



“Come, You Lost in Strife and Sorrow”: Paul Gerhardt’s Hymn Paraphrase of Hosea 6:1–3

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Among Paul Gerhardt’s hymn paraphrases of biblical texts are two from the book of Hosea: “Was soll ich doch, o Ephraim,” based on Hos 11:1–9 and translated earlier as “How Can I Give You Up, My Child,”¹ and “Kommt ihr traurigen Gemüter,” based on Hos 6:1–3 and translated here.

Gerhardt chose his Hosea texts well. Chapters 6 and 11 play key roles in the book, each offering an insight into the very heart of God as God deliberates the divine reaction to Israel’s continued intransigence. “What shall I do with you, O Ephraim,” asks God in Hos 6:4, and then reports at length the acts of judgment done in response to Israel’s failures and the disasters yet to come (6:5–10:15). But in Hos 11:1–9, God repeats the divine soliloquy, returning again to the question, “How can I give you up, Ephraim?” (11:8). This time God replies, “I will not execute my fierce anger...for I am God and no mortal” (v. 9); God’s gracious character now disallows the previous responses of wrath.

¹The translation is included in Frederick J. Gaiser, “Translating Paul Gerhardt’s Hymns,” *Word & World* 27/1 (2007) 73–78. *Word & World* provided new translations of Gerhardt hymns in each 2007 issue to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the poet’s birth (1607–1676).

In his hymn paraphrase of Hos 6:1–3, Paul Gerhardt understands both the terrors of the divine wrath and the wonders of the divine grace; with Hosea, Gerhardt resolves that tension in favor of grace.

To be sure, Gerhardt's hymn on Hos 6 stops with verse 3, short of God's self-questioning in the verses that follow, but the hymn's confidence in God's grace that "restores all things" (stanza 1) clearly reflects Hosea's assurance that God will finally resolve the divine dilemma in favor of grace. A fine example of how Gerhardt builds on that perspective is his transformation of the "morning cloud" and the "dew" of 6:4—for Hosea both examples of Israel's fleeting love that quickly disappears in the heat of the day—into God's cloud and God's dew that will survive the sun and bring Israel new life (stanza 6). In that final stanza Gerhardt moves from the words of the people to the first-person voice of God, as does Hosea in 6:4–6; unlike Hosea, however, where God's self-questioning remains, Gerhardt has moved already to the full word of promise that characterizes chapters 11 and 14 of the book.

Gerhardt clearly understands Hos 6:1–3 positively, as a genuine call to repentance and to reliance on the grace of God, unlike some modern interpreters who find it to be "a parody of the people's insufficient gestures at penitence."² Luther, too, read the text positively; indeed, interpreting the reference to being raised up "on the third day" (v. 2) as an announcement of Christ's resurrection.³ For Luther (and some other interpreters), this is the text to which Paul refers in 1 Cor 15:4, describing Christ's resurrection "on the third day in accordance with the scriptures."⁴ Most contemporary interpreters understand Hosea's "third day" to refer simply to the short time within which God will act on Israel's behalf.

Most surprising, perhaps, given the time of his writing, is the fact that Gerhardt makes no direct move at all to the resurrection in his paraphrase of the three days in verse 2 (see stanza 3 of the hymn). To be sure, Gerhardt's "macht er uns vom Tode frei" ("freeing us from death and harm") goes beyond the biblical text and can be read as an oblique reference to resurrection, but Gerhardt does not make this explicit. Here we see Gerhardt's confidence in the Old Testament message itself, without New Testament interpolations, to point to the work of God, including the work of God in Christ. Though Gerhardt did, on occasion, make the homiletical move to the Christian gospel explicit in his Old Testament paraphrases, most often he let the Old Testament texts stand, making their own witness.⁵

Gerhardt, of course, allows the text's witness to the divine wrath to stand as well. It may grate on modern ears to hear that the same God who restores and delivers was the God who "tore asunder" in the first place (stanza 2), though this is

²So Stephen L. Cook in his revision of James Luther Mays's notes on Hosea in *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, revised and updated (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006) 1200. Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974) 116–117, sees both positive and negative elements in the passage.

³Martin Luther, "Lectures on Hosea," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 18 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1975) 31.

⁴Wolff, *Hosea*, 118, however, reports that "neither the New Testament, nor the Apostolic Fathers, nor the ancient apologists cite Hos 6:2 as a proof-text [for the resurrection]. Tertullian was the first to use it as such."

⁵See Frederick J. Gaiser, "I Sing to You and Praise You': Paul Gerhardt and the Psalms," *Word & World* 27/2 (2007) 195–205, esp. 197–200.

Hosea's clear message—well, almost: the wrath came not “in the first place,” but only secondarily, in response to Israel's self-destructive sin. Gerhardt shares the prophet's understanding that the consequences of sin follow inevitably upon the act, and that this is the way God has made things, precisely in order to prevent the behavior in the first place. We might paraphrase the prophetic and deuteronomic theology here as, “Don't touch the hot stove, it will burn you.” Yes, God is at work in the burning, but only as a way to get back to the free and good life God means for God's people. Hosea understands this, and so does Gerhardt.

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Thus, finally, Gerhardt (like Hosea) turns to extol God's sweet grace that makes each morning “clean and new,” providing new life and rebirth to God's beloved people. Here Gerhardt is the Lutheran preacher at his best, proclaiming full confidence in the goodness and the love of God who, despite the “harsh and grim” realities of our lives and the inescapable terror of our own failures, will always awaken us to the dawning of a new day.

THE TUNE

According to Eberhard von Cranach-Sichart's recent edition of Gerhardt's hymns, the preferred tunes are WIE DER HIRSCH IM GROSSEN DÜRSTEN or ZION KLAGT MIT ANGST UND SCHMERZEN.⁶ ZION KLAGT can be found in *The Lutheran Hymnal* #268; Johann Crüger's setting of WIE DER HIRSCH is available as number 6555 in Johannes Zahn, *Die Melodien der deutschen Kirchenlieder*, vol. 4 (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1891). Zahn includes three alternative tunes for WIE DER HIRSCH at 6556–6558 in the same volume, as well as four tunes for Gerhardt's hymn itself, KOMMT, IHR TRAURIGEN GEMÜTER, at 6594–6597.

More accessible to contemporary singers will be FREU DICH SEHR, O MEINE SEELE, familiar as the tune for “Comfort, Comfort Now My People” (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* #256) and “Praise and Thanks and Adoration” (*ELW* #783, which includes only the melody line). J. S. Bach, too, preferred this tune for his chorale setting of “Der Gott, der mir hat versprochen” (the second stanza of “Zion klagt mit Angst und Schmerzen”) in Cantata BWV 13, “Meinen Seufzer, Meine Tränen.”⁷

⁶Paul Gerhardt, *Wach auf, mein Herz, und singe: Vollständige Ausgabe seiner Lieder und Gedichte*, ed. Eberhard von Cranach-Sichart (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 2004) 405.

⁷Once again, I am grateful to my colleague Paul Westermeyer for his review of this article and his helpful suggestions.

PAUL GERHARDT, "COME, YOU LOST IN STRIFE AND SORROW" (HOSEA 6:1-3)

Tune : WIE DER HIRSCH IM GROSSEN DÜRSTEN
or ZION KLAGT MIT ANGST UND SCHMERZEN
or FREU DICH SEHR, O MEINE SEELE (*ELW* #256) (87 87 77 88)⁸

1

Come, you lost in strife and sorrow,
Come and join in our return
To the Lord whose glorious morrow
Nothing can destroy or burn.
God, whose might no mishap brings,
God, whose grace restores all things
That his zeal did rend and sever;
God, whose love abides forever.

1

Kommt, ihr traurigen Gemüter,
Kommt, wir wollen wiederkehrn
Zu dem Herren, dessen Güter
Kein Verderben kann verzehrn;
Dessen Macht kein Unglück fällt,
Dessen Gnade wieder stellt,
Was sein Eifer umgestürzet:
Seine Gad bleibt unverkürzet.

2

Though we now are torn asunder,
Though God's face turns dark and dim,
Though we've felt God's wrath and thunder,
Seen our lives grow harsh and grim,
Yet our hearts are undismayed,
For the one from whom we've strayed
Will bind up our wounds and bruises,
Earned by sin that grace refuses.

2

Zwar hat er uns ja zerrissen
Mit ergrimmtem Angesicht
Und uns, da er uns geschmissen,
Sehr erbärmlich zugericht't.
Doch deswegen unversagt!
Eben der uns schlägt und plagt,
Wird die Wunden unsrer Sünden
Wieder heilen und verbinden.

3

Every ill to which we're captive
Breaks apart by God's strong arm;
Two days pass and God turns restive,
Freeing us from death and harm.
When the third day's light breaks through,
Everything is made anew;
Now we stand, restored and living,
In the new life God is giving.

3

Alle Not, die uns umfängen,
Springt vor seinem Arm entzwei;
Wenn zwei Tage sind vergangen,
Macht er uns vom Tode frei,
Daß wir, wenn des dritten Licht
Durch des Himmels Fenster bricht,
Fröhlich auf erneurter Erden
Vor ihm stehn und leben werden.

⁸See the comments on the tune immediately above.

4

Now we meditate and ponder,
As we look with sharpened eye
On the gifts of grace and wonder
Given from above the sky;
Just to these and these alone,
These great blessings we've been shown,
We direct our thoughts and gazes,
Our confession and our praises.

5

God appears now as the dawning
Of a day made fresh and bright,
Over which the whole world fawning
Sings in joy and great delight.
God comes now—and just in time—
Bringing blessing, strength sublime,
Like the rain, the earth refreshing,
All things in new hope enmeshing.

6

You my children, you I cherish,
You I give new life, rebirth,
You, in grace, I shield and nourish,
Like the clouds above the earth;
Silv'ry clouds that bear cool dew
In the morning, clean and new,
Shading you from sun's fierce burning,
Satisfying all your yearning.

4

Alsdann wird man acht drauf haben
Und mit großem Fleiße sehn,
Was für Wundernad und Gaben
Uns von obenher geschehn.
Da wird dieses nur allein
Unsers Herzens Sorge sein,
Daß wir Gott, des wir uns nennen,
Mögen recht und wohl erkennen.

5

Denn er wird sich zu uns machen
Wie die schöne Morgenröt,
Über welche Lust und Lachen
Bei der ganzen Welt entsteht.
Er wird kommen uns zur Freud
Eben zu der rechten Zeit,
Voller süßen Kraft und Segen,
Wie die früh und späten Regen.

6

Ach, wie will ich dich ergötzen,
O mein hochgeliebtes Volk!
Meine Gnade soll dich netzen
Wie ein ausgespannte Wolk,
Eine Wolke, die das Feld,
Wann der Morgen weckt die Welt
Und die Sonne noch nicht leuchtet,
Mit dem frischen Tau befeuchtet.

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German text from Paul Gerhardt, *Wach auf, mein Herz, und singe: Vollständige Ausgabe seiner Lieder und Gedichte*, ed. Eberhard von Cranach-Sichart (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 2004) 209–210.

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