

# JOSEPH HART AND HIS HYMNS\*

PETER C. RAE  
COWDENBEATH

Dear Hart, as Joseph Hart was often affectionately called, has regrettably passed into obscurity. It is only in the last thirty or forty years that his hymns have not been in print, although one can find most of them in Gadsby's hymnbook which is used by the Gospel Standard Strict Baptists. The present Baptist church hymnbook contains none of his hymns, whereas C. H. Spurgeon's *Our Own Hymnbook* contained 17. Perhaps more significantly, Spurgeon quoted from Hart a number of times in his sermons, especially in the last few paragraphs when he was applying the message, and pleading with his hearers to commit themselves to Christ. His own favourite hymn of Hart's was 'Come ye sinners', which, for instance, appears in his sermon on Hebrews 7:25 in Exeter Hall on Sunday June 8th 1856. He also quotes a number of verses of Hart's hymn 75 on Gethsemane in his exposition on Psalm 40 in the *Treasury of David*.

The most well-known of Hart's hymns are: 'How good is the God we adore'; 'O Holy spirit come'; and 'Come ye sinners, poor and wretched'. In contrast with the modern tendency, the hymns of the 18th century revival are Christ-honouring, expressing the depth of atonement. Although they too were children of their age – an age of controversy concerning grace – their hymns are experimental and doctrinal. We could apply G. W. Anderson's comment on the psalms to Hart: 'His was a faith sung and not signed.'<sup>1</sup> John Langley (1753-1792) in the preface to his hymnbook which is dedicated to the Countess of Huntingdon, gives his opinion of some of the hymnwriters he has read:

Dr. Watts whose sweetness and beauty heightens with their use, and Mr. Hart's so laden with experience, that like a tree whose Top reaches heaven, yet its fruit bends its branches to the Earth.

\* Many editions of Hart's hymns are available at second-hand theological booksellers. The one used in this essay is Palmer's edition of 1863 which includes the author's 'Experience', a Memoir, and the Supplement and Appendix to the hymns. A biography of Joseph Hart by T. Wright was published in London in 1910.

1. G. W. Anderson, 'Israel's Creed sung not signed', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 1963, pp. 277ff.

And there is also Mr. Cennick's, whose life and evangelical turn of mind must recommend him to every child of God.<sup>2</sup>

It is true of the hymns of Hart, and the theology contained within them, that he believed that the heart of Christian experience was not merely the acceptance of certain doctrines or a system of dogmatics, but a living and vital relationship with the Lord. So aware was he of what God had done for his soul, that he expresses this awareness in joy and praise as he composed his hymns. Because he is not regarded by historians as a major figure in the 18th century revival, that does not mean that his memory should be left unsung. There are many whose names have been forgotten, but who were faithful and used by God in their generation. This Independent preacher in London is such a one.

Joseph Hart was born in London, about 1712. He had believing parents, who attended the ministry of George Whitefield at the Tabernacle in Moorfields, where they also heard those who supplied for Whitefield when he was away, including Andrew Kinsman of Plymouth, who became a staunch friend of young Joseph, and also John Cennick and Joseph Humphreys. Hart was given a classical education, and finally became a teacher of the ancient languages. After reaching the age of 21 he became concerned about his spiritual state, and the record of his spiritual journey is given in the *Experience* which forms the opening pages of his hymnbook. He challenged Wesley's doctrine as given in the famous sermon on Romans 8 and took the side of Whitefield in the controversy that ensued. Around this time, at the age of about 32, he published translations of some Greek classical texts. In 1751 he began to reform and lead a more orderly life. In 1755 he besought the Lord to reveal himself to him, waiting and longing for a vision of the Lord. In the week before Easter in 1757 his prayer was answered, and he says: 'I had such an amazing view of the agony in the Garden as I know not well how to describe. I was lost in wonder and adoration, and the impression it made was so deep, I believe, ever to be obliterated.' Although Hart had been attending the Tabernacle at Moorfields, and the Chapel in Tottenham Court Road, it was at the Fetter Lane meeting of the Moravians that he was finally delivered from his sense of condemnation. His 'vision' of the suffering of Christ in the Garden found a ready appreciation at the Moravian meetings, whose emphasis on the sufferings of Christ is well known.<sup>3</sup>

As soon as he found peace with God, Hart began to write hymns. The hymnbook, the first edition of which came out before he began

2. John Langley, *Sacred Hymns for the Children of God*, 1776, p. vii.

3. Manuscript Diaries of the Fetter Lane Meeting of Moravian Brethren in the Moravian Church House, Muswell Hill, London.

his public ministry in the Jewin Street Independent Chapel, consists of 119 hymns arranged to accord with what we now call the Church Year. For an independent minister this would be unusual, and it indicates that Hart owed much to the Moravians. The Moravians had a simple yet effective means of personal devotion in which a Bible text and verse of a hymn were set for each morning and evening; and their sermons and church services were based on these 'Watchwords', as they called their devotional exercises. It has not been possible to see any close correlation between the subjects of Hart's hymns and the Watchwords of the years 1757-9 when he would have been attending the Fetter Lane meeting as well as writing hymns. Hart's hymnbook was first published in 1759, and a year later he became a minister of the Jewin Street Chapel. It was owing to Hart's reputation through the publishing of the hymnbook and his verve as a preacher of the Gospel, that he attracted large congregations. Not long after his settlement as a minister he began to write other hymns, which are contained in what is known as the 'Supplement', and some of the subjects indicate a pastor's need for suitable hymns for the regular public worship and the pastoral needs of a settled congregation. For instance, the Supplement contains 20 hymns on the Lord's Supper, hymns on death, sickness, and the second coming. He also includes hymns on baptism, the settlement of a minister, and a section of doxologies. Thereafter he added some hymns which appear in later editions as an Appendix. His ministry was abundantly blessed by God, and his congregations were numerous.

His ministry was terminated by an apparently lingering illness, and he died on the 24th May, 1768. The funeral oration was given by Andrew Kinsman of Plymouth, and his body was interred in the Bunhill Fields burying ground in London. It is said that some 20,000 people attended his funeral, a manifest proof that he was held in high esteem. During the years of his ministry he was well-known as an evangelical preacher, acquainted with not only John Gambold and Andrew Kinsman, but also Howell Harris, Whitefield, and the Wesleys, as well as William Romaine, the saintly Anglican who maintained the evangelical witness in the established church in London.

Hart sums up his faith in the conclusion to his *Experience*:

I am daily more and more convinced that the promises of God to his people are absolute; and desire to build my hopes on the free electing love of God in Christ Jesus to my soul before the world began, which I can experimentally and feelingly say, He hath plucked me from the lowest Hell. He hath plucked me as a brand out of the fire! He hath proved Himself stronger than I, and his goodness superior to all my unworthiness. He gives me to know and to feel too, that without Him I can do nothing. He tells me

(and enables me to believe it) that I am all fair, and there is no spot in me. Though an enemy, He calls me his friend; though a traitor a child; though a beggared prodigal, He clothes me with the best robe'; and has put a ring of endless love and mercy on my hand, and though I am sorely distressed by spiritual and internal foes, afflicted, tormented and bowed down almost to death, with the sense of my own present barrenness, ingratitude and proneness to evil, He secretly shows me His bleeding wounds; and softly and powerfully, whispers to my soul: 'I am thy great salvation.' His free distinguishing grace is the bottom on which is fixed the rest of my poor weary tempted soul. On this I ground my hope, often times when unsupported by any other evidence, save only the Spirit of adoption received from Him. He hath chosen me out from everlasting, in whom to make known in inexhaustible riches of his free grace and longsuffering. Though I am a stranger to others and a wonder to myself, yet I know Him, or rather I am known of Him. Though poor in myself, I am rich enough in Him. When my dry empty barren soul is parched with thirst, He kindly bids me come to Him, and drink my fill at the fountain head. In a word He empowers me to say with experimental evidence, 'where sin abounded, grace did much much more abound.' Amen and Amen.

Hart's same faith comes out in the formal wording of his will:

I commit my soul to Almighty God, in good and firm hope that He will save it from perdition, in and through the merits of His dear Son, in whom I have believed and do still believe that through Him I shall receive the full remission of all my sins.<sup>4</sup>

It has not been possible (despite an extensive search by the present writer) to locate Hart's church books, or any other writings of his, and one must presume that they are lost. Thus the only bequest he left to posterity are his hymns, but they have a spiritual quality all their own. As Gadsby says, 'Hart and Berridge are the sweetest and greatest experimental writers that have left any hymns on record'.<sup>5</sup> And S. M. Houghton comments that 'he has a spirit of poetry in him which, linked with an amazingly deep knowledge of matters spiritual guarantees him a permanent niche in the affections of such of the Lord's people as value experimental theology'.<sup>6</sup> Hart's hymnbook became famous, as Dr Johnson's anecdote shows: 'Easter Day, 1764 I went to church. I gave a shilling and seeing a poor girl at the sacra-

4. Manuscript in Probate Office, Public Record Office, London.

5. Preface to Gadsby's *Hymnbook*, 1838.

6. S. M. Houghton, *Bible League Quarterly*, 1979, p. 299.

ment in a bedgown, gave her privately a crown, *though* I saw Hart's hymns in her hand.<sup>7</sup>

Most of the truths of the Christian faith are covered by Hart. However, one cannot claim that he rises to the sublimities of Wesley or Watts. Despite that, the reader can 'warm to his treatment of the suffering of Christ, the vicarious sacrifice of the Redeemer, and the priestly office of the Saviour.'<sup>8</sup>

Many of his hymns reflect his spiritual pilgrimage. Grace was, for him, God stretching out his hand to a helpless sinner. He looked back on his conversion experience and his 'reconversion', which he called the 'Whit Sunday episode', in the light of what God had done for his soul. He retains though the warmth and consideration for others and their spiritual need in his gospel hymns. Often regarded as a hypercalvinist, his hymns of Gospel invitation are some of the richest in the English language.

Between Hart's death and the present, different groups have used Hart's hymns almost exclusively. William Huntington (1745-1831) used many, as did the Revd A. J. Baxter minister of Cavendish Place Chapel in Eastbourne. This Mr Baxter established a magazine entitled the *Gospel Advocate*, in which he wrote a notable series of articles expounding Hart's hymns. There were 142 of Hart's hymns used in that chapel.<sup>9</sup>

In Bunhill Fields, London, there is an obelisk erected over his grave quoting from hymns 51, 100 and 119 in his book.

### The Hymns: Influences

Before distilling some of the more important doctrines in the hymnbook, we may note some striking resemblances with the writings of John Cennick (1718-1755). It is doubtful whether Hart met Cennick since the latter died before Hart became a Christian in 1757, but one supposes that Hart knew of Cennick's published hymnbooks and sermons. Both men began their hymnbooks with an account of their spiritual pilgrimage and conversion in what is entitled *Experience*. We know that Hart attended the Fetter Lane Chapel, and Moorfields where Cennick had been engaged as preacher. Cennick is reported to have been the first to introduce in to English hymnody the metre 8.3.3.6.<sup>10</sup> Hart uses this metre in a special series of four hymns (65-68 in his hymnbook) which deal with the spiritual progression of the soul: Man's Righteousness, the Linsey-Woolsey Garment, Christ's

7. *Ibid.*

8. B. Knopp, *History of Cavendish Place Chapel*, Eastbourne, pp. 12, 13.

9. Frank Baker, *John Cennick: a Handlist of his Writings*, Wesley Historical Society Publication No. 5, 1958, p. 5.

10. Samuel Johnson, *Works, Prayers and Meditations*, Murphy's Edition, 1823, Vol. xi, p. 492.

Righteousness, and the Saint's Inheritance. The unusual second title happens also to be the subject of a sermon by Cennick based on Deuteronomy 22:11, preached in Antrim in 1754. Many of the 18th century evangelicals wrote hymns to illustrate their sermon material, and help the congregation to remember the message. When Hart wrote his hymnbook, he was not yet a preacher. His hymns might well have reflected the messages he heard, as well as illustrating his own personal devotions.

### Subjects in the Hymns

i. In common with many of the 18th century revivalist hymns, Hart stresses the *wretchedness* of sinful souls. He indicates the parlous state of the soul without Christ. When he realises the vileness of the unredeemed soul, and thereafter discovers the possibility of newness of life through conversion, this leads him to wonder and praise. The first hymn in the book describes the universal nature of the sin which Christ bore. Sin repeats itself in 'each sin infected sire'. (Hymn 38 v. 2) Although he acknowledges the nature of sin, he is not slow to confess his own personal sinfulness, *e.g.*,

And dost thou still regard,  
And cast a gracious eye  
On one so foul, so base, so blind,  
So dead, so lost as I?

*Hymn 10 v. 6.*

This accords with a phrase in his *Experience* where he describes himself as 'feeling leprous from head to foot'. The words 'leprous' and 'wretched', occur often, *e.g.*,

Leprous soul, press through the crowd  
In thy foul condition;  
Struggle hard, and call aloud  
On the great Physician;  
Wait till they disease he cleanse,  
Begging, trusting, cleaving;  
When, and where, and by what means,  
To his wisdom leaving.

*Hymn 18 v. 6.*

## JOSEPH HART AND HIS HYMNS

Hymn 106, based on Romans 7:24, has this plea:

How sore a plague is sin,  
To those by whom 'tis felt!  
The Christian cries, Unclean! Unclean!  
E'en though releas'd from guilt.

O wretched, wretched man!  
What horrid scenes I view!  
I find, alas! do all I can,  
That I can nothing do.

*Hymn 106 vv. 1,2.*

If 'wretched' and 'loathsome' are not enough to describe the unredeemed soul, Hart adds a further expressive word, 'vile'.

Not so the needy helpless soul  
Prefers his humble prayer;  
He looks to Him that works the whole,  
And seeks his treasure there.

His language is, 'Let me, my God,  
On sovereign grace rely:  
And own 'tis free, because bestow'd,  
On one so vile as I.

*Hymn 113 vv. 5,6.*

Hart's view of man is that in his unregenerate state, he is without beauty and there is nothing that could possibly attract the divine mercy, except by grace.

ii. This leads us to consider the next theme, that of *grace*. Grace is paradoxical, and Hart suggests the reason why a sinner refuses it:

What makes mistaken men afraid  
Of sovereign grace to preach?  
The reason is (If truth be said)  
Because they are so rich.

That is very telling, and penetrates the self-righteous heart. Hart is quick to declare that the sinner abuses grace when he sins and turns his back on mercy. In the hymn based on the story of the Prodigal:

The prodigal's return'd;  
The apostate bold and base;

That all his Father's counsels spurn'd,  
And long abus'd his grace.

*Hymn 71 v. 2.*

How is grace revealed to sinners? Hart finds grace primarily in the wounds of Christ, and in Christ as the Lamb of God:

Breathe on these bones, so dry and dead;  
Thy sweetest, softest influence shed  
On all our hearts abroad;  
Point out the place where grace abounds;  
Direct us to the bleeding wounds  
Of our incarnate God.

*Hymn 6 v. 2.*

And in the hymn entitled 'The Author's Confession':

But Oh, the goodness of our God!  
What pity melts his tender heart!  
He saw me weltering in my blood,  
And came and eas'd me of my smart.

I would object; but faster much  
He answer'd, *Peace!* What, me? - *Yes, thee*  
But my enormous crimes are such -  
*I give thee pardon full and free.*

. . . He said. I took the full release:  
The Lord had sign'd it with his blood!  
My horrors fled; and perfect peace,  
And joy unspeakable, ensued.

*Hymn 27, vv. 13,16 & 19.*

Grace comes to mankind through the blood of Christ:

Lamb of God! we fall before thee,  
Humbly trusting in thy cross;  
That alone be all our glory,  
All things else are dung and dross;  
Thee we own a perfect Saviour,  
Only source of all that's good;  
Every grace and every favour  
Come to us through Jesus' blood.

*Hymn 17 v. 1.*



## JOSEPH HART AND HIS HYMNS

Grace is the keynote of Hart's teaching concerning God's dealings with wretched sinners. Grace is free:

Good God, are these thy ways?  
If rebels thus are freed,  
And favour'd with peculiar grace,  
Grace must be free indeed.

*Hymn 71 v. 7.*

One cannot but notice the strength of Hart's faith not only on God's grace but also in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and especially his sufferings in Gethsemane and on the Cross. Nowhere is this love seen to full effect than in another of Spurgeon's favourite hymns:

There my God bore all my guilt:  
This through grace can be believ'd:  
But the horrors which he felt,  
Are too vast to be conceiv'd;  
None can penetrate through thee,  
Doleful, dark Gethsemane!

*Hymn 75 v. 13.*

If grace be the basis of Hart's doctrine of salvation, then it underlines his concern that salvation is through Christ alone. In his writings, grace and Christ are almost synonymous. For it is only through faith in Christ that the sinner will know freedom from sin.

Only by faith in Jesus' wounds  
The sinner gets release;  
No other sacrifice for sin  
Will God accept but this.

*Hymn 8 v. 7.*

Throughout the hymnbook, faith in Christ brings freedom from sin, cleansing, forgiveness, peace with God, and a whole salvation. How the following words bring joy to a believer's heart:

The chief concern of fall'n mankind  
Should be to gain God's favour:  
What safety can the sinner find  
Before he find a Saviour?

This Saviour must be one that can  
From sin and death release us,  
Make up the breach 'twixt God and man;  
Which none can do but Jesus.

Mercy and love, from Jesus felt,  
Can heal a wounded spirit;  
Mercy, that triumphs over guilt,  
And love that seeks no merit.

Then kiss the Son, for from his wrath  
No wisdom can deliver;  
Close in with Christ by saving faith,  
And God's your friend for ever.

*Hymn 112 vv. 8, 9, 12 & 13.*

In some places the cross and the blood almost are like grace in that they become synonyms for Christ himself.

This section can be suitably concluded with two verses:

Jesus is the chiefest good;  
He hath saved us by His blood;  
Let us value nought but Him;  
Nothing else deserves esteem.

Jesus therefore let us own.  
Jesus we'll exalt alone.  
Jesus has our sins forgiven.  
Jesus' blood has bought us heaven.

*Hymn 11 vv. 1 & 4.*

iii. The last hymn quoted leads us to the main doctrine of the evangelical faith: *the atonement*. Herein, the blood of Christ, his sufferings, and his vicarious sacrifice are given their rightful place in the hymns of Hart. In his *Experience* he describes his state before conversion:

The blood of Christ was not yet effectively applied to my soul. I looked on Christ's death indeed as a grand sacrifice for sin, but did not see the inestimable value of His Blood and Righteousness clearly enough to make me abhor myself, and count all things dung and dross.

## JOSEPH HART AND HIS HYMNS

He admits and confesses later on in the same *Experience* that the 'blood of the Redeemer, applied to the soul by His Spirit is the one thing needful'.

a. The blood of Christ cleanses from sin:

Blessed are they whose guilt is gone  
Whose sins are wash'd away with blood,  
Whose hope is fix'd on Christ alone,  
Whom Christ hath reconcil'd to God.

*Hymn 103 v. 1.*

b. Unbelievers do not only refuse to believe the message of the Gospel, but trample and despise the blood of the lamb:

And why, dear Saviour, tell me why  
Thou thus would'st suffer, bleed, and die?  
What mighty motive could thee move?  
The motive's plain – 'twas all for love!

For love of whom? Of sinners base;  
A harden'd herd, a rebel race;  
That mock'd and trampled on thy blood,  
And wanton'd with the wounds of God!

*Hymn 1 Part 2 vv. 1 & 2.*

c. Hymns like the following indicate that Hart recognises that it was the love of God that brought forth the blood of the Son to ransom the repentant sinner:

Love to Jesus Christ and his,  
Fixes the heart above;  
Love gives everlasting bliss;  
But who can give us love?  
To believe's the gift of God;  
Well-grounded hope he sends from heaven;  
Love's the purchase of his blood,  
To all his children given.

*Hymn 64 v. 2.*

d. The blood of Christ is the object of the faith of the believer:

Whoe'er believes aright  
In Christ's atoning blood,

THE SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

Of all his guilt's acquitted quite,  
And may draw near to God.

*Hymn 53 v. 1.*

e. The work of the Spirit is to apply the power of the blood of Christ to cleanse and save. The hymns agree with Hart's *Experience* where he suggests that 'the sprinkling of the blood of the Crucified Saviour on the conscience by the Holy Ghost, sanctifies a man, without which the most abstemious life and rigorous discipline is unholy'.

The Father's love in this we find,  
He made his Son our sacrifice;  
The Son in love his life resign'd  
The Spirit of love his blood applies.

*Hymn 47 v. 3.*

f. Grace and the blood of Christ are linked together in:

Breathe on these bones, so dry and dead;  
Thy sweetest, softest influence shed  
On all our hearts abroad;  
Point out the place where grace abounds;  
Direct us to the bleeding wounds  
Of our incarnate God.

*Hymn 6 v. 2.*

g. Hart underlines the idea of the ransom price of salvation being the blood of Christ:

Then let us rejoice,  
And cheerfully sing,  
With heart and with voice,  
To Jesus our King;  
Who thus far has brought us  
From evil to good;  
The ransom that bought us  
No less than his blood.

*Hymn 19 v. 4.*

h. The blood of Christ brings to believing hearts new birth, salvation, reconciliation and redemption. For instance, the hymn entitled 'Saving Faith' begins:

The sinner that truly believes,  
And trusts in his crucified God,

## JOSEPH HART AND HIS HYMNS

His justification receives,  
Redemption in full through his blood.

*Hymn 88.*

Without quoting further examples at length, we may note that Hart covers ideas inherent in atonement such as the incomparable nature of the blood of Christ, and how men are bought with such a price. There are solid riches found in the blood of Christ which brings union with the Lord. The blood of Christ gladdens the heart of the believer, and signals the wisdom of God's mercy.

The God I trust  
Is true and just;  
His mercy hath no end:  
Himself hath said,  
My ransom's paid;  
And I on him depend.

Then why so sad,  
My soul? Though bad,  
Thou hast a friend that's good;  
He bought thee dear;  
(Abandon fear!)  
He bought thee with his blood.

So rich a cost  
Can ne'er be lost,  
Though faith be tried by fire;  
Keep Christ in view;  
Let God be true,  
And every man a liar.

*Hymn 99, based on Romans 3:4.*

iv. Possibly because of his contact with the Moravians, through John Gambold and others, Hart took into his thinking an interest in the wounds and sufferings of Christ. The whole of hymns 1 and 75 describe and expound the meaning of the pain and suffering of the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane, although verse 1 of hymn 36 is typical:

Come, poor sinners, come away;  
In meditation sweet;  
Let us go to Golgotha,  
And kiss our Saviour's feet!  
Let us in his wounded side  
Wash, till we every whit are clean;

## THE SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

That's the fountain open'd wide  
For filthiness and sin!

Apart from the influence of Moravian piety, Hart remembers the spiritual experience he had just before he yielded to the claims of Christ. He writes in his *Experience*:

The week before Easter 1757, I had such an amazing view of the agony of Christ in the garden as I know not well how to describe. I was lost in wonder and adoration; and the impression it made was too deep, I believe ever to be obliterated.

Such an experience remained with him, so that in hymn 62 he writes:

Behold the darling Son of God  
Bow'd down with horror to the ground,  
Wrung at the heart, and sweating blood,  
His eyes in tears of sorrow drown'd!

See how the victim panting lies,  
His soul with bitter anguish prest!  
He sighs, he faints, he groans, he cries,  
Dismay'd, dejected, shock'd, distrest!

But it was not just the fact of such pain and misery that touched Hart, for he continues:

Deep in his breast our names were cut:  
He undertook our desperate debt:  
Such loads of guilt were on him put,  
He could but just sustain the weight.

There are a number of hymns specially written for Good Friday, in which the death of Christ is described as effecting holiness, peace with God, and showing forth the love of God:

When the blessed Jesus died,  
God was clearly justified;  
Sin to pardon without blood  
Never in his nature stood.

See the suffering Son of God,  
Panting, groaning, sweating blood!  
Brethren, this had never been,  
Had not God detested sin.

*Hymn 40 vv. 4 & 6.*

## JOSEPH HART AND HIS HYMNS

The descriptions of the agony of the Saviour sometimes indicate his dependence on the Moravians. Some of the early hymns are very explicit about the physical nature of the wounds, while others describe the spiritual nature of his sufferings:

With thorns his temples gor'd and gash'd  
Send streams of blood from every part;  
His back's with knotted scourges lash'd,  
But sharper scourges tear his heart.

Nail'd naked to the accursed wood,  
Expos'd to earth and heaven above,  
A spectacle of wounds and blood,  
A prodigy of injur'd love!

*Hymn 63 vv. 3 & 4.*

and:

Oh, that closer we could cleave,  
To thy bleeding dying breast!

*Hymn 74 v. 3.*

v. Such sentiments are typical of the 18th century hymnwriters, especially those who at the beginning of the revival were still in fellowship with the Moravian believers. That is the intimacy of the relationship between the believer and the Saviour. The warmth and closeness of such a relationship counteracts the more intellectual, and theoretical discussion of theology. The 18th century establishment had discussion of an abstract religion, and the revivalists sought to give the common people a faith that warmed the heart.

This occurs in two ways in Hart's hymns. First, the use of names of Christ, especially the endearing nature of such nomenclature; and secondly, the longing for a closeness, a striving and longing for Christ himself, and the realisation of union with the Saviour.

The emphasis on the sufferings of Christ and Calvary is seen in the phrase 'Lamb of God', used at least 32 times in his hymns. Sometimes adjectives are used like Pascal Lamb, dying Lamb, bleeding Lamb. The Lamb of God is meek and lowly, harmless, slaughtered, as well as holy. He also uses the word Saviour a number of times, and Immanuel twice. Terms of endearment also occur, including a reference to the 'darling Son of God', hymn 62 v. 1. Endearment leads to the desire for Christ. So in the *Experience* he describes the joy of his conversion: 'Thenceforth I enjoyed sweet peace in my soul; and had such clear and frequent manifestations of his love to me, that I longed for no other heaven.' And later he says:

Though an enemy He calls me friend; though a traitor, His child.  
And though I am often sorely distressed by spiritual and internal  
foes, afflicted, tormented, and bowed down almost to death, with  
the sense of my own present barrenness, ingratitude, and proneness  
to evil, He secretly shows me His bleeding wounds; and softly but  
powerfully, whispers to my soul, 'I am thy great salvation'.

His longing for a close relationship with the Saviour and a deepening  
sense of his nearness also appears :

Nothing but Jesus I esteem;  
My soul is then sincere;  
And everything that's dear to Him,  
To me is also dear.

*Hymn 101 v. 3.*

Then with single eye,  
I took to Christ alone;  
And on His righteousness rely,  
Though I myself have none.

*Hymn 107 v. 3.*

This theme is repeated in the following lines:

Oh that closer we could cleave,  
To thy bleeding dying breast! . . .  
Make our union with thee clear;  
Perfect love, and cast out fear!

*Hymn 74 vv. 3 & 5.*

vi. Next, we notice Hart's concern to give due weight to the Holy Spirit. No doubt this is due in part to his desire to commemorate the day on which he was converted, namely, Whit Sunday. Five hymns, at least, are devoted mainly to the Holy Ghost and his work, *i.e.* 4, 5, 6, 45 and 116.

In hymn 4, the Holy Spirit dispels darkness, points to Jesus and his blood, frees men from bondage and brings them to sweet communion with the Lord. The Holy Spirit, according to hymn 6, points the sinner to Calvary, and helps him meet the Saviour. Hart believes that the Holy Spirit is responsible for salvation and the application of the merits of the Saviour to the seeking soul:

That blessed Spirit omits to speak  
Of what Himself has done;



## JOSEPH HART AND HIS HYMNS

And bids the enlighten'd sinner seek  
Salvation in the Son.

*Hymn 116 v. 2.*

Again:

The Holy Ghost will make the soul  
Feel its sad condition:  
For the sick, and not the whole,  
Need the good Physician.

*Hymn 89 v. 4.*

vii. Finally, we have the *evangelistic* or missionary hymns. Hart is often wrongly accused of being an extreme Calvinist, but he has a well-developed sense of the need to invite sinners to accept Christ and close with the offer of salvation. The facts of the Gospel are well documented, and fully declared, and yet also there is a strong sense of pleading with the sinner to repent and accept the gift of eternal life through the merits of the crucified and risen Saviour. For example:

Come then repenting sinner, come;  
Approach with humble faith;  
Owe what thou wilt, the total sum  
Is cancell'd by His death.

*Hymn 7 v. 5.*

Come, cease your backslidings,  
And once more return;  
Receive the glad tidings,  
A Saviour is born!

*Hymn 13 v. 5.*

Come needy, come guilty,  
Come loathsome and bare;  
You can't come too filthy -  
Come just as you are!

*Hymn 86 v. 7.*

And in the most famous of all his hymns:

Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched,  
Weak and wounded, sick and sore,  
Jesus ready stands to save you,  
Full of pity join'd with power;

## THE SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

He is able, he is able, he is able;  
He is willing; doubt no more!

Ho! ye needy, come, and welcome;  
God's free bounty glorify:  
True belief, and true repentance,  
Every grace that brings us nigh,  
Without money, without money, without money,  
Come to Jesus Christ and buy!

Let not conscience make you linger,  
Nor of fitness fondly dream;  
All the fitness he requireth  
Is to feel your need of him:  
This he gives you, this he gives you, this he gives you;  
'Tis the Spirit's rising beam.

Come, ye weary, heavy laden,  
Bruis'd and mangled by the fall;  
If you tarry till you're better,  
You will never come at all!  
Not the righteous, not the righteous, not the righteous;  
Sinners, Jesus came to call.

View him grovelling in the garden;  
Lo! your Maker prostrate lies;  
On the bloody tree behold him,  
Hear him cry before he dies:  
'It is finish'd!' 'It is finished!' 'It is finished!'  
Sinner, will not this suffice?

Lo! the incarnate God, ascended,  
Pleads the merit of his blood;  
Venture on him, venture wholly;  
Let no other trust intrude;  
None but Jesus, none but Jesus, none but Jesus,  
Can do helpless sinners good.

Saints and angels, join'd in concert,  
Sing the praises of the Lamb;  
While the blissful seats of heaven  
Sweetly echo with his name;  
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!  
Sinners here may sing the same.

*Hymn 100*

Most of the main doctrines of the Christian evangelical faith are represented in the hymns. We have selected a few, and let Hart speak for himself. Hart observed in his *Experience*:

that no righteousness besides the righteousness of Jesus is of any avail towards acceptance. That to be a moral man, a zealous man, a devout man, is very short of being a Christian. That the eye of faith looks more to the blood of Jesus than to the soul's victory over corruptions. That the sprinkling of the blood of a crucified Saviour, on the conscience by the Holy Ghost sanctifies a man, without which the most abstemious life and rigorous discipline is unholy. Lastly that faith and holiness with every other blessing are the purchase of the Redeemer's blood.

Although the objective doctrines of the faith are evident, the subjective necessity of taking those doctrines into the very heart and life of the believer are never lost. Hart continually stresses the need to *feel*, e.g. in the very first verse of the entire hymnbook:

Come all ye chosen saints of God,  
That long to feel the cleansing blood;  
In pensive pleasure join with me,  
To sing of sad Gethsemane.

The Holy Spirit's work is to pray that the sinner might know in his experience the merits of the blood of Christ:

Teach us for what to pray, and how;  
And since, kind God! 'tis only thou  
The throne of grace canst move,  
Pray thou for us; that we through faith,  
May feel the effects of Jesus' death:  
Through faith that works by love.

*Hymn 6 v. 5.*

and again, in a hymn on 'Faith and Repentance',

'Tis a safe though deep compunction  
Thy repenting people feel;  
Love and grief compound an unction,  
Both to cleanse our wounds and heal;

## THE SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

Balm is useless to the unfeeling;  
And repentance without faith  
Is a sore that, never healing,  
Frets and rankles unto death.

*Hymn 54 v. 4.*

Such a sense of the feeling of God's nearness, and the experience of the benefits of the Saviour's death and resurrection might well have come from his involvement at the Fetter Lane Meeting. The church records of the Moravian meetings on Good Friday, April 18th 1757 run like this:

All the congregation and society met, and heard the history of Our Saviour's crucifixion read out of St Matthew's Gospel, and we sung Amen, Hallelujah, and at singing of that awful thrust which the soldier's made we all kneeled down, and overwhelming feeling of Grace and our Saviour's nearness

and on the following Easter Day, 'Bro. Frederick, recited Jesus' High Priestly Prayer John 17, with an extraordinary feeling.'<sup>11</sup>

The mere record of that Holy Week at Fetter Lane, at which Hart was presumably present, gives some indication of the atmosphere that burned into his soul. Erik Routley concludes an article on Hart's hymns with this comment:

His hymns are those of an educated convert, a man who combines a clearly rational outlook, with a passionate zeal both for Christ and souls. This is what makes him unusual even amongst hymn-writers of that age of zeal and rationalisation.<sup>12</sup>

Are evangelical sentiments more winsomely or gently expressed than in Hart's hymns? Hart's hymns have drawn many to a believing knowledge of Christ, and inspired a longing for more of what the nearness of the Lord can give us.

11. Manuscript Diaries of Fetter Lane Meeting (see note 3).

12. Erik Routley, *Bulletin of Hymn Society of Great Britain*, Vol. 2, January 1951, p. 208.