the people we serve and they trust us, they will welcome the visitor because we have issued the invitation.

Why Stand So Far Away, My God?

Ruth Duck

Composer: Anon

Poetic Meter: Common Meter (8.6.8.6) Tune: MORNING SONG

The tune, MORNING SONG, is familiar, suitable to the text, and available in many hymnals. For example, it appears with Duck’s words in the *Chalice Hymnal* (Disciples of Christ, 1996), #671; and (with other hymn texts) in the *Presbyterian Hymnal* (1990), #600 and *United Methodist Hymnal* (1989), #226. Permission is needed to reproduce any version whose harmonization is in copyright.

Why stand so far away, my God?
Why hide in times of need?
The proud, unbridled, chase the poor,
and curse you in their greed.

Why do you hide when, full of lies,
they murder and betray?
They wait to pounce upon the weak
as lions stalk their prey.

The weak are crushed and fall to earth;
the wicked strut and preen.
Why, in these cruel, chaotic times
cannot your face be seen?

In ages past you heard the voice
of those the proud oppress.
Remember those who suffer now,
who cry in deep distress.

Arise, O God, and lift your hand;
bring justice to the poor.
Come, help us stop the flow of blood!
Let terror reign no more!

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Strong, Gentle Children

Daniel Charles Damon (Author and Composer)

Poetic Meter: 5.6.10.Double

Tune: TWILIGHT

Strong, gentle children,
God made you beautiful,
gave you the wisdom and power you need:
speak in the stillness
all you are longing for;
live out your calling to love and to lead.

Strong, hurting children,
angry and terrified,
fear not the secrets your life has concealed;
though you are wounded,
know you are not to blame;
cry out your story till truth is revealed.

Strong, knowing children,
utter your cry aloud,
honor the wisdom God gave you at birth;
speak to your elders
till they have heard your voice;
sing out your vision of healing on earth.

Faith Will Sing (Carol Stream, Ill.: Hope Publishing Company, #21). Copyright © 1993
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Speechless in a World that Suffers

Brian Wren

Composer: William Owen

Poetic Meter: 8.7.8.7.8.5.7.7. TUNE: BRYN CALFARIA

-1-

Speechless in a world that suffers,
 seeking hope, in prayer we come,
sick with warfare, rape, and murder,
 crying out, or stricken, dumb.
Are you loving? Are you listening?
Hear our hearts, crying,
 Why, Oh Why, Oh Why, Oh Why?
 Will you help, or pass us by?

-2-

Did your love, unseen and holy,
 seeking human love and trust,
give a law and keep a treaty,
 though your people turned unjust?
Did you tend them through affliction,
loving still, judging,
 grieving, weeping, feeling loss,
 in a foretaste of the cross?

-3-

Could a loving, wise Creator,
 seeing evil unresolved,
stay aloof, a silent ruler,
 calm, unchanging, uninvolved?
Could a heart that heard the Savior,
near despair, crying,
 “Why, oh why, am I alone?”
 sit unmoved, as cold as stone?

-4-

Hour by hour, as life advances,
 as eternally you trace
all our choices, all the chances,
 howling evil, healing grace,
far beyond our understanding,
do you know, weighing
 every if and why and where,
 joy and grief beyond compare?

-5-

Living in a world that suffers,
 pain and evil fret our mind.

Reason ends with broken answers.

Let us pray, and hope to find,
through each other, joined together,
Christ alive, caring,
bearing evil, giving joy
that the world cannot destroy.

-6-

In the grief, by fear undaunted,
telling truth through tearful songs,
in the burst of loving anger,
giving strength to tackle wrongs,
in a neighbor, in a stranger,
show your love, living,
glowing, warming, gleaming bright,
like a candle in the night.

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God Weeps

Shirley Murray Composer: Carlton Young
Poetic Meter: 6.4.8.10. Tune: HIROSHIMA

God weeps
at love withheld,
at strength misused,
at children's innocence abused,
and till we change the way we love,
God weeps.

God bleeds
at anger's fist,
at trust betrayed,
at women battered and afraid,
and till we change the way we win,
God bleeds.

God cries
at hungry mouths,
at running sores,
at creatures dying without cause,
and till we change the way we care,
God cries.

God waits
for stones to melt,
for peace to seed,
for hearts to hold each other's need,
and till we understand the Christ,
God waits.

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Tune: HIROSHIMA, by Carlton Young. Same copyright attribution. Source of words and tune: Shirley Erena Murray, *Every Day in Your Spirit: New Hymns Written Between 1992 and 1996* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Hope Publishing Company), #12.

When All Is Ended

Brian Wren

Poetic Meter: 10.10.10. with Alleluia

Composer: William Rowan

Tune: YOGANANDA

When all is ended, time and troubles past,
shall all be mended, sin and death out-cast?
In hope we sing, and hope to sing at last:
Alleluia!

As in the night, when lightning flickers free,
and gives a glimpse of distant hill and tree,
each flash of good discloses what will be:
Alleluia!

Against all hope, our weary times have known
wars ended, peace declared, compassion shown,
great days of freedom, tyrants overthrown:
Alleluia!

Then do not cheat the poor, who long for bread,
with dream-worlds in the sky or in the head,
but sing of slaves set free, and children fed:
Alleluia!

With earthy faith we sing a song of heaven:
all life fulfilled, all loved, all wrong forgiven.
Christ is our sign of hope, for Christ is risen:
Alleluia!

With all creation, pain and anger past,
evil exhausted, love supreme at last,
alive in God, we'll sing an unsurpassed
Alleluia!

Copyright © Hope Publishing Co., 1989. All Rights Reserved Source of words and tune: Brian Wren, *Bring Many Names: Thirty-Five New Hymns* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Hope Publishing Company, 1989), #33. Though this can be sung to SINE NOMINE, Rowan's tune YOGANANDA—composed for this text—is vastly more suitable in progression and scope.

We Cannot Measure How You Heal

John Bell and Graham Maule

Poetic Meter: Long Meter Double (8.8.8.8.D)

Tune: YE BANKS AND BRAES

Trad., arr. John Bell

We cannot measure how you heal
or answer every sufferer's prayer,
yet we believe your grace responds
where faith and doubt unite to care.
Your hands, though bloodied on the cross,
survive to hold and heal and warn,
to carry all through death to life
and cradle children yet unborn.

The pain that will not go away,
the guilt that clings from things long past,
the fear of what the future holds,
are present as if meant to last.
But present too is love which tends
the hurt we never hoped to find,
the private agonies inside,
the memories that haunt the mind.

So some have come who need your help
and some have come to make amends,
as hands which shaped and saved the world
are present in the touch of friends.
Lord, let your Spirit meet us here
to mend the body, mind and soul,
to disentangle peace from pain
and make your broken people whole.

John L. Bell and Graham Maule, *When Grief Is Raw* (Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc., 1997), 12. Words and arrangement © 1989, 1996, WGRG, The Iona Community. GIA Publications, Inc; exclusive North American Agent. Tune: YE BANKS AND BRAES (Scottish traditional, arranged John Bell).

We Cannot Care For You The Way We Wanted

(A Cradling Song)

John Bell and Graham Maule

Poetic Meter: 11.10.11.4.

John Bell

Tune: JENNIFER

We cannot care for you the way we wanted,
or cradle you or listen for your cry;
but, separated as we are by silence,

love will not die.
We cannot watch you grow into childhood
and find a new uniqueness every day;
but special as you would have been among us,
you still will stay.

We cannot know the pain or the potential
which passing years would summon or reveal;
but for that true fulfillment Jesus promised
we hope and feel.

So through the mess of anger, grief and tiredness,
through tensions which are not yet reconciled,
we give to God the worship of our sorrow
and our dear child.

Lord, in your arms which cradle all creation
we rest and place our baby beyond death,
believing that she now, alive in heaven,
breathes with your breath.

John L. Bell and Graham Maule, *When Grief Is Raw* (Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc., 1997), 48. Words and Music © 1989, 1996, WGRG, The Iona Community. GIA Publications, Inc; exclusive North American Agent.

There Is a Place

John Bell and Graham Maule
Poetic Meter: 11.10.11.4

John Bell
Tune: DUNBLANE PRIMARY

There is a place prepared for little children,
those we once lived for, those we deeply mourn;
those who from play, from learning and from laughter
cruelly were torn.

There is a place where hands which held ours tightly
now are released beyond all hurt and fear,
healed by that love which also feels our sorrow,
tear after tear.

There is a place where all the lost potential
yields its full promise, finds its true intent;
silenced no more, young voices echo freely
as they were meant.

There is a place where God will hear our questions,
suffer our anger, share our speechless grief,
gently repair the innocence of loving
and of belief.

Jesus, who bids us be like little children,
 shields those our arms are yearning to embrace.
 God will ensure that all are reunited;
 there is a place.

This song was written in memory of the sixteen primary school children and their teacher who were killed by a gunman at 9:30 a.m. on Wednesday 13th March 1996, in Dunblane, Scotland. It was never intended as a congregational hymn, though it may be used as such. Its original choral setting allows for reflection on the text, which is not possible if everyone is involved in singing. This song is featured in the CD/Cassette and Octavo collections entitled *The Last Journey*. The individual octavo arrangement for choir and organ is available in the GIA catalogue. No.: G4542

John L. Bell and Graham Maule, *When Grief Is Raw* (Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc., 1997), 50. Words and Music © 1989, 1996, WGRG, The Iona Community. GIA Publications, Inc; exclusive North American Agent.

Notes

¹This point applies whether or not the song is suitable for congregational utterance (some are more suitable as solos).

²From John H. Sammis' well-known gospel hymn, 1887 (tune: TRUST AND OBEY, by Daniel B. Towner).

³See for example, the concluding stanza of my hymn, "How Deep Our Maker's Grief," in *Visions and Revisions* (Hope Publishing Company, 1998, #9): "Let love's lament dissolve /aloofness and despair, /and resurrect our best resolve / to comfort, heal, and care." Copyright © 1996 by Hope Publishing Co., Carol Stream, IL 60188. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

⁴A psalm of lament, ending without comfort, and absent from most hymnals.

⁵"God, Give us Freedom to Lament," Brian Wren, in *New Beginnings* (Hope Publishing Company, 1993), #26, with a fine tune, WILMINGTON NEW, by Hal H. Hopson.

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⁶A recent, helpful essay is Walter Brueggemann, "Reading from the Day 'In Between'," in *A Shadow of Glory: Reading the New Testament After the Holocaust*, ed. Todd Linafelt (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 105-116.

⁷Pronounced: "Brin Calvahria."

⁸The three nouns in line 3 have varied meanings: "warfare" points to the extreme violence of large-scale armed conflict and the suffering it causes, while "rape" and "murder" are both instruments of war and of interpersonal crime in civil society.

⁹Note the comma between these two words in line 4 of stanza 1.

¹⁰In lines 1 ("Could a loving, wise Creator?") and 4 ("Could a heart that heard the Savior?").

¹¹I am not trashing a hymn like "Immortal, invisible, God only wise." Sung sparingly, and in deliberate counterpoint with hymns about God's vulnerability in the Crucified Christ, its joyful awe has a tenable place. If placed at the center of a congregation's songs, however, its Pollyanna perception of God's justice and untouchable changelessness ("nor wanting," "naught changeth thee") is unreal and unacceptable.

¹²This section is adapted from the discussion in chapter 8 of my book, *Praying Twice* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000). In adult study settings, it is instructive to compare the text of Duck's hymn with the text of Psalm 10, to discover how and what the poet selects from the Psalm.

¹³Though tune names are often unrelated to the meaning of their lyric, the name is in this case significant, and suggestive for preaching. In singing, care should be taken to make a caesura between the first two words of the penultimate line, so that it is heard as "and, till" not "until."

¹⁴*When Grief Is Raw*, 48.

¹⁵In Britain's anti-gun culture, the impact of the Dunblane shootings was immense, and led to the swift passage of laws forbidding private ownership of handguns.