



# “Go Forth, My Heart, and Take Delight”: Paul Gerhardt’s “Summer Song”

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**D**espite the terrors of the times in which he lived, Paul Gerhardt reveled in God’s created world. Gerhardt’s invitation, “Go forth, my heart, and take delight / In summer’s days and colors bright,” was no doubt directed to himself as well as to the singers of his well-known summer hymn.<sup>1</sup>

The times were indeed hard. Born in 1607, Gerhardt’s early life was marked by the ravages of the Thirty Years War (1618–1648), which he experienced personally when the estate of his parents was destroyed by marauding mercenaries in 1637.<sup>2</sup> Only one of his five children survived beyond infancy. Caught in the conflict

<sup>1</sup>The hymn was called “Sommer-Gesang” (“Summer Song”) in an edition published by Johann Georg Ebeling in 1666. No doubt because of its lyrical beauty, this hymn has been translated often, but most of the translations are now dated and/or incomplete. Two recent translations available online are also incomplete (by Frank and by Erich Lettbecker, at <http://ingeb.org/Lieder/GehAusMe.html>; accessed 9 May 2007). As this issue of *Word & World* went to press, I became aware of another new translation by Madeline F. Marshall, “A New Song...Paul Gerhardt’s ‘Geh aus, mein Herz, und suche Freud’: Musings of a Translator,” *CrossAccent: Journal of the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians* 15/1 (2007) 29–34. That issue also includes a new tune for the hymn by Martha Sullivan and other Gerhardt-related articles. Readers now have the happy opportunity of comparing two full and recent translations of this summer hymn.

<sup>2</sup>Note the “wars and great terrors” that “cover the world” in stanza 3 of Gerhardt’s New Year’s hymn, “Nun laßt uns gehn und treten,” in Paul Gerhardt, *Wach auf, mein Herz, und singe: Vollständige Ausgabe seiner Lieder und Gedichte*, ed. Eberhard von Cranach-Sichart (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 2004) 55.

*In this summer issue, we offer a new translation of Paul Gerhardt’s “Summer Song.” Rejoicing in God’s good creation, yet aware of the pitfalls and dangers of the world, Gerhardt, as preacher and poet, anticipates eternal life with Christ by even now bearing witness in faith and service to God’s good gifts of grace.*

between upholders of the Lutheran and Reformed confessions, Gerhardt remained true to his Lutheran ordination vows and, for that, was deposed by the Elector Friedrich Wilhelm from his call to the Nicolaikirche in Berlin in 1667.

The Lutheran confessional heritage was evident not only in his public/political stance but also in his hymnody. Both the power of sin and the triumph of grace find full expression there. Though Gerhardt truly loved the world and extolled its beauty, it was never for him an innocent or benign world. It was God's world, to be sure, never Satan's, but Satan remained an active character in Gerhardt's world, theology, and hymnody. The morning hymn that begins so joyfully ("My soul awake and render / To God, thy great defender, / The God of all the living, / thy prayer and thy thanksgiving") quickly turns in the second stanza to the dangers of the night and an attack of Satan (though in Jacobi's English translation Satan is expunged and only the night remains).<sup>3</sup> The hymn continues in thanksgiving, however, for although Satan seeks to devour ("fressen") the pray-er, he remains safe in God's lap, enclosed in God's wings.<sup>4</sup> This intimate experience of God is typical for Gerhardt and explains the security with which he lived in a dangerous world. It is evident also in "Now Rest beneath Night's Shadow," an evening prayer in which the poet confidently gives himself into Jesus' "protecting arm," despite the "evil" that would assail him.<sup>5</sup>

Gerhardt's Lutheran confession finds clear expression in his creation hymns. "Die güldne Sonne" ("The Golden Sun"), for example, begins with joyful praise of the sun and the new day (stanza 1), but also recognizes the presence of "Lucifer's bands," which can be overcome only by standing on God's word (stanza 5). The singer prays in stanza 6 that he be able to rejoice in the good fortune of the neighbor (Luther's explanation of the ninth commandment!); he recognizes the frailty and finitude of human existence as opposed to the eternal foundation of God's word and will (stanzas 7 and 8). God's creation is beautiful, because God in God's own self is "the greatest," the "most beautiful and best," "the sweetest" and "noblest treasure of all treasures" (stanza 10). Since the world's beauty reflects God's beauty, it also prefigures the "heavenly garden" for which the poet longs and waits (stanza 12).<sup>6</sup>

We should read Gerhardt's summer song, "Go forth, my heart, and take delight," within this confessional heritage as well. To be sure, its description and sheer delight in creation is fuller than in any of Gerhardt's other creation hymns, but the song is not simply a rapturous praise of an idyllic "nature." We are told at the outset that "summer's days and colors bright" are "signs of God's own favor"

<sup>3</sup>Paul Gerhardt, "Wach auf, mein Herz, und singe," in *Wach auf*, 129; English translation by J. C. Jacobi in *The Moravian Hymn Book* (London: Moravian Publication Office, 1914) #727.

<sup>4</sup>Gerhardt, stanza 3 of "Wach auf, mein Herz," 129.

<sup>5</sup>Paul Gerhardt, "Now Rest beneath Night's Shadow," in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* #568.

<sup>6</sup>Paul Gerhardt, "Die güldne Sonne," in *Wach auf*, 132–135. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (along with other Lutheran hymnals) retains only four stanzas of the original twelve (and in different order: 4, 9, 12, 3) as the hymn "Evening and Morning" (*ELW* #761).

(see the translation below); Gerhardt sings here not of an independent realm of "nature," but of creation responding to and reflecting the Creator, the good world confessed in the First Article of the creed. In the tradition of Luther, creation, like the gospel, is "for me" and "for you" (stanza 1). It is "God's own works and deeds" that awaken the poet's response (stanza 8). And here, too, this earth, for all its beauty, remains merely a "primer" of what is to be found in the world to come (stanza 9). Indeed, the coming garden is better than Eden, for now it is Christ's garden (stanza 10), where the palms and alleluias of the singers (stanza 11) remind of the Palm Sunday praise of Christ the Savior, who, of course, alone opens the gates to that heavenly garden. Nevertheless, the poet will not reject this earth in anticipation of the world to come: song is vibrant here as well, even "amid all struggle" (stanza 12); the this-worldly goal remains: the pray-er asks to "bloom and flourish" in faith (stanza 13), so that he might here and now show forth God's "wonder true" (stanza 14). Rejoicing in God's good creation, yet aware of the pitfalls and dangers of the world, the singer anticipates eternal life with Christ by even now bearing witness in faith and service to God's good gifts of grace (stanza 15).

#### THE TUNE: DEN HERREN MEINE SEEL ERHEBT

Gerhardt's summer hymn was originally set to Johann Crüger's tune DEN HERREN MEINE SEEL ERHEBT in *Praxis Pietatis Melica*, Crüger's seventeenth-century collection of Lutheran hymns. That tune, no longer available in extant hymnals, has been reconstructed below by Paul Westermeyer from two editions of *Praxis Pietatis Melica*.<sup>7</sup> The melody line is available also as #2519 in Johannes Zahn, *Die Melodien der deutschen evangelischen Kirchenlieder, aus den Quellen geschöpft und mitgeteilt*, vol. 2 (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1890) 129.

Gerhardt's hymn can also be sung to KOMMT HER ZU MIR (*Lutheran Book of Worship* #361) and is set in the current German hymnal to a nineteenth-century tune by August Herder (*Evangelisches Gesangbuch* #503). With repetition of the last line (as in Herder's tune), OM HIMMERIGES RIGE (*Lutheran Book of Worship* #227) would also fit.

<sup>7</sup>Thanks to Professor Westermeyer and also to our colleague Amy Marga for her help in locating one of these editions.

PAUL GERHARDT, "GO FORTH, MY HEART, AND TAKE DELIGHT"  
("SUMMER SONG")

Tune: DEN HERREN MEINE SEEL ERHEBT (887 D)  
or KOMMT HER ZU MIR (*Lutheran Book of Worship* #361)

1

Go forth, my heart, and take delight  
In summer's days and colors bright,  
All signs of God's own favor:  
The earth adorned in splendor rare,  
The world a garden, rich and fair,  
For you and me to savor.

2

Trees in full leaf stand tall with pride,  
Earth's brown crust covered far and wide  
With mantle lush and verdant.  
The daffodils and tulips blaze,  
Their brilliance worthy of more praise  
Than Solomon's fine raiment.

3

The lark takes to the skies in flight;  
Doves from their clefts soar into sight,  
Now in the woods to rally.  
The highly gifted nightingale  
Sings its enticing, dulcet tale  
O'er mountain, field, and valley.

4

The mother hen parades her brood,  
The swallow brings her young their food,  
The stork its nest is building.  
The light and agile deer draw near;  
From heights above, the stags appear,  
Their grace the meadow gilding.

5

The brooks wend their meand'ring way,  
Providing on each bank and bay  
A shady patch of myrtle.  
The shepherds tend their bleating flocks,  
Their music, echoing from rocks,  
Across the pastures fertile.

1

Geh aus, mein Herz, und suche Freud  
In dieser lieben Sommerzeit  
An deines Gottes Gaben;  
Schau an der schönen Gärten Zier  
Und siehe, wie sie mir und dir  
Sich ausgeschmücket haben.

2

Die Bäume stehen voller Laub  
Das Erdreich decket seinen Staub  
Mit einem grünen Kleide:  
Narcissus und die Tulipan,  
Die ziehen sich viel schöner an  
Als Salomonis Seide.

3

Die Lerche schwingt sich in die Luft  
Das Täublein fliegt aus seiner Kluft  
Und macht sich in die Wälder;  
Die hochbegabte Nachtigall  
Ergötzt und füllt mir ihrem Schall  
Berg, Hügel, Tal und Felder.

4

Die Glucke führt ihr Völklein aus  
Der Storch baut und bewohnt sein Haus  
Das Schwälblein speist die Jungen:  
Der schnelle Hirsch, das leichte Reh  
Ist froh und kommt aus seiner Höh  
Ins tiefe Gras gesprungen.

5

Die Bächlein rauschen in dem Sand  
Und malen sich und ihren Rand  
Mit schattenreichen Myrten;  
Die Wiesen liegen hart dabei  
Und klingen ganz vom Lustgeschrei  
Der Schaf und ihrer Hirten.

6

The buzzing bees fly back and forth,  
From west to east, from south to north,  
To find their precious nectar.  
Sweet juice ascends each branch, each vine,  
Providing strength, producing wine  
In ev'ry fruitful sector.

7

Wheat surges upward, ev'ry spike  
Rejoicing young and old alike,  
Who praise the endless measure  
Of God's abundant, wondrous grace,  
Refreshing earth's resplendent face,  
Compounding human pleasure.

8

I cannot rest, my song proceeds,  
For God, in God's own works and deeds,  
Awakens all my senses.  
I sing along when all things sing,  
My heart and soul and spirit ring  
With song that God commences.

9

How beautiful things are, I cry;  
How beautiful your earth and sky,  
And all this just a primer!  
What will you then provide in love  
In your next world, your realm above,  
Where golden castles shimmer?

10

What radiant joy will Christ bestow  
In his own garden, all aglow  
With light and mirth victorious,  
Where seraphim sing thousandfold,  
In harmonies both sweet and bold,  
Their alleluias glorious.

6

Die unverdroßne Bienenschar  
Fleucht hin und her, sucht hie und dar  
Ihr edle Honigspeise.  
Des süßen Weinstocks starker Saft  
Bringt täglich neue Stärk und Kraft  
In seinem schwachen Reise.

7

Der Weizen wächset mit Gewalt,  
Darüber jauchzet Jung und Alt  
Und rühmt die große Güte  
Des, der so überflüssig labt  
Und mit so manchem Gut begabt  
Das menschliche Gemüte.

8

Ich selbst kann und mag nicht ruhn;  
Des grossen Gottes großes Tun  
Erweckt mir alle Sinnen;  
Ich singe mit, wenn alles singt,  
Und lasse, was dem Höchsten klingt,  
Aus meinem Herzen rinnen.

9

Ach denk ich, bist du hier so schön  
Und läßt du's uns so lieblich gehn  
Auf dieser armen Erden,  
Was will doch wohl nach dieser Welt  
Dort in dem reichen Himmelszelt  
Und güldnen Schlosse werden?

10

Welch hohe Lust, welch heller Schein  
Wird wohl in Christi Garten sein!  
Wie muß es da wohl klingen,  
Da so viel tausend Seraphim  
Mit eingestimmtem<sup>8</sup> Mund und Stimm  
Ihr Halleluja singen!

<sup>8</sup>The version in *Evangelisches Gesangbuch* #503 reads "unverdroßnem."

11

Were I but there before your throne,  
Where angels, Lord, their hymns intone,  
Their voices ceasing never,  
I'd join their ranks and wave my palms;  
We'd sing a thousand thousand psalms  
To praise your name forever.

12

Yet, even in this earthly life,  
Amid all struggle, in all strife,  
I can't, I won't be silent.  
My heart erupts with thanks and praise,  
Through all my nights and all my days;  
Here, too, my song is vibrant.

13

Help, Lord, and in my spirit sow  
Those blessings that from heaven flow,  
That I may bloom and flourish.  
Send now the summer of your grace  
To make my soul a fruitful place  
Where you my faith might nourish.

14

Lord, send your Spirit, hear my plea:  
Make me a strong and healthy tree,  
Fed with your grace forever,  
A flow'r that shows your wonder true.  
Plant me so deep that I from you  
My roots no more can sever.

15

Take me to paradise at last;  
Till then make me your own, steadfast,  
My soul and body tending.  
Here will I serve you, you alone,  
The only God that I have known,  
And there sing praise unending.

11

O wär ich da, o stünd ich schon,  
Ach, süßer Gott, vor deinem Thron  
Und trüge meine Palmen,  
So wollt ich nach der Engel Weis  
Erhöhen deines Namens Preis  
Mit tausend schönen Psalmen!

12

Doch gleichwohl will ich, weil ich noch  
Hier trage dieses Leibes Joch,  
Auch nicht gar stille schweigen;  
Mein Herze soll sich fort und fort  
An diesem und an allem Ort  
Zu deinem Lobe neigen.

13

Hilf mir und segne meinen Geist  
Mit Segen, der vom Himmel fließt,  
Daß ich dir stetig blühe!  
Gib, daß der Sommer deiner Gnad  
In meiner Seelen früh und spät  
Viel Glaubensfrücht erziehe!<sup>9</sup>

14

Mach in mir deinem Geiste Raum  
Daß ich dir werd ein guter Baum,  
Und laß mich wohl bekleiben;<sup>10</sup>  
Verleihe, daß zu deinem Ruhm  
Ich deines Gartens schöne Blum  
Und Pflanze möge bleiben!

15

Erwähle mich zum Paradeis  
Und laß mich bis zur letzten Reis  
An Leib und Seele grünen;  
So will ich dir und deiner Ehr  
Allein und sonsten keinem mehr  
Hier und dort Ewig dienen.

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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) 140–142.

<sup>9</sup>EG 503 reads "Glaubensfrüchte ziehe."

<sup>10</sup>EG 503 reads "laß mich Wurzel treiben."

GO FORTH, MY HEART, AND TAKE DELIGHT – tr. Frederick J. Gaiser, 2007  
*Geh aus, mein Herz, und suche Freud* – Paul Gerhardt, 1653

Go forth, my heart, and take de- light      In sum-mer's days and col - ors bright,

All signs of God's own fa - vor:      The earth a - dorned in splen-dor rare,

The world a gar - den, rich and fair,      For you and me to sa - vor.

DEN HERREN MEINE SEEL ERHEBT – Johann Crüger, 1640  
 887 D

Soprano & Bass from *Praxis Pietatis Melica*, Ed. XXIII (Berlin 1688), number 544, p. 589.  
 Alto & Tenor from *Praxis Pietatis Melica*, Ed. XXIV (Berlin 1690), number 581, p. 785.

(1) #2519 in Johannes Zahn, *Die Melodien der deutschen evangelischen Kirchenlieder*, vol. 2 (Gütersloh: Druck und Verlag von C. Bertelsmann, 1890) 129, gives half a note here and no rest.

(2) *Praxis*, Soprano & Bass edition, gives a whole note here, but the Alto & Tenor editions and Zahn give half notes.

(3) Zahn gives the C here. *Praxis*, Soprano & Bass edition, gives a B natural. (This edition appears less trustworthy than the Alto & Bass edition and Zahn.)