

# "AND READ THEE EVERYWHERE."

This is the last line of Jn. Keble's hymn (first line, "There is a Book, who runs may read") for Septuagesima Sunday (based on Ro.1.20: "The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made."), pp51-53, THE CHRISTIAN YEAR (1827, my copy, ca.1870).

Here is the last stanza:

Thou, Who has given me eyes to see  
And love this sight so fair,  
Give me a heart to find out Thee,  
And read Thee everywhere.

Strictly regular: abab RHYME; trochaic RHYTHM; 4343 METER

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1 In his A NEW KIND OF CHRISTIAN (Jossey-Bass/02), Brian D. McLaren raises the questions of ministry after modernism & optimistically views postmodernity as gospel-opportunity. Good. Also good is to explore, with the same intention of better to face the future Christianly, *old* kinds of Christians. That I did in #3129, an in-context study of the pastor in Oliver Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village" (1770). Twenty-two years later, Jn.Keble--whom we study in the present Thinksheet--was born.

2 Why have I included a portrait of Keble? Because I think it reveals his intelligence (which was genius-level) & his joyful benevolence (he was as much saint as scholar). Matriculating at 14 in Oxford's (at the time) most intellectual college (Oriel), he quickly rose to the top, became a fellow, then Oxford's professor of poetry. Yet, in Christian humility, he avoided self-promotion (as did the pastor in *The Deserted Village*); & he felt most in the will of God when pastoring, the supreme calling (he said) for "contributing to the everlasting happiness of my neighbor." (He was vicar in a number of Church of England parishes.)

3 When Keble joined the faculty of Oriel College, Oxford, in 1811, religion was at the low ebb in Britain. (In Am., too: if memory serves, no member of Yale's 1800 entering class was a professing Christian.) He started a prayer-&-discussion group, & he & the group members (including Jn. Henry Newman, later Cardinal Newman) became the Tractarians (publishing tracts critical of church, state, & state/church relations--as a generation later, American tractarians produced the political tracts we call The Federalist Papers). The Oxford revival was called first the Tractarian Movement & then the Oxford Movement.

Not of a combative temperament, Keble loathed the storm that swirled around him from 1833 to 1846 (after which his life returned to the calm he loved and the daily companionship of his beloved wife [they were childless]).

4 According to Newman, the Oxford Movement began with Keble's Oxford sermon titled (exactly pertinently as he was complaining against both state & church about the low estate of religion) "National Apostasy." Besides laxity on both foci (church & state) of the establishment religion, he was concerned about dissident advances (the "chapel" movement of Methodists & Independents [mainly Congregationalists & Baptists]) & about creeping Romanism (1828, the government made "chapels" legal; the next year, the Roman Catholic Church). Said Keble (& the Movement, for its mind did not differ from his), Catholicism is scholastic, narrow, frustrating the intellect; Protestantism is culturally impoverished, frustrating the heart; & liberalism (we would call it secularism) is cold, indifferent to things spiritual. The Anglican compromise (of Elizabeth I & the [1549] Book of Common Prayer)? Just right when passionately believed, compassionately lived, & intelligently defended.

Jon. Edwards (d.1758) had been, a century earlier, the personal center of the revival we call the Great Awakening. Jn. Keble was that for the Oxford Movement.

5 Personal devotion, the adoration of God, was Keble's heart & the heart of the Movement. As Oxford's professor of poetry (1831-41), he poured out his heart in hundreds of hymns, & in 1827 his hymnal THE CHRISTIAN YEAR was published (the same year as Bp. Reginald Heber's hymnal, HYMNS). Still in the Oxford Movement & a staunch defender of The [Anglican] Book of Common Prayer, in 1833 Newman wrote the great hymn "Lead, kindly Light."

Why this burst of Anglican hymnody? Two reasons: hymn-singing became legal, the last criminal (i.e., disobeyer of the anti-hymn establishment-church law), Thos. Cotteril, in 1819 having been haled into court for using a hymnbook (his own) in worship. The other reason: the sounds of singing on the religious left, the dissenting wing of British religion. Isaac Watts (d. 1748), the father of modern hymnody, had written 6,000 hymns; & Anglicans who wanted to sing left church for chapel. "Incite one another to good works," says the Holy Book; & it worked. The Anglicans took to singing with a verve, & Keble's hymnal went through 100 editions in forty years. The movement also produced, in 1861, one of the truly great hymnals of all time, HYMNS ANCIENT AND MODERN (in which Loree & I read a hymn daily at breakfast); the hymn with which this Thinksheet begins is No. 168 (minus two of the dozen stanzas in THE CHRISTIAN YEAR). Perhaps these amount to one reason, the 1st explained by the 2nd....

6 ....so let's have a closer look at our Keble hymn: (1) It's bookish (good sense), its 1st line being "There is a Book" ("that shows how God Himself is found"), & its last line uses reading as a metaphor for seeing ("And read Thee everywhere"; cp. W. Pannenberg's aim of theology, viz. "to understand all being [including history] in relation to God"). The 2nd stanza is epexegetic to the 1st: "The works of God, above, below, / Within us and around, / Are pages in that Book...." (2) The penultimate ¶ points to the reason for humanity's spiritual blindness (cured by God's "grace"): "Two worlds are ours: 'tis only Sin / Forbids us to descry / The mystic heaven and earth within, / Plain as the sea and sky." (3) The last stanza (in boldface at the beginning of this Thinksheet) shifts the hymn from affirmation to prayer. Twice the verb "give" is used, 1st for our outer eyes, 2nd (by efforts on our part, beginning with petition) our inner eyes (called here, "heart"). As our eyes of flesh see everything "in sight," so--if the heart is open--our spiritual eyes see God "everywhere," the beatific vision without ceasing & thus a prelude to heaven. The 2nd line shows another feature of the Oxford Movement, viz. nature-romance. But "fair" is both esthetic ("beautiful, shining, smooth") & moral ("just, equitable, impartial, unbiased, dispassionate, objective" [cp. "fair and square" (1604)], even "gentle, nonviolent"). The revolutionary sees only the 2nd meaning, the esthete only the 1st--& my greatest criticism of the Oxford Movement is that it tended to estheticism, was insufficiently activist vis-a-vis the downside of the Industrial Revolution. Indeed, an 1848 hymn of the Movement ("All things bright and beautiful") has, as its embarrassing now-never-sung 3rd stanza, this blithe acceptance of the (feudal-industrial) status quo: "The rich man in his castle, / The poor man at his gate, / God made them high and lowly / And ordered their estate." So the "church" lost the workingman & his family 1st to the "chapel," then to secularism (only 5% of Britain now regular in worship). (The continental revolutions of that year, 1848, were avoided in Britain, however, because of "chapel," especially the Wesleyan movement.)

7 The most painful experience in Keble's life was Newman's (1845) defection to Rome. From the Movement's High Church Anglicanism it was only a small step to the Vatican: N. said that step, back into the Roman Church, was a needed "Second Reformation." K.'s response was that (my metaphor) it was a huge step, from the order/freedom balance back into tyranny--to which N. responded that the Anglican compromise could not avoid ultimate collapse into anarchy. UPDATE: In 1970 at the National Council of Churches Faith and Order Colloquium, another cardinal in process, Avery Dulles, took the apostolic-succession, papal-authority stance Cardinal Newman took; I was the other lecturer, & took the position Keble had taken. I just reread his "Authority and Diversity in the Christian Community" & my "Stability and Conflict in Community." Eerie similarities between 1845 & 1970. In the debate, Avery could not have been more generous in spirit; but the intellectual gap seems now (2002) little less wide than in 1970 & in 1845.