

## Week 8: Long Meter Variants

### And Can It Be

Text: Charles Wesley (1707–1788), 1738

- After a disastrous trip to the colony of Georgia as missionaries, the Wesley brothers were impressed by the faith of a group of Moravians on their ship back to England
- This prompted them to attend a meeting on Aldersgate Street, London, where the Moravian Peter Bohler was speaking and brought about a renewal of the Wesleys' faith
- Wesley wrote this text shortly after his re-conversion; the mention in his journal that "I began a hymn upon my conversion" leads many to believe this is the hymn Wesley is referring to
- When first published in 1739, it was given the subtitle "Free Grace"

Tune: Thomas Campbell (1777–1844), 1825

- Very little is known about Campbell's life in England
  - Few of his poems and hymn tunes are in use today
  - This tune is taken from a collection of tunes titled *The Bouquet*, each given a flower-related name
  - The name SAGINA is a family of flowers related to carnations, commonly called "pearlwort"
1. Appropriately, as a "conversion hymn" the text centers around the concept of salvation. What ideas does Wesley show in his text that makes this grace so "amazing"?
    - a. We don't deserve grace, but we're granted it anyway!
      - i. Stanza 1 repeats the phrase "for me" three times in total
      - ii. Christ died for the one who "caused his pain"
    - b. Christ's death makes us alive
      - i. The original stanza 5 contains the line "I feel the Life his Wounds impart"
    - c. The mystery of the incarnation is amazing
      - i. Stanza 2, "the immortal dies"
      - ii. Stanza 3, "left his father's throne above ... emptied himself of all but love"
        - i. This is an interesting take on Philippians 2:7
    - d. The scope of God's grace is amazing – it's for everyone!
      - i. Stanza 3, "Adam's helpless race" and "tis mercy all, immense and free"
    - e. Grace is not just free, but sets us free
      - i. Stanza 4, "my chains fell off, my heart was free"
      - ii. This is a parallel to Paul's freedom from jail in Acts 16:25-26

### Before Thy Throne, O God, We Kneel

Text: William Boyd Carpenter (1841–1918), 1925

- Son of an Anglican minister in Liverpool (with Carpenter his father's family name, and Boyd his mother's)
- Served at a variety of churches, eventually appointed Bishop of Ripon in 1884
- Many of his writings focus on personal and experiences of faith, rather than abstract theology
- Granted an honorary Doctor of Divinity from the University of Glasgow, also lectured at Cambridge, Oxford, and Harvard universities
- Chaplain to Queen Victoria, this led to a correspondence with her granddaughter Alexandra Feodorovna, the last empress of Russia, on her adjustment to the Russian Orthodox church
- Between two wives, Carpenter fathered 11 children (5 boys and 6 girls), and among his grandchildren include a member of parliament as well as prominent academics, lawyers, and businessmen

Tune: Dmitri Bortnianski (1751–1825), 1822

- Born in modern-day Ukraine (then part of the Russian Empire), joined the Russian imperial chapel choir at the age of eight years old
- The chapel choir director Baldassare Galuppi returned to Italy in 1769 and Bortnianski followed, studying in

Venice, Rome, and Naples

- After 10 years abroad, returned to Russia and in 1796 became the choir's first Russian-born director
  - In addition to sacred music, he wrote seven operas and other concert pieces
  - The tune ST. PETERSBURG is named for the city where he lived and worked
  - His music later influenced famous Russian composers Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff
  - Tchaikovsky edited and published much of Bortnianski's church music in 1882, totaling 10 volumes
1. Both "And Can It Be" and "Before Thy Throne" deal with the concept of freedom from sin, but with somewhat different perspectives. What similarities and differences do you see between the two hymns on this topic?
    - a. Both hymns show our need for humility
      - i. In "And Can It Be", we "cause [Christ's] pain" and are "bound in sin"
      - ii. In "Before Thy Throne", we need to be taught to "know our faults"
        - i. This is excellently explored in this commentary
    - b. There is a difference between salvation and sanctification
      - i. "Before Thy Throne" shows a process of growth through trials
        - i. Stanza 1, "whate'er the pain and shame may be"
        - ii. Stanza 2, "train us with thy rod"
        - iii. Stanza 4, "fierce fires which burn and try"
          - i. References 1 Peter 1:6-7, Malachi 3:3, Zechariah 13:9 and others
          - ii. But there is an interesting twist, asking God to "be with us in the flame"
          - iii. Is this a reference to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Daniel 3:25?
      - ii. "And Can It Be" shows the immediate cleansing power of Christ
        - i. Stanza 4, "my heart was free" in a flash of light
        - ii. Stanza 5, even with past sins "no condemnation now I dread"

## Exercises

1. Read the hymn "Imperfect Child of Perfect God", whose theme is similar to both "And Can It Be" and "Before Thy Throne". List places that you think work well, and places that need improvement. What changes would you suggest? Consider the following areas:
  - a. Meter and rhyme
  - b. Word choice and imagery
  - c. Scripture references
  - d. Flow of ideas