

Four English translations of Grundtvig's hymns

By S. A. J. Bradley

Come, you dear-bought souls!
Kommer, sjæle, dyrekøbte

Come, you dear-bought souls! he prized you
over angels and baptized you
kin of David's son restored:
with God's angels heavenward bending,
let us join the Lord ascending,
glimpse the pure in heart's reward.

Wide resound the shouts that meet him:
»Welcome from the dead,« they greet him
»every devil's scourge and dread!
Over them the fires are sweeping,
but the freed are in your keeping,
lost and found, now homeward led!«

Open wide the lofty portal,
sentries of that place immortal,
city beyond stars and sky!
Followed by the freed now comes he,
world's Redeemer, Judge that shall be:
ever shall his name stand high!

Proffering crowns of gold, receive him
and the many millions with him,
dearly purchased by his blood,
from that vale of tears ascending
to this hall of joys unending:
give him thanks for he is good!

Men with angels now find union
 and with Christ a full communion:
 spirit, body, life and blood,
 faith and hope and love in fullness,
 light, resplendence, joy and stillness,
 tree of life and life's full flood.

Freely may each generation
 choose or spurn its true salvation,
 choosing either life or death,
 life in light or life benighted,
 Paradise or desert blighted,
 heat of hell or heaven's breath.

Glory to the Liberator
 with a name than all names greater,
 breaker of Death's tyrant-boast.
 Glory, praise and thanks eternal
 to the Trinity supernal,
 Father, Son and Holy Ghost!

The version translated is that used in *Den Danske Salmebog* (1988). The text (published by Grundtvig in 1837) was inspired by a passage in the Anglo-Saxon poet Cynewulf's poem *The Ascension (Christ II)* in the Exeter Book, which Grundtvig studied and transcribed in 1830. It also echoes passages in the Anglo-Saxon poems *The Judgment (Christ III)* in the Exeter Book and *Christ and Satan* (once attributed to Cædmon) in Oxford Bodleian Library Junius 11.

Literal prose translation: (1) Come, souls dearly-bought and baptised to be more than angels, siblings to David's son. Let us, with God's angel-troop and with him, journey to heaven and see the great reward of the pure (soul). (2) Round about is heard in his reception:»Welcome from the dead, terror and horror of all the devils. Over them go fiery waves; the people released accompany you, once lost but now found.« (3) Soldiers, you who protect the

fortress, the fortress above the sky and stars, open forthwith the lofty portal. Accompanied by those freed again comes the world's Redeemer, the world's Judge: his name is everlastingly great. (4) With golden crowns, meet him, him and the many millions dearly bought with his blood, now ascending with him from the vale of tears to the hall of joy. Thank him, for he is good. (5) Among the angels men are now counted, and have everything in common with the Lord: spirit and body and life and blood, faith, hope, love, light, lustre, joy, peace, the tree of life and the river of life. (6) Earth's generations in all ages can repeatedly choose and refuse, choose between life and death, day's light and night's dark, Paradise and wild desert, hot Hell and sweet Heaven. (7) Honour be to the Saviour with a name like no other, looser of the bondage of death. Praise and thanks and everlasting honour, within the Trinity, be to Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Christ's Church is One
Almindelig er Kristi kirke

Christ's Church is one without division,
for every folk a house of prayer;
there only is the Spirit's mission
as love's and truth's interpreter.
In creed, at font, she no more faltered
through time than God, her rock, is altered;
her pledges, like the Spirit, stand.

O mark it, heirs to Christian story,
with faith in font and common creed,
one Lord, to God the Father's glory,
one hope in one same glorious meed:
o let forthwith each bastion crumble
and let dividing walls all tumble
that sunder so the Lord's own house.

O mark it, folk of every culture
who fain would kneel at Jesus' name:
deny we share one mother's nurture,
deny one father's love the same.
And did the Church unstable flounder,
the God of truth were not her founder:
for ever stands the word of truth.

The version translated is that used in *Den Danske Salmebog* (1988). Published by Grundtvig in 1837.

Literal prose translation: (1) Universal is Christ's Church, a prayer house for all peoples, and only in it will the Spirit work as love's and truth' interpreter. Over the course of time it changes its creed and its baptism as little as its God and Founder (changes), and its promises as little as the Spirit (changes). (2) O

mark it, dear fellow Christians, who have in common creed and baptism and the Lord, to the honour of God the Father, with the great hope of glory: O let forthwith sink and fall all the partitions and redoubts which render the Lord's house so divided against itself. (3) O mark it, every nation which wants to kneel in Jesus' name: were the mother's womb not one and the same, nor then would be the father's embrace. And had the Church shifted its foundation, the God of truth could not have founded it: for eternally fast stands the word of truth.

*On high ascends all glory's Lord
Til Himmels för den Ærens Drot*

On high ascends all glory's Lord
– *hallelujah! hallelujah!* –
who has all things on earth restored.
Hallelujah!

What name has he, this valiant one?
– *hallelujah! hallelujah!* –
His name is Jesus, Mary's son.
Hallelujah!

As God and man in flesh and bone,
– *hallelujah! hallelujah!* –
he rose, ascended, mounts the throne.
Hallelujah!

King David's song for true is shown:
– *hallelujah! hallelujah!* –
his son ascends his royal throne.
Hallelujah!

To our good Lord let praise forth peal
– *hallelujah! hallelujah!* –
with death and devil neath his heel.
Hallelujah!

From God's right hand, mid heaven's host,
– *hallelujah! hallelujah!* –
he sends to earth the Holy Ghost.
Hallelujah!

God's angels carry without cease
 – *hallelujah! hallelujah!* –
 his people's praise, his royal peace.
Hallelujah!

Tomorrow he shall come again
 – *hallelujah! hallelujah!* –
 with clouds of glory in his train.
Hallelujah!

The version translated here is that used in *Den Danske Salmebog* (1988). Grundtvig's text (1837) is developed from the 15th-century Latin hymn *Caelos ascendit hodie* (in a Danish version of about 1620).

Literal prose translation: (1) To heaven goes the Lord of Glory who made good everything on earth. (2) What is his name, this handsome warrior? It is Jesus, Mary's son! (3) With flesh and blood as God and man he arose, ascended and mounts the throne. (4) Now king David's song is fulfilled: his son has raised himself upon his throne. (5) High-praised be the good Lord, with death and devil underfoot. (6) At the right hand of God the Father he sends to dust [mortal humankind] the Holy Ghost. (7) God's angels climb up and down with the people's song and the King's peace. (8) Tomorrow he shall come anew in a radiant halo upon rosy clouds.

The blessed new day
Den signede dag

The blessed new day with joy we see
 from out of the deep ascended.
 Now brightens the sky by slow degree:
 our hearts with its cheer are mended.
 It shows in us all, each child of light,
 that now the dark night is ended.

That sacred sweet hour, that midnight dear,
 our Lord in the flesh took dwelling,
 away in the east the sky shone clear,
 the rosiest dawn excelling:
 thus broke forth the light which earth's dark sphere
 shall shine with, all gloom dispelling.

If life were bestowed on each greenwood tree,
 each leaf as a tongue resounded,
 yet could they not voice half worthily
 the praise of God's grace unbounded:
 that for old and for young the Light of life
 should shine, in eternity founded.

To God our good Father thanks shall wing
 as lark in the rosy dawning –
 for day, that from night he deigned to bring,
 for life, when the grave stood yawning.
 May all of our lives, in Jesus' name,
 be sweeter for this blest morning.

Go stately along, our festal day,
 your brow with a glory glowing:
 so time rolls, at God's behest, away
 as brook through the meadow flowing,
 until at the end it gladly winds
 where green linden-trees are growing.

When day from the dead returns anew,
 like gold is the sun's ascending,
 but gold is its kiss at evening too,
 with beautiful crimson blending,
 rekindling a spark in the eye grown dim,
 a blush to the pale cheek lending.

So journey we on to our Father's land
 where day never sleeps benighted,
 to dwell in his city proud and grand,
 in mansions of gold delighted,
 and blissful remain for ever more
 with friends in the light united.

The version translated here is that used in *Den Danske Salmebog* (1988). The hymn was first composed by Grundtvig, on the basis of a 16th-century Danish text which in turn derived from a medieval hymn, for a particular »festal day« namely the thousandth anniversary (1826) of the mission of Ansgar to Denmark. He subsequently published reworked versions which made the hymn appropriate to any Sunday or other festal day of the Church's year.

Literal prose translation: (1) We see with joy the blessed day arising from out of the ocean to us; in the sky it lightens more and more, to the pleasure and consolation of us all! It can be recognised in us, as the children of light, that the night is now over! (2) That blissful time, that midnight-tide, when our Lord condescended to be born, then in the eastern sky it brightened up into the loveliest blushing dawn, when that light beamed forth in which the earth's sphere shall lighten and shine. (3) If every tree in the forest came to life and if then each leaf were a tongue, they could still not sing forth the praise of God's mercy with a worthy voice; because now for everlasting the Light of Life shall shine for old and for young as well. (4) So let us thank God, our good Father, like the lark at the rosy dawning, for the day which he has caused to rise up for us, for life which he gave from the dead: may this blessed day, in Jesus' name, for all of us make our life sweeter. (5) Now gently proceed, our festal day, with rays in a halo about your brow: at the Lord's pleasure, every hour runs away like the stream in the meadow; so delightfully at the last it

winds its way up under the green lindens. (6) As gold is the early morning hour when day rises up from the dead, yet the beautiful blushing evening also kisses us with gold upon her lips: then the dulled eye may yet sparkle and faded cheeks yet glow. (7) So we journey on to our fatherland: there day never lies dormant, there stands a city so proud and grand with festivity in golden halls. So though time everlasting we shall converse there with friends in the light.