

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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Whatever Happened to Hymns?

Many of the churches my husband Lars and I visit on our travels seem to know nothing of the great old hymns that have instructed, comforted, and enriched the church for centuries. Hymns constitute a crucial part of worship, but not by any means the whole. In churches which use almost exclusively what are called "praise songs," that part of the service is usually referred to as "Worship," as though prayer, preaching, offering, and listening were something else. May I lodge a plea to those who use overhead projectors to make sure that some great hymns are displayed in addition to the praise songs? Hymns will get you through the night.

In January of 1956, when five women were waiting with bated breath to find out whether our husbands were dead or alive, I lay in bed in Nate Saint's home, my little daughter Valerie sick in a crib beside me. The hymn "How Firm a Foundation," with those magnificent words taken from Isaiah 43:1-2, sustained me, especially stanzas 2, 3, and 6, memorized when I was a child in our daily family prayer time:

"Fear not, I am with thee; O be not dismayed,/ For I am thy God and will still give thee aid;/ I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,/ Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.

"When through the deep waters I call thee to go,/ The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;/ For I will be with thee thy trials to bless,/ And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress....

"The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,/ I will not, I will not desert to his foes;/ That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,/ I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake!"

Someone sent me a magazine featuring a musician named Michael Card who presents to a new genera-

tion of believers ancient melodies and hymns. His music is described as "folk-flavored, biblically sound music." Unable to recommend or comment on his work since I have heard none of it, I can nevertheless say *Amen* to his observation: "So many of today's worship songs are all about us: 'We do this, we do that, we worship You ...' without presenting the depth and richness of who God is, proclaiming His greatness and His might. You can read the lyrics of one of these old hymns and learn so much about God's attributes and His creation."

Everywhere I go I try to point out what a tragic loss is the disappearance of these powerful aids to spiritual stamina. A true hymn has rhyme and meter, a logical progression from the first verse to the last, and I feel like jumping up and down and "hollering" to get my message across, but I try to keep it to merely begging and *imploping* folks to get their hands on a good hymnbook. Where to find them? they ask. Perhaps they are moldering in the church basement. More than likely they've long since been dumped—"Young folks don't like hymns," we're told. But of course they don't like them—they don't know them. Alas!

But help is on the way. Try *Trinity Hymnal*, Great Commission Publications, 3640 Windsor Park Drive, Suite 100, Suwanee, GA 30174 (800-695-3387). May I suggest that you keep it with your Bible wherever you've arranged your quiet time?

The Hazards of Homemade Vows

Many engaged couples today love the idea of writing their own wedding vows and many a minister finds no reason to persuade them otherwise. I think it was about thirty-five years ago that improvisation was introduced—a sunny California meadow, a barefoot bride wearing wildflowers in her hair, and a groom dressed like Ghandi, reading what he hopes is poetry. Things slid ignominiously downhill. At the conclusion of his own marriage a Rev. Mr. Gould of Chicago turned to his bride and said, "Thank you for choosing an outrageous cuss like me." His bride burst out

laughing. The formality of bridal gowns and rent-a-tuxes underlines the incongruity of such events. My husband Lars attended what might be called a fun nuptial. As the groomsmen chanted, "The ring! The ring! Who's got the ring?" down the aisle came a large and reluctant dog with the ring attached to his collar.

Marriage is not a private transaction. It ought never to be a mere *concoction*. It is public business as the couple joins the enterprise of the human race. The vow creates the couple, not the couple the vow. Why would a Christian bride refuse the time-honored vow, "I N. take thee M. to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to obey, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I give thee my troth"? It is as G.K. Chesterton wrote, "[The opponents of vows] appear to imagine that the ideal of constancy was a yoke mysteriously imposed on mankind by the devil, instead of being, as it is, a yoke consistently imposed by all lovers on themselves. They have invented a phrase, a phrase that is a black and white contradiction in two words—'free-love'—as if a lover ever had been, or ever could be, free.... It is exactly this back-door, this sense of having a retreat behind us, that is, to our minds, the sterilizing spirit in modern pleasure. Everywhere there is the persistent and insane attempt to obtain pleasure without paying for it.... Thus, in religion and morals, the decadent mystics say, 'Let us have the fragrance of sacred purity without the sorrow of self-restraint'.... Thus, in love, the free-lovers say, 'Let us have the splendor of offering ourselves without the peril of committing ourselves; let us see whether one cannot commit suicide an unlimited number of times.'

"Emphatically it will not work. There are thrilling moments, doubtless, for the spectator, the amateur, and the aesthete; but there is one thrill that is known only to the soldier who fights for his own flag, to the ascetic who starves himself for his own illumination, to the lover who makes finally his own choice. And it is this transfiguring self-discipline that makes the vow a truly sane thing."

If the prospective bride and groom read earnestly Chesterton's remarks, will they still have the temerity to cobble up their own vows?

Promotion

"If every call to Christ and His righteousness is a call to suffering, the converse is equally true—every call to suffering is a call to Christ, a promotion, an invitation to come up higher."

Charles Brent (1862-1929)

Notes for Quiet Time

"Thou shalt remember all the ways which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no" (Deuteronomy 8:2). In a file from my teens and twenties I found these notes from my quiet time, entitled *What God Is to Me*. I was helped by reviewing it.

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|------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. My inheritance | Numbers 18:20 |
| 2. My praise | Deuteronomy 10:21 |
| 3. My strength | Psalms 118:14 |
| 4. My song | Psalms 118:14 |
| 5. My salvation | Psalms 23:1 |
| 7. My righteousness | Jeremiah 23:6 |
| 8. My fortress | Jeremiah 17:17 |
| 9. My refuge | Psalms 46:1 |
| 10. My hope | Jeremiah 17:7 |
| 11. My dwelling place | Psalms 90:1 |
| 12. My defense | Psalms 89:18 |
| 13. My king | Psalms 89:18 |
| 14. The strength of my heart | Psalms 73:26 |
| 15. My portion forever | Psalms 73:26 |
| 16. My trust | Psalms 71:5 |
| 17. My rock | Psalms 62:6 |
| 18. My strong tower | Psalms 61:3 |
| 19. My helper | Psalms 54:4 |
| 20. My shield | Psalms 28:7 |

(...and there are many more—should we feel discouraged, disheartened, insecure? Is there any reason to fear the future?)

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An Assault From the Enemy

From time to time someone writes to me in great distress, convinced that he or she has committed the unpardonable sin. Our adversary the devil, that “perverse fiend attempts our utter overthrow by the terror which he infuses into our minds at the remembrance of our sins, in order to make us throw ourselves into the gulf of despair.

“In this peril, hold fast to this infallible rule, that *the remembrance of thy sins is the effect of grace*, and tends to salvation, when it produces humility, sorrow for having offended God, and confidence in his mercy. But when such thoughts disquiet thee, and make thee fearful and fainthearted, though they may look so like truth as to make thee believe thyself condemned, and thy day of salvation to be past, know assuredly that they come from the deceiver; humble thyself, then, the more, and trust the more confidently in God; so shalt thou overcome the enemy with his own weapons, and glorify the Lord. Mourn, indeed, over thine offences against God, as often as they recur to thy memory; but yet implore their pardon with a full trust in his Passion.

“I will say further, that should God himself seem to say to thee that thou art not one of his sheep, still on no account let go thy confidence in him; but say to him, with all humility: ‘Thou hast good reason, indeed, O Lord, in my sins to condemn me; but I have greater reason in thy mercy to hope for pardon. Save, therefore, I beseech thee, this thy miserable creature, condemned, indeed, by her own sinfulness, but redeemed by the price of thy blood. I commit myself wholly to thy hands, O my Redeemer; trusting fully to thy infinite compassion, that thou mayest save me, to the glory of thy name. *Do with me what thou wilt*, for thou art my only Lord; yes, though thou slay, still will I hope in thee.’” (italics mine)

Lorenzo Scupoli, *Spiritual Combat*

How Does One Know “He’s the One”?

Dear Tanya [not her name]:

Since you’ve read *Passion and Purity*, you can easily find the answers to your questions about the characteristics and qualities which I observed in Jim Elliot. I

did not know that Jim was seriously interested in me until shortly before I graduated. You’ve read the story—he took me for a walk, told me he loved me. Better read that part again! Of course I could not possibly know that Jim was “the one” until he proposed to me in Ecuador five years later. My feelings, of course, would tell me he was the one, but no sensible person ought to trust mere feelings. It is the *will of God* which we should faithfully seek.

My advice, dear Tanya, is to tuck that young man way, way back in your head and get on with the business of trust and obedience to God. You are rushing ahead of Him. Tim *might* possibly be God’s choice for a husband for you, but much can happen between now and then. Don’t tell anybody of your love for Tim. Talk to God. Nobody else. Keep your mind on your studies. Read Romans 12:1 and 2 over and over—it’s a good recipe for discovering the will of God: (1) Tell God you’ll do anything He says. Present your body. (2) Read the Bible and pray daily in order to be “transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (3) You’ll learn the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God *if* you take one day at a time, study faithfully, don’t cheat on exams or plagiarize on papers, and are nice to your roommate!

Obedience today prepares you for obedience tomorrow (but tomorrow is, so far, God’s business). Do I sound tough? I love you! I’ve been through this agony myself!

Love, Elisabeth

How to Prepare for Tragedy

Jesus, knowing exactly what awaited Him when He went up to Jerusalem, *went*. He had set His face to go to Jerusalem, and He moved steadily through the days, doing His Father’s work of healing and peace with the same serenity which had always characterized His ministry. He told His disciples exactly what would happen and they understood none of it. On the way there, near Jericho, Jesus healed a blind man. Then He brought salvation to the house of Zaccheus. He wept over the city of Jerusalem, entered it, threw the merchants out of the temple, and carried on His daily teaching in the temple until the Zero Hour arrived.

Nothing dismayed or depressed Him enough to cause Him to quit. The prospects of torture and death

in no way hindered His day-by-day work, which, as always, pleased the Father. This was His preparation: the faithful doing of the Will, one day at a time.

Dust Under the Bed?

The headmistress of Hampden DuBose Academy where I was a student often reiterated the importance of small things. They reveal *character*, a word she pronounced with vigor. A reader was offended: "Surely God doesn't focus on the cleanliness of our homes." I would cite Zechariah 4:10 and 1 Corinthians 14:40, on which our family was raised. Would my reader suppose that the carpenter shop, in which we believe Jesus must have worked for many years, was disorderly? Of course there would be sawdust and noise, but there would surely be a visible and appropriate order. A home is much happier and more peaceful if things are orderly. Agreed? I cannot imagine what my desk and study would look like if I had not been taught at an early age that there is a place for everything and everything is to be in its place. A great simplifier!

Prayer

"Before the glorious seat of Thy majesty, O Lord, and the exalted throne of Thy burning love, and the absolving altar which Thy command hath set up, and the place where Thy glory dwelleth—we, Thy people and the sheep of Thy fold, do kneel with thousands of the cherubim singing Alleluia, and many times ten thousand seraphim and archangels, acclaiming Thine holiness, worshipping, praising, and confessing Thee at all times, O Lord of all."

The Chaldean Liturgy

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Travel Schedule May–July 1999

May 14, 15 Mountlake Terrace, Wash., Calvary Fellowship, (425)775-1509, or Cathy Taylor, (206)368-0960.

May 25 Flagstaff, Ariz., School of Tomorrow, David Logan, (972)315-1776, ext. 344.

June 4,5 Taping for *Gateway to Joy*.

June 25, 26 Eden Prairie, Minn., Wooddale Church, Sally Foote, (612)446-6300.

July 24-29 Family reunion—White Sulphur Springs, Mont.

August 9 Wales.

August 29 Alton Bay, N.H., Christian Conference Center, David Northrup, (603)875-6161.

Recommended Reading for Parents

Lots of Love and a Spanking, by Jamie Pritchett. She says this book is "aimed more at debunking what goes for discipline nowadays than for being a deep scriptural explanation of why we should follow God's word.... It's aimed more at nonbelievers than at the mature Christian." But I found it excellent for believers as well. Order from the author at 510 Indian Bay Blvd., Merritt Island, FL 32953, \$9.95 + \$3.00 shipping (6% sales tax for Florida residents).

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