

# Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL



# Singing God

**B**ECOMING QUICKLY LOST in a tsunami of simple, repetitive, sometimes trite “praise” choruses are many of the most profound and eloquent hymns of the church. Worship is not to be just emotion and clapping of hands; it is to be “spirit and truth.”

[Jesus said,] “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

*John 4:23-24*

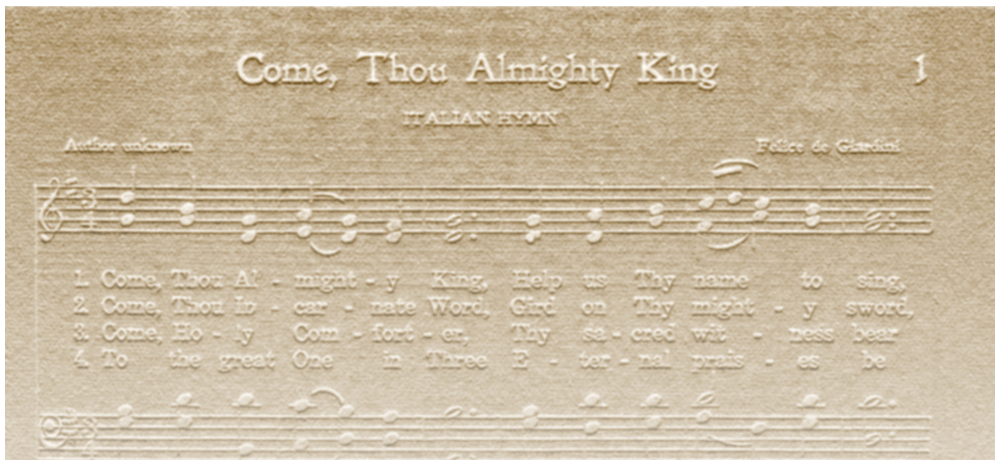
Likewise there are aspects of Christ’s kingdom, faithfully enshrined in song, that are oddly, and sadly, wanting in our corporate singing. When was the last time you considered what it was like, from heaven’s perspective, the moment Christ Jesus returned home from His time on earth? When was the last time you *sang* about it? In 1809 Thomas Kelly included a hymn he had written about that very moment in the third edition of his hymnal, *Hymns on Various Passages of Scripture*.

It is a rare privilege to sing to God—or even to sing God. The venerable songs of the church are God’s gift to us, a gift we return every time we sing them back to Him.

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**T**RUE WORSHIP BEGINS WITH A PRAYER. Jesus told the woman at the well,

“But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

*John 4:23-24*

How can one worship “in spirit” without first connecting with heaven? How can one worship “in truth” without knowledge of who God is from His printed word? So the first act in our worship is to invite God to not just attend, but to facilitate, to energize, to animate our worship of Him.

*Come, thou Almighty King,  
Help us Thy name to sing,  
Help us to praise!  
Father all glorious,  
O'er all victorious!  
Come and reign over us,  
Ancient of days!*

It may seem like an odd concept to mere flesh, but God must be part of our praise of Him. Indeed, the fullness of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Spirit—must be involved before our worship and praise can be authentic, and thus acceptable to a holy God.

*Come, Thou incarnate Word,  
Gird on Thy mighty sword -  
Our pray'r attend!  
Come! and Thy people bless,  
And give Thy word success,  
Spirit of holiness  
On us descend!*

Nothing of this world can prepare our mind and spirit for worship. Nothing can fill our heart with

the necessary desire to exalt the Lord our God but the Lord our God Himself! We hear this truth even in Jesus’ analogy of the vine.

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”

*John 15:4-5*

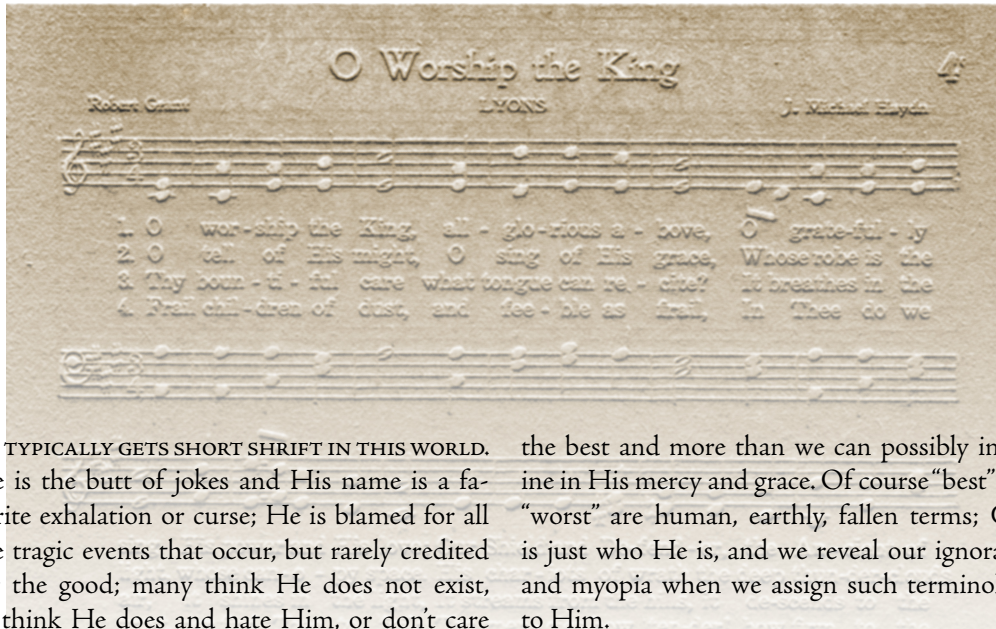
It is folly—no, it is hubris to imagine we can worship God “in spirit” without the Holy Spirit presiding. Even as believers, even with the Spirit indwelling our flesh, we are still in battle with the flesh. The flesh has no desire to worship God, so we must call upon His Spirit to enable our devotion.

*Come holy Comforter,  
Thy sacred witness bear,  
In this glad hour!  
Thou who Almighty art,  
Descend in ev'ry heart,  
And ne'er from us depart.  
Spirit of pow'r.*

The holy Godhead must be more than just the object of our worship; it must be its facilitator.

*To the great One in Three  
Eternal praises be  
Hence - evermore!  
His sov'reign Majesty  
May we in glory see,  
And to eternity  
Love and adore!*

Anonymous



**G**OD TYPICALLY GETS SHORT SHRIFT IN THIS WORLD. He is the butt of jokes and His name is a favorite exhalation or curse; He is blamed for all the tragic events that occur, but rarely credited for the good; many think He does not exist, or think He does and hate Him, or don't care either way. Even many who claim to believe in Him and His Son treat Him as if He were an unpleasant step-parent they would just as soon ignore.

It defies logic that so many would so blithely and dangerously disregard someone so powerful.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

*Romans 1:18-19*

We might credit this behavior in the unregenerate to the pull of flesh and the absence of the Holy Spirit, but what is *our* excuse within the body of Christ?

*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 splendor, and girded with praise.*

It is to our shame that we so lightly, so casually regard our glorious King, the Ancient of Days, the One who holds the universe in the palm of His hand. Fear should be a part of our relationship with Him—not fear as in fright or terror, but fear as in respect, fearing what He can and should do to us were it not for the redemption we have through His Son.

God in His triune fullness is all of everything. He is the worst and more than we can imagine in His wrath and severe judgment, and He is

the best and more than we can possibly imagine in His mercy and grace. Of course “best” and “worst” are human, earthly, fallen terms; God is just who He is, and we reveal our ignorance and myopia when we assign such terminology to Him.

And this is not restricted to “the God of the Old Testament.” First, God is always the same as He was, is, and will be. “For I, Yahweh, do not change,” He declares through the prophet Malachi. Second, though the world would have us believe there is a hard, bright line between the God of wrath and Jesus, who is love, it once again reveals its ignorance. For there will come a day—a glorious, terrible day—when the Son of Man will return in awful judgment and, yes, wrath.

And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.

And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, “King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.”

*Revelation 19:11-16*

*O tell of His might, O sing of His grace,  
Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space,  
His chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form,  
And dark is His path on the wings of the storm.*

In point of fact, God’s wrath is “good,” because behind it is His sublime holiness, His purity. And His grace is “good” because it reveals His tender love for His creation. Both are who He is, and it matters not whether we consider anything from Him to be “good” or “bad.” For God is *always* good, in *everything* He does. Thus He is worthy of our devotion and praise.

*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 distills in the dew and the rain.*

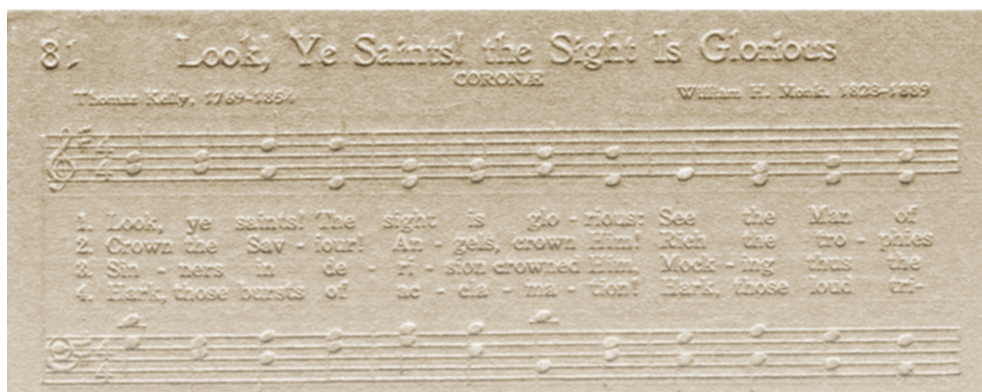
*Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,  
In Thee do we trust, nor find Thee to fail;  
Thy mercies how tender, how firm to the end,  
Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend.*

Our worship and praise is not to be grounded in our opinion of God’s “goodness” by earthly standards, whether His behavior has been more or less pleasing to us of late. No, it is to be grounded in who and what He is in Himself—His majesty and power, His eternal and unwavering justice.

Even in our base and fragile flesh we are to revere Him, fear Him, exalt Him, worship and adore Him.

*O measureless might! Ineffable love!  
While angels delight to worship Thee above,  
The humbler creation, though feeble their lays,  
With true adoration shall all sing Thy praise.*

Robert Grant



And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they, after worshipping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising God.

Luke 24:50-53

**W**

WE THINK WE ARE FAMILIAR WITH CELEBRATION.

When the members of our home team and winners of the World Series roll down Main Street, we shout our joy and praise. When our first child is born we know a height of joy never before experienced. When we stand at the front of the church and watch our beautiful bride come down the aisle toward us, our heart fills with a brand new pride and we want to cry out our joy for all to hear.

We think we have known the exhilaration of celebration, but all these and more are nothing but faint whispers, mere shadows of the celebration that took place in the precincts of heaven the

day the Son of God returned home from earth.

*Look, ye saints! the sight is glorious:  
See the Man of Sorrows now;  
From the fight returned victorious,  
Every knee to Him shall bow;  
Crown Him, crown Him,  
Crown Him, crown Him,  
Crowns become the Victor’s brow,  
Crowns become the Victor’s brow.*

By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Every priest stands daily minister-

ing and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet.

*Hebrews 10:9-13*

Like no other high priest before or since, Jesus the Christ completed His work. His sacrifice, the shedding of His blood, the giving of His life need never be repeated. Sin was now, once for all time, vanquished. Now sin would never have the triumph; evil would never hold a victory celebration. Instead, heaven would rejoice over the return of its victorious Warrior.

And that return was not just a celebration; it was a coronation. Jesus, Son of God, took His place to the right of the Father, and like no other priest before or after, He *sat down*, because His sacrificial work was done—it need never be repeated. And all of heaven rejoiced to crown Him King of kings!

*Crown the Savior! angels, crown Him;  
Rich the trophies Jesus brings;  
In the seat of power enthrone Him,  
While the vault of heaven rings;  
Crown Him, crown Him,  
Crown Him, crown Him,  
Crown the Savior King of kings,  
Crown the Savior King of kings.*

Such a contrast to His time on earth. Misunderstood, threatened, ridiculed, tortured, unloved and unappreciated by those He created—those for whom He was giving His life.

*Sinners in derision scorned Him,  
Mocking thus the Savior's claim;  
Saints and angels crowd around Him,  
Own His title, praise His name;  
Crown Him, crown Him,  
Crown Him, crown Him,  
Spread abroad the Victor's fame,  
Spread abroad the Victor's fame.*

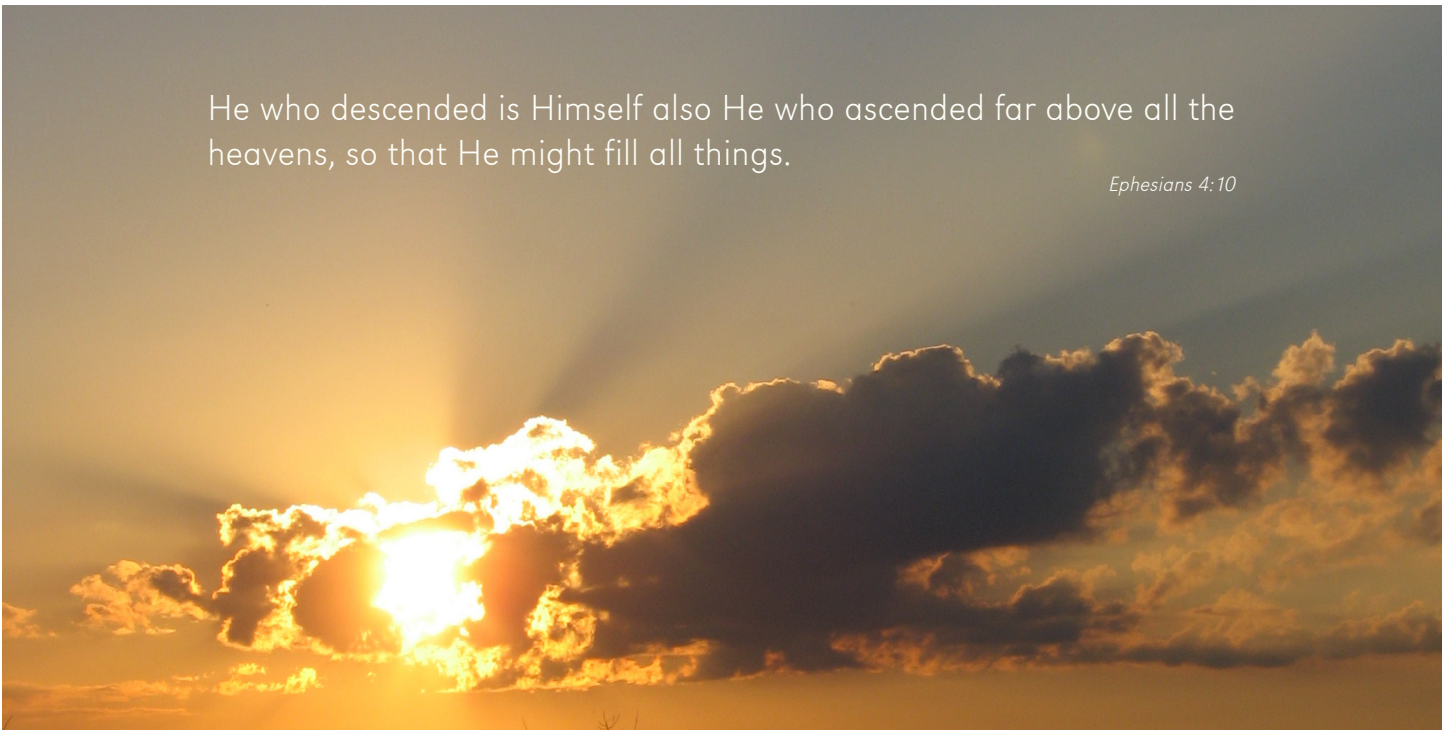
But now that is all at an end. He is home, after being gone the time span of a generation. And all of heaven welcomes the Son with a celebration that reverberates throughout the width and breadth of the cosmos.

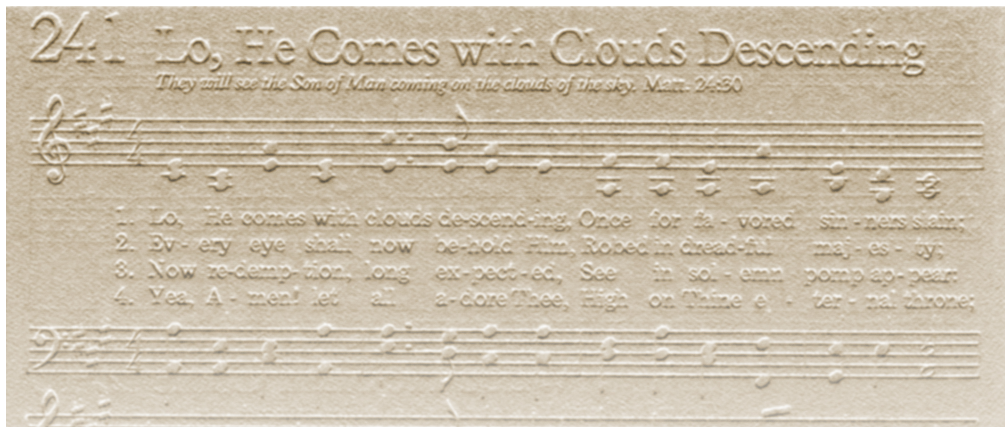
*Hark, those bursts of acclamation!  
Hark, those loud triumphant chords!  
Jesus takes the highest station;  
O what joy the sight affords!  
Crown Him, crown Him,  
Crown Him, crown Him,  
King of kings and Lord of lords!  
King of kings and Lord of lords!*

Thomas Kelly

He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.

*Ephesians 4:10*





O

NE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL PHRASES in all of God's word is, "...and so we shall always be with the Lord." The well-known passage from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians is overflowing with grandeur and majesty, but also with hope, reassurance, and unbounded joy.

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

*1 Thessalonians 4:15-18*

*Lo! He comes, with clouds descending,  
Once for favored sinners slain:  
Thousand thousand saints attending,  
Swell the triumph of His train:  
Hallelujah!  
God appears on earth to reign!*

Whether one is of the school that says Christ returns twice—first, without touching down, to remove His church from the earth, then subsequently, after Daniel's "seventieth week," to deliver judgment and establish His millennial kingdom—or whether one is of the school that says He accomplishes all this and more in one trip, this will be an event of staggering importance and power.

*Graves have yawned in countless numbers,  
From the dust the dead arise;  
Millions out of silent slumbers,  
Wake in overwhelmed surprise;  
Where creation  
Wrecked and torn on ruin lies!*

Whether there are mere seconds or seven years between the removal of the church and Christ returning in majesty and wrath, this will be a Jesus never before seen by mortal man. If it acknowledges Him at all, this fallen world likes to reference the "flower child" Jesus, the hippy Jesus, the wan, insipid, all-loving, all-forgiving Jesus who is all gooeey with nauseating sweetness. Three words for anyone who holds to this picture of Jesus: *Read the gospels!*

Did Jesus love the people of His creation? Yes, enough to die for them. Was He forgiving and patient? Yes—to those who were earnestly repentant and interested in following Him. Was He loving and patient to everyone? No, and He reserved a special venom for hypocritical religious leaders.

"Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the chief seats in the synagogues and the respectful greetings in the market places. Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it." One of the lawyers said to Him in reply, "Teacher, when You say this, You insult us too." But He said, "Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers."

*Luke 11:43-46*

This is little more than a sampling, a faint foreshadowing of the Lord of all creation who will descend in wrath and "dreadful majesty" to judge the world.

*Every eye shall now behold Him  
Robed in dreadful majesty;  
Those who set aside and sold Him,  
Pierced and nailed Him to the tree,  
Deeply wailing,  
Shall the true Messiah see.*

“In that day the LORD will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the one who is feeble among them in that day will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the angel of the LORD before them. And in that day I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.”

*Zechariah 12:8-10*

*All the tokens of His passion  
Still His dazzling body bears;  
Cause of endless exultation  
To His ransomed worshippers;  
With what rapture  
Gaze we on those glorious scars.*

When Christ returns in His role as final arbiter of justice He will be met by two different groups of people, bearing two very different responses to His arrival. The first group will meet Him with abject terror, perhaps mingled with anger. They will either defiantly hate the Lord, hate what His appearing represents (the folly of their willful rejection of Him), hate that His arrival seals their long-denied doom, or they will bow before Him in whimpering, pleading fear, hoping against hope that it is not too late to repent from their ways.

For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flam-

ing fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed.

*2 Thessalonians 1:6-10*

The second group will greet the victorious Christ for what He truly is: Savior and Lord. They too will bow before Him, but now with unbridled joy, for His coming represents for them the fulfillment of promise, of hope. When Christ had taken His church home they had been left behind, and even though they had taken that opportunity to repent, to claim Him as Savior and Lord, they had passed through the terrible time of rebellion and the terror of the self-exalting “man of lawlessness.” They had suffered for their new faith, and some in their number had been tortured and killed. But those who remain will greet their Lord not with the weeping of helpless fear, but with the weeping of unrestrained joy.

*Lo! the last long separation!  
As the cleaving crowds divide;  
And one dread adjudication  
Sends each soul to either side!  
Lord of mercy!  
How shall I that day abide!*

*Yea, Amen! Let all adore Thee  
High on Thine eternal throne!  
Saviour—take the power and glory;  
Make Thy righteous sentence known:  
Jah! Jehovah!  
Claim the kingdom for Thine own.*

John Cennick, et al

