

# The Christian & Literature

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## Session 2: Hymns & Poetry



# Hymns & Poetry

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# Hymns & Poetry

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Session 1:

## **The World as Story and Fostering a Poetic Imagination**



# Hymns & Poetry

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- I. To strengthen our “literary” understanding of Scriptures
  
- II. To teach us to see our lives and the world as “story”---His story.

# Hymns & Poetry

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III. To help us foster a poetic imagination

(i) to understand God poetically

(ii) to widen our perspective of the world

(iii) to grasp the mysteries of the gospel

(iv) to live out “The Golden Rule”

(v) to communicate God’s glory anew

# Hymns & Poetry

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III. To help us foster a poetic imagination

(i) to understand God poetically

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(iii) to grasp the mysteries of the gospel

(iv) to live out “The Golden Rule”

**(v) to communicate God’s glory anew**

# Hymns & Poetry

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“Imagination may be the hardest, most God-like work of the human mind.”

“Imagination is like a muscle. It grows stronger when you flex it. And you must flex it... Imagination is also contagious... So I suggest that you hang out with people (mainly dead poets) who are full of imagination. Then **labor to say an old truth in awakening ways. God is worthy. ‘Oh sing to the Lord a new song’—or picture, or poem, or figure of speech.**”

~ *John Piper, “God is not boring”*

# Hymns & Poetry

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## “The Love of God”

by Frederick M. Lehman

Could we with ink the ocean fill,  
And were the skies of parchment made,  
Were every stalk on earth a quill,  
And every man a scribe by trade,  
To write the love of God above  
Would drain the ocean dry;  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,  
Tho stretched from sky to sky.



# Hymns & Poetry

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# Hymns & Poetry

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What's wrong with poetry?

# Hymns & Poetry

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Robert Morgan (b. 1944)

## **Mountain Graveyard**

stone	notes
slate	tales
sacred	cedars
heart	earth
asleep	please
hated	death

# Hymns & Poetry

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e.e. cummings (1894-1962)



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# Hymns & Poetry

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Robert Morgan (b. 1944)

## Mountain Graveyard

stone	notes	<i>(anagrams)</i>
slate	tales	
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# Hymns & Poetry

e.e. cummings (1894-1962)



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(a leaf falls)

# Hymns & Poetry

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G. K. Chesterton

“The artist is a person who communicates something... But it is a question of communication and not merely of what some people call expression. Or rather, strictly speaking, unless it is communication it is not expression... The artist (or poet, etc.) does ultimately exhibit himself as being intelligent by being intelligible. I do not say by being easy to understand, but certainly by being understood.”

# “The Poetry of His Physics”

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Poetic Being never appeared  
To philosophic muses of century past—  
Bertie Russell and Ayer and Moore—  
And they were the poorer by far.

Politics, pundits and peers  
With oratory dry have poured  
Self and soul into image and byte  
And yet powerless be.

Even some of those who claim  
Prophecy and pastoral tool  
Are purblind to Poetry's power  
To scintillate soul with glory divine.  
Oh, to be a lover of Poesy's appearing!

Michael A.G. Haykin©2008 (April 26, 2008)



# Hymns & Poetry

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- Poetry



# Hymns & Poetry

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- Poetry
  - Oldest form of human written communication

# Hymns & Poetry

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- Poetry
  - Oldest form of human written communication
  - The largest book in the Bible is a collection of poetry

# Hymns & Poetry

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□ Poetry vs. Prose?



# Hymns & Poetry



- #1 Of the family Falconidae  
Characterized by imperforate nostrils  
Legs of medium length  
A hooked bill,  
The hind toe inserted on a level  
    with the three front ones  
The claws roundly curved and sharp;  
Land eagles are feathered to the toes,  
Sea-fishing eagles, halfway to the toes;  
Length is about three feet  
And wingspan,  
    seven;  
Nest is found on some inaccessible cliff;  
Eggs are spotted, and so not exceed three  
    in number  
And the eagle possesses an acute power of vision.

# Hymns & Poetry

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#2 He clasps the crag with crooked hands;  
Close to the sun in lonely lands,  
Ringed with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;  
He watches from his mountain walls,  
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

# Hymns & Poetry

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## The Eagle: Two Poems

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Tennyson

# Hymns & Poetry

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## □ What is Poetry?

*Poetry is a disciplined, compact verbal utterance, in some more or less musical mode, dealing with aspects of internal or external reality in some meaningful way.*

~Burton Raffel, *How to Read a Poem*



# Hymns & Poetry

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- The Good, The Bad and the Ugly



# **Keep Believing in Yourself**

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*Deanna Beisser*

**There may be days  
when you get up in the morning  
and things aren't the way  
you had hoped they would be.**

**That's when you have to  
tell yourself that things will get better.**

**There are times when people  
disappoint you and let you down,**

**but those are the times  
when you must remind yourself  
to trust your own judgments and opinions,  
to keep your life focused on believing in yourself  
and all that you are capable of.**

**There will be challenges to face  
and changes to make in your life,  
and it is up to you to accept them.**

**Constantly keep yourself headed  
in the right direction for you.**

**It may not be easy at times,  
but in those times of struggle**

**you will find a stronger sense of who you are,  
So when the days come that are filled  
with frustration and unexpected responsibilities,  
remember to believe in yourself**

**and all you want your life to be,  
because the challenges and changes  
will only help you to find the goals  
that you know are meant to come true for you.**

**Mother to Son—*Langston Hughes***

Well, son, I'll tell you:  
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.  
It's had tacks in it,  
And splinters,  
And boards all torn up,  
And places with no carpet on the floor-  
Bare.  
But all the time  
I've been a climbin' on,  
And reachin' landin's  
And turnin' corners,  
And sometimes going in the dark  
Where there ain't been no light.  
So boy, don't you turn back.  
Don't you set down on the steps  
'Cause you find it kinda' hard  
Don't you fall now-  
For I've still goin', honey,  
I've still climbin',  
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.



# Hymns & Poetry

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## □ Poetry

“Why did such a powerful warrior like David hear and write poetry? He had a passion for beauty and a passion for Yahweh, for life, for creation, for friends, for enemies. Simple prose couldn’t contain such a life. There is too much to be said, and the engineer’s syntax can’t capture it.”

~Douglas Wilson, “Men Hate Poetry”

# Hymns & Poetry

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- George Herbert (b.1593, d.1633)



# Hymns & Poetry

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- George Herbert (b.1593, d.1633)
  - Minister, poet and member of parliament

# Hymns & Poetry

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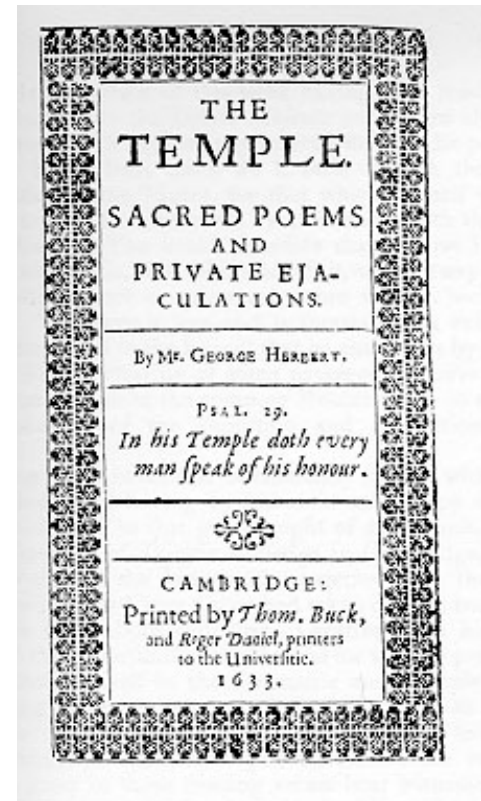


- George Herbert (b.1593, d.1633)
  - Minister, poet and member of parliament
  - Wrote many poems and hymns

# Hymns & Poetry



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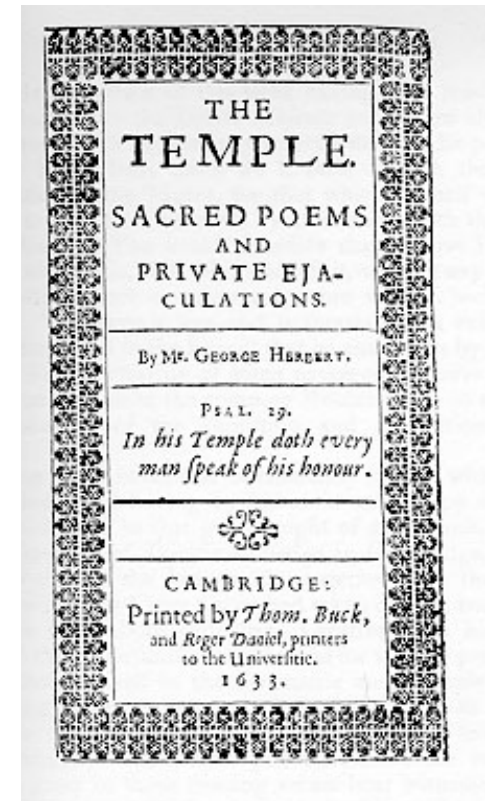


# Hymns & Poetry

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- George Herbert
  - *The Temple*



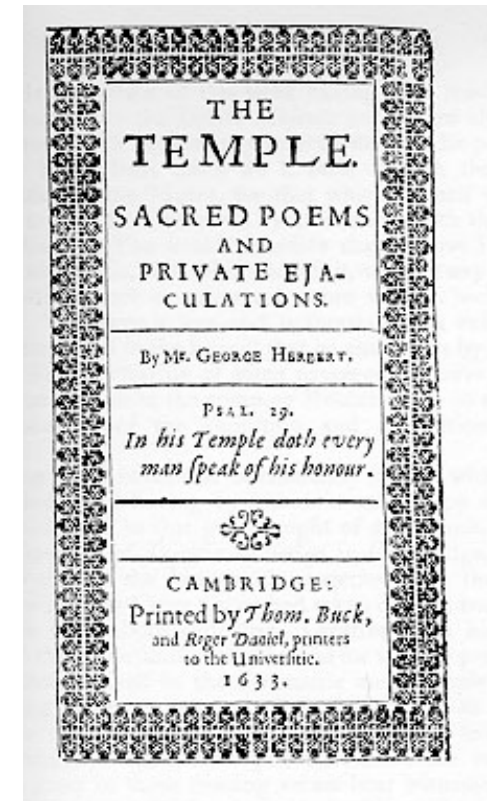
# Hymns & Poetry



## □ George Herbert

### ■ *The Temple*

- C.S. Lewis considered Herbert's *The Temple* as one of the top ten most influential books on his life; he often recommended it to others



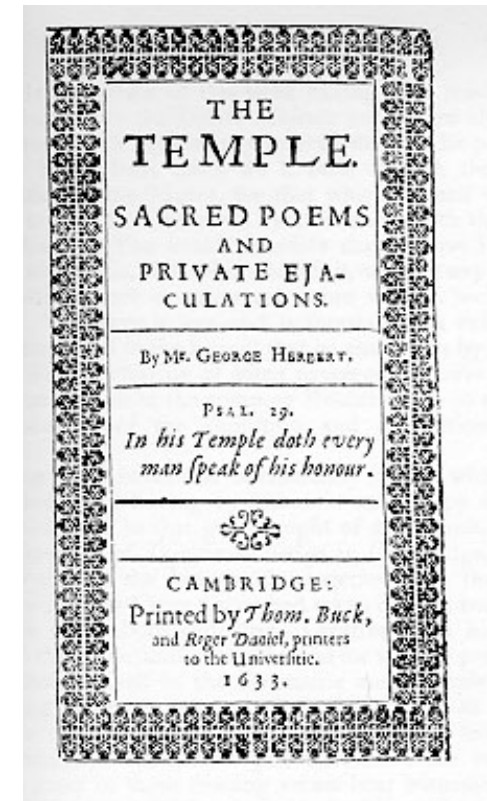
# Hymns & Poetry



## □ George Herbert

### ■ *The Temple*

- C.S. Lewis considered Herbert's *The Temple* as one of the top ten most influential books on his life; he often recommended it to others
- “[Herbert is] a good poet and one who helped to bring me back to the Faith.”



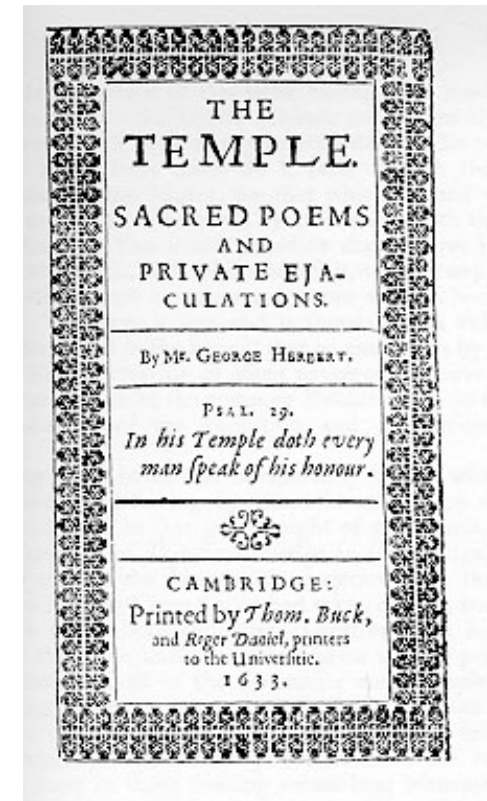
# Hymns & Poetry



## □ George Herbert

### ■ *The Temple*

- “George Herbert at his very best is extremely nutritious”



# Hymns & Poetry

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## □ George Herbert

### ■ *The Temple*

- “But the most alarming of all was George Herbert. Here was a man who seemed to me to excel all authors I had ever read in conveying the very quality of life as we actually live it from moment to moment; but he wretched fellow, instead of doing it directly, insisted on meditating it through what I would still have called ‘the Christian mythology’”
  - C.S. Lewis on his pre-conversion reading of Herbert and other Christian poets, from *Surprised by Joy*

# Hymns & Poetry

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## Opening stanza: *The Temple*

Thou, whose sweet youth and early hopes inhance  
Thy rate and price, and mark thee for a treasure;  
Harken unto a Verser, who may chance  
Rhyme thee to good, and make a bait of pleasure.

A verse may find him, who a sermon flies,  
And turn delight into a sacrifice.

¶ *Easter-wings.*

Lord, who createst a man in wealth and store,  
 Though foolishly he lost the same,  
 Decaying more and more,  
 Till he became  
 Most poor:  
 With thee  
 O let me rise  
 As larks, harmoniously,  
 And sing this day thy victories:  
 Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

¶ *Easter.*¶ *Easter-wings.*

My tender age in sorrow did beginne:  
 And still with sicknesses and flame  
 Thou dost so punish mee,  
 That I became  
 Most thinne.  
 With thee  
 Let me combine,  
 And feel this day thy victories:  
 For, if I limp my wing on thine,  
 Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

¶ *H. Ba.*

The Church

Easter wings

Lord who createdst man in w<sup>o</sup>ll the store  
Though foolishly he lost y<sup>e</sup> same  
— Decaying more and more  
Till he became  
Most poore,  
W<sup>th</sup> thee  
O lett mee rise  
As I have <sup>harmo<sup>n</sup>ious lie</sup> ~~deceiv'd by thy~~  
And sing this day thy <sup>vi<sup>o</sup>lenty</sup> ~~carol~~  
Then shall my fall further y<sup>e</sup> flight in mee



# “Easter-wings”

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Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,  
Though foolishly he lost the same,  
Decaying more and more,  
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# “Prayer” (sonnet)

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Prayer, the Church's banquet, Angels' age,  
God's breath in man returning to his birth,  
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,  
The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth;  
Engine against th' Almighty, sinner's tower,  
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,  
The six-days'-world transposing in an hour,  
A kind of tune, which all things hear and fear;  
Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and bliss,  
Exalted manna, gladness of the best,  
Heaven in ordinary, man well dressed,  
The milky way, the bird of Paradise,  
Church bells beyond the stars heard, the soul's blood,  
The land of spices, something understood.

# Hymns & Poetry

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- John Donne (1572-1631)



# Hymns & Poetry

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□ John Donne (1572-1631)

- 1 Corinthians 15:55, “O death, where is thy sting?  
O grave, where is thy victory?”

# Holy Sonnet X

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Death be not proud, though some have called thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so,  
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow,  
Die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me.  
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,  
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,  
And soonest our best men with thee do go,  
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.  
Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men,  
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,  
And poppy, or charms can make us sleep as well,  
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?  
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,  
And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.

# Hymns & Poetry

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## □ Christian Poets

- Edmund Spenser (1552-1599)
- John Milton (1608 - 1674)
- Anne Bradstreet (1612 - 1672)
- Christina Rossetti (1830 - 1894)
- T. S. Elliot (1888-1965)

# Hymns & Poetry

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# Hymns & Poetry

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- Isaac Watts (1674-1748)



# Hymns & Poetry

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- Isaac Watts (1674-1748)
  - Considered the “father of English hymnody”

# Hymns & Poetry

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- Isaac Watts (1674-1748)
  - Considered the “father of English hymnody”
  - Literary scholar Dr. Johnson

# Hymns & Poetry

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## □ Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

- Considered the “father of English hymnody”
- Literary scholar Dr. Johnson

“To the *Collection of English Poets* I have recommended the volume of Dr. Watts to be included. His name has long been held by me in veneration.”

# Hymns & Poetry

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## □ Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

### ■ Enoch Watts (letter to I.W., c. 1700)

“There is great need of a piece vigorous and lively as yours, to quicken and revive the dying devotion of the age, to which nothing can afford such assistance as poetry... Yours is old truth, stripped of its ragged ornaments, and appears, if we may say so, younger by ages, in a new and fashionable dress.”

# Hymns & Poetry

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- Isaac Watts (1674-1748)
  - Pastoral heart (cp. Benjamin Keach)

# Hymns & Poetry

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- Isaac Watts (1674-1748)
  - Pastoral heart (cp. Benjamin Keach)
  - Re-creation of traditional psalmody

# Hymns & Poetry

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## □ Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

“While he granted that David [to whom authorship of the Psalms is traditionally ascribed] was unquestionably a chosen instrument of God, Watts claimed that his religious understanding could not have fully apprehended the truths later revealed through Jesus Christ. The Psalms should therefore ‘renovated’ as if David had been a Christian, or as Watts put it in the title of his 1719 metrical psalter, they should be ‘imitated in the language of the New Testament.’”

~Stephen Marini, *Sacred Music*



# Hymns & Poetry

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## □ Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

“He saw the inconsistency of preaching and praying in the name Jesus Christ and at the same time excluding this title from sung praise. He believed that he was simply calling for a return to the New Testament worship where the Christians were exhorted to make melody in their hearts ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ’ (Gal. 5:19, 20).”

~David Fountian, *Isaac Watts Remembered*

# Hymns & Poetry

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□ Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

“Jesus Shall Reign” Ps 72 (#375)

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun  
Does his successive journeys run;  
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,  
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

# Hymns & Poetry

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□ Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

“O God, our help in ages past” Ps 90 (#686)

Our God, our help in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come,  
Our shelter from the stormy blast,  
And our eternal home.

# Hymns & Poetry

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## □ Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

“Watts’s voice broke down the distance between poet and singer and invested the text with personal spirituality.”

~Stephen Marini, *Sacred Music*

# Hymns & Poetry

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□ Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” (#321)

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.

# Hymns & Poetry

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- Isaac Watts (1674-1748)
  - “...within the reach of an ordinary Christian..”
  - “...original songs of Christian experience...”
  - “...I have used words of greater latitude and comprehension...”
  - “I am fully satisfied that more honour is done to our blessed Saviour by speaking His Name, His graces, and actions...”

# Hymns & Poetry

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- Isaac Watts (1674-1748)
  - Watts sought to make the truths of the gospel and the worship of God accessible to his time and culture

# Hymns & Poetry

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“When an artist is in the strict sense working, he of course takes into account the existing tastes, interests and capacity of his audience. These no less than the language, the marble, the paint, are part of his raw material; to be used, tamed, sublimated, not ignored or defied. Haughty indifference to them is not genius, it is laziness and incompetence.”

~ *C. S. Lewis*



# Hymns & Poetry

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- Isaac Watts (1674-1748)
  - Many critics: “Watts Whims”

# Hymns & Poetry

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# Hymns & Poetry

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  - Many critics: “Watts Whims”
  - Benjamin Franklin reissued Watts’s hymns in America
    - “Great Awakening” (1740s)

# Hymns & Poetry

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- Isaac Watts (1674-1748)
  - Many critics: “Watts Whims”
  - Benjamin Franklin reissued Watts’s hymns in America
    - “Great Awakening” (1740s)
    - American poet, Emily Dickinson, influenced by Watts poetry (e.g., C.M.)

# Hymns & Poetry

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## □ C.S. Lewis on “imagination”

- “For I take it there are two things the imagination loves to do. It loves to embrace its object completely, to take it in at a glance, and see it as something harmonious, symmetrical, and self-explanatory... It also loves to lose itself in a labyrinth, to surrender to the inextricable.”

*from “Is Theology Poetry?”*

# Hymns & Poetry

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## □ Charles Wesley

He breaks the powers of cancelled sin,  
He sets the prisoners free:  
His blood can make the foulest clean,  
His blood availed for me

# Hymns & Poetry

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## □ C.S. Lewis

- “The rules for writing a good passion play or a good devotional lyric are simply the rules for writing good tragedy or lyric in general: success in sacred literature depends on the same qualities of structure, suspense, variety, diction, and the like which secure success in secular literature.”

*from “Christianity and Literature”*

# Hymns & Poetry

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## □ John Wesley

- “Here are, allow me to say, both the purity, the strength, and the elegance of the English language; and at the same time, the utmost simplicity and plainness, suited to every capacity.”



# Hymns & Poetry

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- Timothy Dudley-Smith
  - “In its own way, a hymn also needs to be a work of art. A good hymn should exist in its own right as a product of craftsmanship and the artist’s ear and eye.”

# Hymns & Poetry

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## □ Paul Steven Jones

- “Despite the current popularity of ‘choruses,’ the church continues to need hymns written by preachers and poets who heed the command of Scripture to ‘sing a new song.’ Choruses rarely rise to the beauty of form and depth of content that hymns do. Hymns make demands on the whole person---on the heart, soul, and mind, and they have special power to communicate memorable spiritual truth.”

# Hymns & Poetry

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- Martin Luther (preface to Hymns, c.1524)
  - “Therefore, I too, with the help of others, have brought together some sacred songs, in order to make a good beginning and give an incentive to those who can better carry on the Gospel and bring it to the people... I therefore pray that every pious Christian will agree with this, and if God has given him equal or greater gifts, will lend his aid.”

# The Christian & Literature

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