

"COME, YE DISCONSOLATE"

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Devotion, not criticism, is the dominant mood of my inner life: despite the curmudgeonliness of some of my Thinksheets, I'm more a joyful psalmist than a biblical prophet. So I'm eagerly setting myself to the task announced in the first line of this Thinksheet's title. Each day, hymns bubble up from below my dailiness. It happened this morning when I read this in my diary of $\frac{1}{2}$ c. ago today: "Talk with a **disconsolate**" whom I found come early to the church where I was to preach that morning.

Immediately there leapt to mind the hymn here printed, & I closed my eyes to savor its lines.

Odd word, that. Through the years I've tried to help many who were depressed, discouraged, disenchanted, dejected, desolate, despondent, down in the dumps, doleful, in the doldrums, distressed, disgusted, & I don't know how many other "d"s. But "disconsolate"? I've not used the word for years. Better look it up to see if there's any more to it than just being down when consolation might be available but isn't, for some external &/or internal reason(s)....OED gives me a few more "d"s: discomforted, dismal, destitute of consolation; + gloomy, unhappy, cheerless, inconsolable. You get the meaning. And the feeling.

To use a hoary phrase, the gospel is for "all sorts & conditions of men." Also all moods. The grand old hymns run the full range of human moods, but many modern hymnals have dropped many great hymns on the heavy end of the emotional scale. Eg, this hymn was in the PILGRIM HYMNAL till the 1958 edition, when it was pulled (& of course doesn't appear in the UNITED CHURCH HYMNAL). It's back, however, in some recent hymnals that aim to include the great hymns without prejudice--eg, THE WORSHIPING CHURCH (Hope/90).

1 Notice how the mood is sustained throughout the hymn. Write a sentence to describe **how** the hymnist is feeling. Then another sentence in which you say **what** he's doing about it. (Yes, "he": the hymnist is a man, though some very great hymns were written by women.) For both sentences, try not to use any of the words in the hymn. This discipline "accesses" (to use a computer word) your own vocabulary, the words you have stored that can express & deal with the hymn's mood.

2 Now, before we look at the hymn more closely, let's have a look at the **author**, the hymnist (who wrote the words: "composer" is the one who wrote the tune; the "hymn" proper does not include the music--some old hymnals were split in the lateral middle, so you could choose what tune [below] you wanted to sing the hymn [above] to).

I couldn't remember the hymnist, & was delighted when I found "**Thomas Moore**." Why delighted? Two reasons. I immediately heard a secular song of his, one of history's most poignant love-songs, a song affirming life-long-loyal love in spite of physical decay. Yes, I closed my eyes & heard the whole song, which put me in a mellow & grateful mood: "Believe me, if all those endearing young charms / which I gaze on so fondly today, / were to fade.... / Thou wilt still be the same as this moment thou art, / though thy loveliness fade...." The other reason for my delight is my memory of hearing an Irish tenor sing the song on the occasion when Loree & I visited Moore's boyhood home in Ireland. In case the tourist didn't know what the excitement around that house was about, on an exterior wall could be seen at some distance, in large letters, "BELIEVE ME, IF."

Ireland's foremost poet-lyricist was b. 1779 & d.1852. Religion, Roman Catholic. Occupation, law.

3 Moore wrote our hymn in 1816 & published it in his 1824 collection of SACRED SONGS, DUETS AND TRIOS, 32 in number. Only a dozen of these are hymns proper, congregational songs for the "praise of God" (a phrase I've put in quotation marks, for that's the meaning of the Greek verb we transliterate "to

COME, ye disconsolate, where'er ye languish:
Come to the mercy-seat, fervently kneel;
Here bring your wounded hearts, here tell your anguish;
Earth hath no sorrow that heaven cannot heal.

2 Joy of the comfortless, light of the straying,
Hope of the penitent, fadeless and pure;
Here speaks the Comforter, tenderly saying—
Earth hath no sorrow that heaven cannot cure.

3 Here see the Bread of Life; see waters flowing
Forth from the throne of God, pure from above;
Come to the feast of love: come, ever knowing
Earth hath no sorrow but heaven can remove.

hymn"). One of his hymns, "Thou art, O God, the light and life," was long more popular than our hymn, which finally took & ever since has held first place in his small body of hymnody.

4 SILENCE: While studying the hymn, ask yourself (1) What's the keenest, sharpest experience I've ever had of this mood? and (2) How did I handle it like, unlike, the hymnist's way? You will not be asked to tell the group what came to your mind during this silence, but you may be given opportunity to do so.

COMMENTARY on the hymn (Read only after working through all the above.)

1 The hymn's center is not the hymnist, his mood or (as in modern therapies such as "imaging") its cure: the center is God presented under various images: "mercy seat," "heaven," "joy," "light," "hope," "the Comforter," "the Bread of Life," "waters," "the throne of God," "the feast of love." Only a Bible-saturated poet could pack such a riot of biblical images into so small a compass!

This theocentricity appears elsewhere in his hymns--eg, this: "There's nothing bright above, below / From flower that blooms to star that glows, / But in its light my soul shall see / Some feature of thy Deity."

What's the secret of the depth of man-woman romance in Moore's secular lyrics? It is that even deeper than that depth is the peace, joy, & power of the Deity-humanity romance, & under & centering that is "the Love that moves the worlds" (first line of Dante's classic). All our little loves that seem so big to us are but sparks from the Great Fire (something profounder than, but not exclusive of, the Big Bang, if any). And nothing God-honoring of our loving is doomed to be lost in the Big Chill. What stokes & feeds the fires of all our loving is **con-templation** of the beloved-Beloved. The mind does, but the soul does not know the difference, in its intense attending, between devotion to the beloved & devotion to the Beloved. If the mind does not know & observe the difference, "falling in love" is the Fall revisited, this time as the idolatry of relationship addiction, which is doomed (to use a biblical metaphor) by the divine jealousy.

A comparison of Moore's love-lyrics with today's shows up today's as having two failings his avoided, viz lust (which misses love by defect) & worship (which misses love by excess). A healthy theism is the best prophylaxis against pathological "love."

2 The KJV phrase "the beauty of holiness" is true even though it's without benefit of the original Hebrew. Our hymn, in addition to being profoundly realistic & devout, is surpassingly beautiful.

3 Does the hymn have literary **integrity** (ie, is it as it left the hymnist's hand)? Yes, except:

....The last stanza was written & added in 1831 by Thos. Hastings.

....Here's the original third stanza: "Go ask the infidel what boon he brings us-- / What charm for aching heart he can reveal, / Sweet as the heavenly promise hope sings us-- / 'Earth has no sorrow that God cannot heal.'" Note here the replacement of the metaphor "heaven" (stanzas 1 & 2, & Hastings' stanza 3) with its meaning, "God."

....Stanza 2, line 1, alternative: "Joy of the desolate."

....Stanza 1, line 2, original: "Come at the shrine of God, fervently kneel." A change Moore may have made, both metaphors being in Hebrews 4.14-16.

....In the stanzas as we sing them, "heaven" is one syllable, viz. "heav'n."

....The original of stanza 2, lines 2 & 3: "Hope, when all others die, fadeless and pure, / Here speaks the Comforter, in God's name saying." The redactorial changes to "mercy-seat" & "penitent" are explicit that sin is somehow involved in the hymn's mood--a reality Moore meant to imply, perhaps, but not to state even thus by indirection. In trying to help the disconsolate, remember Job, & Jesus' "Condemn not!" (Mt.7.1).

4 Note the words compassionately describing the sufferer's mood: "disconsolate," "languish," "wounded," "anguish," "sorrow," "comfortless" (or "desolate"), "straying," dead hopes (or "penitent")....For "the Comforter," see Jn.14.16-16.7 KJV. For "Bread of Life," Jn.6.25-59. Love-feast. Rev.22.1-2.

* The first stanza entire: Believe me, if all those endearing young charms / Which I gaze on so fondly today, / Were to change by tomorrow and fleet in my arms, / Like fairy gifts fading away, / Thou wouldst still be ador'd, as this moment thou art, / Let Thy loveliness fade as it will; / And around the dear ruin each wish of my heart / Would entwine itself verdantly still.
--No.248, HEART SONGS [chosen by 25,000 Americans], Boston: Chapple, 1909.