

O Sacred Head, Now Wounded

Bernard of Clairvaux (attrib.) · 1153 · Tune: Passion Chorale (Hans Leo Hassler)
Meter: 7.6.7.6.D

Verse 1

O sacred Head, now wounded,
With grief and shame weighed down,
Now scornfully surrounded
With thorns, Thine only crown:
O sacred Head, what glory,
What bliss till now was Thine!
Yet, though despised and gory,
I joy to call Thee mine.

Verse 2

What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered
Was all for sinners' gain;
Mine, mine was the transgression,
But Thine the deadly pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Saviour!
'Tis I deserve Thy place;
Look on me with Thy favor,
Vouchsafe to me Thy grace.

Verse 3

What language shall I borrow
To thank Thee, dearest Friend,
For this Thy dying sorrow,
Thy pity without end?
O make me Thine forever;
And should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never
Outlive my love for Thee.

Verse 4

Be near when I am dying,
O show Thy cross to me!
And, for my succor flying,
Come, Lord, and set me free!
These eyes, new faith receiving,
From Jesus shall not move;
For he who dies believing
Dies safely through Thy love.

History

The Latin original 'Salve caput cruentatum' is part of a longer medieval poem traditionally attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux (12th century) but more likely written by the Cistercian Arnulf of Leuven (d. 1250). Paul Gerhardt translated it into German in 1656. James Waddell Alexander gave it the now-standard English form in 1830. The tune is by Hans Leo Hassler (1601), originally a love song; J. S. Bach harmonized it five times in his St. Matthew Passion.

Scripture References (KJV)

Isaiah 53:5

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

Matthew 27:29

And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!

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