

TEN HYMNS

by

Don E. Kerr

These hymns were written, at the request of Stephen A. Crisp, for the boys of the *Montreal Boys Choir School at CAMMAC*, Québec, between 1989 and 1991. The intent was to provide texts that would instruct the choirboys (and perhaps the choirmasters) in the Faith and in the Church Year.

The set is dedicated to the late Right Reverend James MacLean, friend to the boys at CAMMAC and their choirmasters, advocate for the very best in church music, and model and mentor to all in the Faith and the Mind of the Church.

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Veni Domine

Come, Lord and Savior-Child, draw near;
Incarnate God, from heaven appear;
Bring Salem's city to this earth:
Great Teacher, show us our true worth.

Come for a while, Lord, with us dwell;
And rescue us from man-made hell:
We have mismanaged all God sent,
Our contract with creation rent.

Come, give for us your final breath;
We'll share your life, and so, your death,
And rise with you, with you proclaim:
Death, life, light, darkness, are the same.

Come once again, O Lord, we pray,
To take us in at Judgment Day:
From all our struggles then set free,
We'll live as one, for one we'll be.

In every child, Lord, may we see
Your Self, reflected perfectly;
In every family, every home,
A flawless vision of your own.

[Tune: Mendon]

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Et habitavit in nobis

The forests sing, the plains descant,
High mountains ring, and deserts dance;
Ice caps send up a steamy joy,
Rain forests deepening green deploy.

To country home or city street,
Where nomads roam or monarchs meet,
To open space or urban sprawl
The Child now comes, the God of all.

His love's embrace moves us to free
All lives defaced by tyranny;
The time has come to put things right,
For we are one this holy night.

All opposites have disappeared;
His love acquits what we once feared;
No more may gender, clan, or shade
In mindless strife his truth evade.

In human flesh he comes full-robed,
Us to enmesh in web of love;
This child, like us, is born to die,
And, in so doing, death destroy.

So, as in him our God we greet,
Let us our sin of hate defeat
By greeting God in every one
That lives and moves beneath the sun.

[Tune: *Dunedin* or *Puer nobis*]

Reges Tres

Three wise men, all of race and lands diverse,
To seek a new king, mountains, plains, traversed;
And on their journey, one refrain rehearsed:
Alleluia!

Some say these mismatched three themselves were kings,
And legend, joined with fact, the whole truth brings:
Then heart with head in concert truly sings
Alleluia!

Led by the luster of a rising light,
Exhausted, breathless, kept on day and night;
Though travel-weary, all could still recite
Alleluia!

At length the three arrived in David's town,
And in amazement stared at what they'd found:
A peasant-king in simple homespun bound.
Alleluia!

Their wisdom was the grace that made them see
Rich gifts, though gracious, little use could be:
This King would walk the earth in poverty.
Alleluia!

In that rude stable let us make our home,
And learn the love that shatters hearts of stone;
As creatures wise, then praise him with our own
Alleluia!

[Tune: Engelberg]

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Lignum crucis, lignum vitae

A bird flew to a barren hill,
And there it dropped a seed
That clung to soil with stubborn will
Which nothing could impede.

It grew to sapling, sturdy tree
Of beauty soon became;
Soaked sun without apology,
Rejoiced in wind and rain.

But then, in prime of life, midstream,
It fell to axe and saw;
Attained new life as sturdy beam
Devoid of knot or flaw.

Its open grain was filled and purged
With human blood, still warm;
With human flesh its fibers merged,
By cold, hard iron torn.

That sacred flesh, that holy wood
In unison proclaim:
All things reflective of his good
Evoke the holy Name.

[Tune: Richmond]

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Haec dies

The rose that winter tried to kill
Embraces life once more;
Veins open wide, with sap drink fill
To bud and flower restore.

Not long ago, it seemed as dead
As withered branch and thorn;
Its blossoms gone, its beauty fled,
With brown-dried leaf forlorn.

Now green shoots timidly appear,
Complete in innocence
Of multifoliate grace that's near:
The blood-red joy immense.

In blindness, what was evident
A month or two ago
In barren bush, life heaven-sent
We simply failed to know.

When we both love and beauty see
Alike in rose and thorn,
The daytime starry night shall be;
The darkness, glorious morn.

If we break through our tomb of self,
Love all that lives and grows,
We will return to life and health,
And blossom with the rose.

[Tune: Crimond, St. Magnus]

Ascendit Deus

Fresh-risen from death, the Christ now ascends;
Borne up by God's breath while heaven attends.
Cruel hate is defeated, our hearts he has won;
His earth's work completed, and ours just begun.

His nail-mangled hands, the wound in his side,
His brow's bloodied band, all up with him ride.
Our mortal flesh, broken, ascends with him, too:
This rising the token of wholeness anew.

Let all humankind ascend, here on earth;
Arise with one mind; see each other's worth
As treasure to nurture, protect, and defend;
Both now, and in future, all beings befriend.

Though gone from our scan, he's here evermore:
His altar the span that spirit restores:
There wholeness and health still his Presence imparts,
And bridges of goodwill are built, heart-to-heart.

A while we will lie beneath earth's cool sod,
Then rise up and fly to live with our God;
And, safe from all harm there, as one we will rest
In his loving arms there, our Brightest, our Best.

[Tune: Laudate Dominum or Hanover]

Infunde amorem cordibus

Holy Spirit, fill our minds;
Give us knowledge, wisdom, learning;
Ban all prejudice that blinds;
Let us sing, with faith discerning,
Alleluia!

Holy Spirit, fill our hearts;
Give us light for understanding;
Fruit of justice, peace impart;
Let us sing, with hope commanding,
Alleluia!

Holy Spirit, fill our souls;
Heav'n on earth we then can fashion;
Let this be creation's goal:
Sing, all hearts, with love impassioned,
Alleluia!

[Tune: Mowsley or St. Albinus]

Hymn to the Trinity

O God, our Holy Father strong, we worship thee,
Creator, source of nurture, truth now veiled in mystery,
So may our growth in love and service perfect freedom be
That with our eyes full-opened thy glorious light we see.

O Jesus, brother, friend and guide, our Savior dear,
Redeemer, teacher, Word-made-Flesh, we pray thee, help us hear
And recognize in every human heart the same and clear
One voice, one song, one mind, as before thee we appear.

O Holy Spirit, wings of light, our souls befriend;
Great Sanctifier, knowledge, patience, wisdom, virtue lend;
Foolish division in all humankind forever end:
With one transcendent tuning all hearts and voices blend.

O Trinity of Father, Holy Spirit, Son,
As we approach thy Godhead when our work on earth is done,
We'll sing that perfect song in chorus, joining thee as one
In infinite full-circle, when we the song become.

[Tune: *Keynsham*, Graham Knott, 1989: see Appendix.]

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A Hymn from the Rest of Creation

Not just human praise alone reaches the Creator's throne:
Song of nightingale or jay, or of frog from swamp's decay,
All that wake by night, or day;
Humpbacked whale and speckled trout, those that fly, or creep about,
All in glad thanksgiving shout *Alleluia!*

Finch or eagle, lion or cat, elephant or tiny gnat,
Stately maple, budding pear, thistle harsh and lilac fair,
Wolf with cubs in sheltered lair,
Fern and moss and giant oak—all thy loving glance provoke;
Sing with all created folk *Alleluia!*

Speck of dust or mountain high, dewy meadow, desert dry,
Planet vast or atom's core, flower's or sunset's color-store—
None are counted less, or more.
Mighty whirlwind, gentle breeze, rippling brook and swelling seas
With great joy they all reprise *Alleluia!*

Sin of Adam, and of Eve, humans share, since they believe
God made them the lords of all—beast and plant, both great and small;
Thus they come to grievous fall:
To their selfishness they cling, so their praises discord bring;
Out-of-tune, in vain they sing *Alleluia.*

Grace give humankind to flee grim superiority;
Partners, stewards, let them be: cease their exclusivity,
Join us in our praise of thee;
Wren and rose and grain of sand, held in thy sustaining hand,
With perfection chant the grand *Alleluia!*

[Tune *Blythewood*, Alan Ridout, 1991: see Appendix.]

Through a Glass Darkly

When thou, O God, my senses gave,
I did misuse them, for I craved
To understand thy majesty,
To penetrate thy mystery.

A glass I fashioned with my will
To closer, better view thee; still,
From mine own self and essence made,
It caused refractions, did thee shade.

More than my sight this glass obscured:
I saw thee not as Word, but words;
Its opaque coldness barred access
And kept me from the Spirit's breath.

Both goal and means were bound to fail;
Five senses were of no avail:
My quest to know thee literally
Returned me to myself, not thee.

That glass I shatter here, today,
And all pretense I cast away;
Not number parts, dissect no more,
Just know that thou art there: adore,

And live, content with mystery,
In hope, at death, to bond with thee,
Freed from the darkness self demands,
With no more need to understand.

[Tune: Jesu dulcis memoria]