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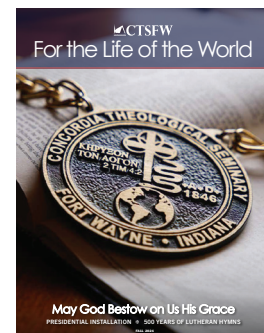
Stephen P. Starke
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On the Cover

The chain of office, presented to new presidents at the time of their installation, features the seal of the Seminary with its motto, “Preach the Word” (2 Tim. 4:2) and the year of the Seminary’s founding, 1846. The president wears the chain of office at occasions requiring academic regalia, chiefly the opening service and commencement. (Photo: Marcos Navarro)



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TUNE AND TEXT, PERFECTLY PAIRED:

Hymn Texts Inspired by the Tune THAXTED

By Stephen P. Starke

It was 1997, and I was serving on the hymn selection committee for *Hymnal Supplement 98*. The British patriotic hymn, “I Vow to Thee, My Country,” set to the tune THAXTED, had been submitted to the committee for possible inclusion in *HS98*. I recognized that the tune was from “Jupiter” in Gustav Holst’s *The Planets*, but I had never before considered it as a tune for a hymn.

THAXTED was on my mind as I flew back to my parish in Connecticut. Also on my mind was a seven-stanza text on the church year by the 20th-century German hymn writer, Jochen Klepper: “Du bist als Stern uns aufgegangen” [*Das Kirchenjahr*]. On that flight back to Middletown, I began drafting my *first* text to the tune THAXTED, “O Christ, Our Star of Radiance,” a four-stanza condensation of Klepper’s text:

1. O Christ, our star of radiance, of promise in the night,
O rising Star of Jacob, aglow with God’s own light,
Though mist and darkness shroud us, Your light shows us the way,
A beam of brilliance blazing a path that leads to day;
We follow to a stable, astonished by Your birth:
Your meteoric glory enfleshed with us on earth!
2. Across Your life, O Savior, loom shadows of great loss:
Of Golgotha and suff’ring, of cruelty and cross.
For us, the lost and straying, You bowed Your sinless head
And from the cross Your body was caverned with the dead.
Then we, with oil and spices in early morning gloom,
Hear news that You have risen and see Your empty tomb.
3. Your wounds, dear Lord, invite us to touch Your heart of love;
Too soon Your mighty presence returns to God above.
While left on earth behind You, not orphaned in this place,
For to our weakness sending Your Comforter of grace:
The fire none can extinguish, the wind none can exhaust,
The promised Holy Spirit, poured out on Pentecost.
4. Through words You gave us, Jesus, our Father You reveal;
With bread and wine You feed us where You are host and meal.
Each day You gently lead us, drawn deeper in Your Word,
As fruits of faith within us are nurtured and matured
Until that time You take us, or when You come again,
When all our hymns will blend in an infinite “Amen!”



TUNE AND TEXT, PERFECTLY PAIRED

After completing this text in 1998, I mentally laid aside the tune THAXTED, but not for long.

In the time before I wrote “We Praise You and Acknowledge You, O God” in 1999, I came across “O God, Beyond All Praising,” a hymn written by Michael Perry to the tune THAXTED. In Perry’s text, God is transcendent (beyond all praising); we on earth worship, wonder, honor, adore, bless, marvel, and make it our joyful duty to offer our sacrifice of praise to God. My response: “This hymn is really about *us* and says very little about *God!* God is *not so* far removed from us and *not* beyond all praising. He is immanent! God has come near to us in Christ Jesus, the incarnate Word made flesh, Immanuel—God with us.”

It was then that the thought came to me that the Te Deum, that great confession of faith from the ancient Church, could possibly be versified to fit the tune THAXTED. Such a strong tune could well carry such a strong text! In retrospect, I believe that is why “We Praise You and Acknowledge You, O God” (LSB 941) has been so well-

“God has come near to us in Christ Jesus, the incarnate Word made flesh, Immanuel—God with us.”

received. The text and the tune fit together hand in glove. Such a marriage of strong text and supportive tune is true of all enduring hymns.

In contrast to Perry’s text, my Te Deum versification is not about a God *beyond* all praising, but rather the God who has revealed Himself in Holy Scripture, the

God who is Lord over all, the Father everlasting, adored by the angels, the thrice-holy Lord God Sabaoth whose “majesty and glory fill the heavens and the earth!” The apostles, prophets, and martyrs join the angels’ praises in glorifying the Triune God. We, too, join in this song of praise, which finds its salvific focus in Christ, the King of glory, the everlasting Son, who condescends to save us as the incarnate One, finally crucified for us and raised for us, who “opens heaven’s kingdom to all who would believe.”

The Te Deum versification concludes with the eyes of faith seeing the ascended Son of God seated at the right hand of the Father, upholding all things by His omnipotence and with the heart of faith confessing Christ as the One who will come again as Judge on the Last Day. This hymn of praise and confession of faith joyfully ends

with prayerful confidence that we will be kept in this true faith unto life everlasting and numbered among the saints in glory by God’s grace!

I have many memories connected to “We Praise You and Acknowledge You, O God.” It has been sung at special worship services through the years on a variety of occasions. It was sung at our daughter’s wedding as the opening hymn, before which she and I processed down the aisle to John Behnke’s Prelude on THAXTED, with John himself at the organ! I once met a student from Concordia University Chicago who loved this hymn so much that her friends threw her an “LSB 941-themed” birthday party.

Perhaps the most surprising request I have had for the use of this text came from a Reformed pastor on the East Coast, who called me and identified himself as a Calvinist. He really liked this text and wanted to use it, but he wanted to make this one change: instead of “Yet You, with boundless love, sought to rescue everyone” in the second line of the third stanza, he wanted to change it to read “Yet You, with boundless love, sought to rescue all Your own.” This change would have reflected his Reformed perspective of double predestination and his belief that Christ died only for those elected to heaven. Of course, being a good Lutheran pastor, I strongly refused his request!

I had thought that four stanzas were most likely all the text that the tune THAXTED could bear at one singing. In 2019, however, I received a request from Historic Trinity Lutheran Church in St. Louis to add a *fifth* stanza to “We Praise You and Acknowledge You, O God” for use on the occasion of their 180th anniversary. The resulting text, “Lord, Save Your People,” is the versification of the remaining lines of the Te Deum, known as the *Salvum fac populum tuum*:

5. Lord, save Your people—blessings on Your heritage outpour;
Uplift and govern them by grace, both now and evermore.
We magnify You daily, as we glorify Your Name.
O grant, dear Lord, to keep us this day from sin and shame.
Your mercy be upon us, Lord; our trust in You is sound.
In You, Lord, have I trusted; let nothing me confound.

When the recent Spanish Lutheran hymnal, *Himnario Luterano*, was published, I learned that two of my hymn texts had been chosen for inclusion, one of which was a Spanish translation of “We Praise You and Acknowledge You, O God,” by Roberto A. Weber (b. 1990): “*Señor, a Tí la gloria*” [HL 1001]:

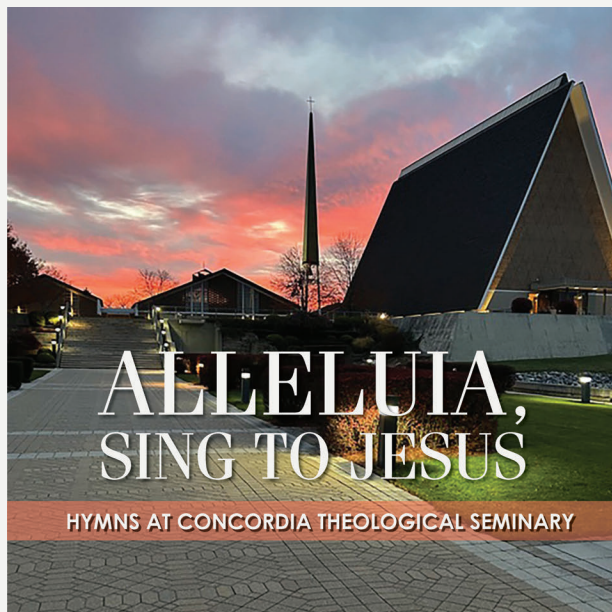
1. *Señor, a Ti la gloria, la honra_y bendición
La tierra toda, Padre, te rinde_adoración
A Ti cantan los cielos, los ángeles al son,
Con ellos nos unimos, cantando_en comunión”
“¡Oh, santo, santo, santo, Señor de Sabaot!
Los cielos y la tierra, Tu gloria los llenó.”*
2. *Apóstoles en gloria te_alaban sin cesar;
Profetas, junto_a ellos, sus voces han de_alzar.
Los mártires unidos te_alaban a_una voz;
Con ellos hoy tu_iglesia, cantando marcha_enpos:
“La majestad al Padre, y_al Hijo, y_a su don,
Espiritu divino, Un santo_y trino Dios.”*
3. *¡Oh, Cristo!, Rey de gloria, eterno_Hijo de Dios,
Que por misericordia rescate_a todos dio:
Dejaste Tú la gloria, para de virgen nacer,
Y_en cruz Tú moriste para perdón traer.
Mas hoy Resucitado venciste_¡Oh Salvador!,
Los cielos has abierto, ¡Bendito Redentor!*
4. *Al cielo Tú_ascendiste, del Padre_en diestra_estás,
Sostienes cielo_y tierra, por siempre reinarás.
Vendrás el postrer día, Juez nuestro has de ser,
Por fé, Señor, rogamos, sin nada merecer:
Que_entre tus santos cuentas tus siervos hoy aquí,
Para cantarte siempre, Eternamente._A-mén.*

All that is left to say is: ¡Sólo a Dios la gloria! Soli Deo gloria! To God alone be the glory! 🏰



The Rev. Stephen P. Starke is pastor emeritus of St. John Lutheran Church (Amelith), Bay City, Michigan.

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