

John G. Morris

A Short Biography of Paul Gerhardt



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Paul Gerhardt: A Short Biography of the Beloved Hymn Writer

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Paul Gerhardt: A Short Biography of the Beloved Hymn Writer

By John G. Morris, D.D.
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Preface by Lutheran Librarian

In republishing this book, we seek to introduce this author to a new generation of those seeking authentic spirituality.

JOHN GOTTLIEB MORRIS (1803-1895) attended Princeton and Dickinson Colleges, and Princeton Theological Seminary and was a member of the first class of the Lutheran Seminary at Gettysburg. Dr. Morris founded the *Lutheran Observer* and was president of both the Maryland and General Synods. Morris was a frequent lecturer before the Smithsonian Institution and author of the *Catalogue of the Described Lepidoptera of North America* (1860), among other scientific and religious publications. He and his nephew founded the Lutheran Historical Society. [Source: William and Mary Special Collections Database.]

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Paul Gerhardt.

AS A THEOLOGIAN, a preacher, and above all, as a sacred poet, Paul Gerhardt will be remembered and revered, by the Lutheran church and all other German communions, in all ages and in all lands. Uncounted numbers of pious worshipers are every Lord's day edified by the singing of his hymns "in the great congregation," and multitudes are daily encouraged in their most holy faith by the private reading of these admirable productions.

Gerhardt is more to the German churches than Watts or any other poet to the English. His hymns are more numerous and not less spiritual. They are less liable to dilution and adulteration, and are engrafted into the very constitution of German worship. We might dispense with Watts quietly, but a revolution would be necessary to exterminate Gerhardt. There are other German sacred poets, and of the highest style of excellence, it is true, but Gerhardt is the mighty master, before whom they all bow in reverential submission.

He lived in troublous times. From his twelfth to his forty-second year, the bloody Thirty years' war desolated the fairest portions of Europe. Fire and sword, famine and pestilence laid waste her proudest cities and ruined her most fertile provinces. The toxin of war sounded terribly all over the land, and death and destruction followed in the train of the infuriated foe. Protestant and Catholic were arrayed against each other in the deadly fight, and as is usual, in all religious wars, the unholy strife was carried on with the most unrelenting barbarity.—But there was another contest that raged most violently during the life of Gerhardt. Protestants were engaged in virulent controversy among themselves. Lutherans and Reformed were discussing in most unamiable temper the hairsplitting distinctions of their respective creeds. It was not alone the Professors in their chairs, nor preachers in their pulpits, nor writers in their books, but the common people themselves, who were carrying on this logomachy with the fiercest acrimony. The most rancorous hate, the most bitter malignity, the most vulgar personal and denominational abuse, characterized this controversy. The whole

Protestant church of Germany was in a blaze, and all the alienation of feeling and the disruption of fraternal ties usually attendant on violent theological warfare, were universally felt.

One may well suppose that this was not a period suited to the gentle spirit of Gerhardt, but he lived through it all and was even compelled to take no inconspicuous part in it. In the seasons of deepest dejection, he would grasp his harp and sing as David did, to lull the tumult of his soul and soothe the anguish of his wounded spirit. His deep piety for a long time seems to have protected him against the perils of the word strife of the schools. He never lost sight of the only star that guides the believer to the haven of peace and never elevated mere scholastic orthodoxy above holiness of heart and life. It may be also, that foreign influences were exerted upon him, and that the reading of Arndt's *True Christianity*, which had just then appeared, preserved him from the contamination so rife around him. But a poet is not apt to be dragged down from the summit of Parnassus into the dirty arena of theological strife. His soul disdains such inharmonious pursuits. He dwells in another atmosphere and holds communion with more refined spirits.

During the whole Thirty years' war, Gerhardt was without a pastoral charge. He was over forty years old before he had the care of souls. He gained his subsistence by teaching and spent his leisure hours in writing poetry. The horrors of war, the sufferings of his countrymen and the afflictions of Zion were fruitful themes for his pen. He regarded the war as a judgment of God on the guilty nations, for they had degenerated into the licentiousness of the heathen.—In flowing numbers, sweet-as angels' voices, he calls on the people to turn their hearts to God. Like the prophet Joel, he warns them against still greater evils, and when at last, the storm is over—the thunder of artillery no longer reverberates through the land – the conflagration extinguished and peace again scatters her blessings all around, the poet breaks forth in most enrapturing strains. He calls on the people and the church to snatch their harps from the willows and send aloft a shout of praise to the God of their deliverance:

Wohl auf, und nimm nun wieder,
Dein Saitenspiel hervor,
O Deutschland! singe Lieder
Im hohen vollen Chor.

Alright, and take off again, a string play,
O Germany! sing songs In high full choir.

During this period of suffering, Gerhardt was himself often in personal peril. It was after escaping imminent danger on one occasion that he wrote that beautiful hymn,

Wach auf, mein Herz und singe,
Dem Schöpfer aller Dinge,
Dem Geber aller Güter
Dem frommen Menschenhüter.

Wake up, my heart and sing,
The creator of all things,
The giver of all goods
The pious human keeper.

Every remarkable event of his life was the occasion of some admirable poetical effusion, and all so pious, so lovely, so divine. He was in constant intercourse with God, and the more gloomy were his prospects, the more profound was his confidence and the more bright his hopes of heaven. The greater his need the nearer was he to God.

After untold anxieties and sufferings in being driven from place to place and earning a poor subsistence, he at length found a comfortable situation as private instructor in the family of Berthold, an officer of state in Berlin. It was a pious family, the children of which had been trained in the fear of the Lord. Gerhardt was now a happy man. — He had a home among those who sympathized with him as a Christian, and appreciated his talents and labors as a poet. There was one member of the family, who especially harmonized with the tenderest emotions of his heart. An accomplished poet and a handsome, intelligent young lady dwelling under the same roof are apt, it is said, to betray extraordinary sensibility towards each other in a very short period. Love and poetry are intimately associated.

Frederick William, the great Elector of Brandenburg, had taken a decided stand on the Reformed side of the theological discussions of the day. The majority of his subjects were Lutheran, and they were mortified to desperation, to see the Elector and the Court promoting the cause of the Reformed with all their influence and authority. Reformed professors were appointed to vacancies in Lutheran theological Faculties, and other unmistakable evi-

dences of the Electoral preferences were given. Gerhardt, as a strict and conscientious Lutheran, regarded all this with fearful apprehension. He was nearly forty years of age, and was as yet nothing but a bachelor candidate. He feared that the probabilities of success in Brandenburg, under such a government, were but small; and how could he expect to consummate his most ardent wishes and establish a home for himself? He daily saw one before him who would adorn a palace. Anna Berthold was lovely in his eyes. Besides possessing uncommon attractions of person and mind, she was truly pious. The Scriptures were her daily companion, and she had an extraordinary gift of prayer. She was a dutiful and affectionate daughter, and a pattern of every filial virtue. She was not indifferent to the constrained attentions of the poet, but could he, a poor man — a dependent preacher — a destitute instructor of a lawyer's children, aspire to the hand of his patron's daughter?—here was a struggle— a season of extreme solicitude! — It was a poet in love — a Christian poet, whose passion was moderated and refined by high Christian principle, but the emotion was still strong as death. But he submitted to God. He looked beyond this life and reveled in the anticipations of a blissful eternity.— About this time, he was also severely afflicted by sickness, and amid these multiplied anxieties, he wrote that incomparable hymn:

Warum sollt ich mich den grämen, etc.
 [Why should I grieve?]

It was thus that almost every circumstance of his life drew forth some beautiful hymn. His feelings naturally flowed out in verse of the most tender character.

Fierce temptations often assailed him — “the pains of hell gat hold upon him – he found trouble and sorrow,” and who but Gerhardt, in such a state of mind, could write that most noble composition,

Schwing dich auf zu deinem Gott,
 Du betrübte Seele!
 Warum liegst du, Gott zum Spott,
 In der Schwermuthshöhle?
 Merkst du nicht des Satans List?
 Er will durch sein Kämpfen
 Deinen Trost, den Jesus Christ
 Dir erworben, dämpfen.

Raise yourself up to your God,
you troubled soul!
Why do you lie, in mockery of God,
in the slough of melancholy?
Are you not aware of Satan's cunning?
through his opposition he wants
to lessen your consolation,
which Jesus Christ gained for you.

But we are not to suppose that all his hymns were of the same melancholy tone. Joy and gladness often filled his pious soul, and he warbled forth his ecstasy in most thrilling song. His *Lob- und Dank-Lieder* speak the fervid emotions of his grateful spirit, and they impart to the reader a portion of the same blissful feelings. The most profound gratitude, the most ardent love, the most cheering hope fill his heart. Penetrated with these emotions he hails the advent of the church, in that imperishable hymn:

Wie soll ich dich empfangen
und wie begegn ich dir,
o aller Welt Verlangen,
o meiner Seelen Zier?
O Jesu, Jesu, setze
mir selbst die Fackel bei,
damit, was dich ergötze,
mir kund und wissend sei.
Wie soll ich Dich empfangen,

O Lord, how shall I meet You,
how welcome You aright?
Your people long to greet You,
my Hope, my heart's Delight!
O, kindle, Lord most holy,
Your lamp within my breast
to do in spirit lowly
all that may please You best.

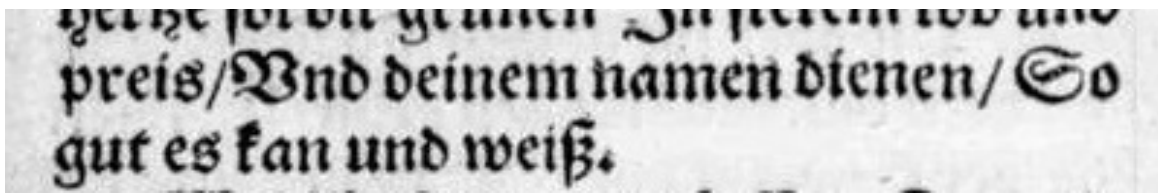
The coming of the Savior, with the benefits of his redemption, is represented in most glowing language, — the poet's soul glows with fervor as he hails the rising of the Sun of Righteousness on a darkened world.

St.

Wie sol ich.

Wie sol ich dich empfangen? Und
wie begegn ich dir/ O aller welt
verlangen O meiner seelen zier? O Je-
su/ Jesu/ setze Mir selbst die sackel ben/
Damit/ was dich ergötze/ Mir kund
und wissend sey.

2. Dein Zion streut die palmen/ Und
grüne zweige hin/ Und ich wil dir in
psalmen Ermuntern meinen sün/ Mein
hertz sol dir grünen In stetem loh und



The Thirty Years' War had terminated. Peace was proclaimed. Dilapidated churches were rebuilt — exiled pastors were restored — vacant parishes were filled — schools were reestablished — trade and commerce revived — agriculture was resumed, and yet there was no station found for Gerhardt. All his attempts to gain a place were fruitless. His heart was cast down, but-to this circumstance we owe that excellent hymn:

Ich hab' in Gottes Herz und Sinn,
Mein Herz und Sinn ergeben, etc.

I have in God's Heart and Mind,
My heart and mind arise, etc.

Never were pious resignation to God's will — complete subjection to His sovereignty — perfect patience under disappointment and sorrow more beautifully and impressively uttered than in that hymn. We do not think it possible for human language to express a more thorough acquiescence in the decrees of Providence. This was the character of Gerhardt's piety, and to be in all things of the same mind with God, is the perfection of piety.

He did not in vain admonish himself to patience. Daylight begins to appear after a long night of gloom, — the horizon is streaked with the first blush of the morning — the hill tops are gilded with a roseate hue, — hope comes to the bosom of this mourning son of song.

But, before we accompany him in this new career of life, let us take another view of him as a church poet. Until now, his hymns were accidental and personal. They were occasioned by the times, and were the breathings out of his own religious experience. They were such as every poetical genius writes in the retirement of his closet, and which are never designed to see the light or be published to the world. But Gerhardt was to become the sacred poet of his own and of future times.

The Papal church, since the fourth century, had possessed a rich treasure of hymns. Many of these are of the most exalted and refined character — deeply spiritual and full of poetic unction. But they were all written in the

Latin language, and of course unintelligible to the common people. The priests alone sang them at the altar, and the people were not edified by these sacerdotal solos. It was the Reformation by Luther that restored this department of public worship to the church. The language of the people became the language of the church, and when Luther published his own hymns, in an incredibly short time, all the Evangelical churches resounded with their melody. The arches of the old cathedrals reverberated the joyful sound as it went up from thousands of happy worshipers, who were not prevented by false delicacy or natural imperfection of voice, from giving full vent to all its force. Luther's hymns were also sung in the private residences of the well conditioned citizens and in the cottages of the poor peasants. Every where was heard the voice of the singers, for their tongues were loosed by the power of the truth. The church invited the nations to join the anthem of praise, and cried out, "O come, let us sing unto the Lord a new song; Let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation." The nations heard, and as the chorus came sweeping over the land, they joined their voices, until it became universal.

Other men, such as Weisse, the Hermanns, Selnecker and Ringwaldt, had written hymns before Gerhardt, which were extensively used in the churches. Gerhardt revered his poetical brethren of the church, and was influenced much by the deep pathos and elevated piety of their church songs. Some of his most exquisite compositions are evidently founded on some of theirs, but in style, in metre, and in every thing else external, they could no longer be models for him. Whilst they were natural, popular, and suited to the times, they were, in many instances, disjointed, unmelodious and rough. Gerhardt made a wonderful improvement in smoothness of versification, in purity of style, in beauty of language, and in propriety of figure. Whilst there was more art, there was no less of nature than in his predecessors; he was more ornamental, though no less popular; he was more refined, though no less vigorous; he was more melodious, though no less spiritual. The improved times called for improved church hymns. He labored for Zion as a poet, even if Providence did not open a way for him as a pastor. Though he afterwards labored as a preacher, yet it is Gerhardt the poet whom we especially know. As his reputation as a sacred poet rose, the Lutheran ministers of Berlin now began to appreciate the attainments and poetical genius of the obscure private teacher. They particularly admired his strong adherence to the Lutheran confessions in those days of presumed, if not real, persecution.

They gave him an occasional opportunity of preaching in their pulpits. He became popular as a preacher, for he was now well known as a poet, but his godly life contributed more than all, to gain for him the respect of the people. In all these things he probably anticipated an approaching change in his outward circumstances. His clerical friends all encouraged him with hopes — he needed encouragement, for he was now 7 forty-four years of age, and still a homeless candidate. But he did not despair. He trusted in God, and wrote the hymn,

Ich singe Dir mit Herz und Mund,
Herr, meines Herzens Lust—

I sing to you with heart and voice,
My Lord, my soul's pleasure.

This time his hopes were not destined to be disappointed — his persevering confidence was to be rewarded. A vacancy occurred in a neighboring town, and the magistracy of the place requested the Ministerium at Berlin to recommend a suitable person to fill it. They unanimously recommended Gerhard without his knowledge, and he was elected.

We may well imagine with what feelings he received this call. After twenty years of patient wailing and trouble, his object was at last gained — his mind was at peace, and he gave utterance to his feelings in a beautiful hymn.

On November 18, 1651, he was ordained, and on that day signed the following declaration in the Ordination Book:— “In the name of the Holy and Indivisible Trinity, — I confess and declare that the doctrine which is embraced in the unaltered Augsburg Confession and its Apology, in the Schmalkald Articles, in the Catechisms of Luther and the Form of Concord, is established distinctly and firmly on the foundation of the Scriptures, and that, by God's help, I will adhere unchangeably to this faith to the end of my life.”

With this confession, which was made with the most profound sincerity, he entered on the discharge of his clerical functions, at Miltenwalde. He had exalted views of the responsibility of his office, which in that day was no sinecure in the Lutheran church. The Sunday sermons required an uncommon degree of preparation. It was necessary that they should bear the marks

of mature study, and the taste of the times demanded that they should be of a full hour's duration. No baptismal, funeral or matrimonial service was performed without the accompaniment of a long discourse. The communion was administered every week. The communicants were numerous, and every one of them had a private interview with the pastor. The young people were catechized twice a week, and besides all this, numerous pastoral visits to the sick and others, were to be paid. We can hence, have some idea of the multiplied labors of Gerhardt in the first year of his ministry. He had not much time to indulge his natural inclination to poetry, but still, genuine poetical talent cannot be altogether suppressed by outward circumstances. There are few or no poets by nature, who ever wholly break their harps or hang them on the wall. Gerhardt occasionally sung in the midst of all his pastoral engagements and anxieties, and by degrees, the latent poetic fire burnt forth in all its original vehemence.

With all his fame as a poet – with all his popularity as a preacher – with all his attainments as a theologian – with all his strong trust in the Providence of God, he still felt there was something wanting to complete his happiness. He felt uneasy – he looked around him and within him for the cause. He could find none; at length he came to the conclusion that it was his solitary life, and if he had one to share his anxieties, he would be perfectly happy. Anna Berthold was still unmarried, but could he, a clerical bachelor of forty-five, expect to gain the hand of the young lady of twenty-three? After long deliberation, and prayer and trembling, he succeeded. Then came forth that splendid paraphrase of Prov. 31, in which the wise man characterizes a virtuous woman. Gerhardt has put it into beautiful verse, and Anna was the model.

He was married on February 11, 1655. He conveyed his bride to his humble home, deeming himself the happiest man alive. His apprehensions that the youthful bride would encounter many inconveniences and privations in the confined limits of his village parsonage, were realized. Her husband's numerous engagements often left her in dreary solitude, and she longed after more congenial society than the place afforded. Gerhardt observed her disquietude, and sought to cheer her melancholy spirit by striking the wires of Zion's harp. He wrote an ode suited to her state of mind. She recovered her cheerfulness, and discharged all her domestic duties with a lively assiduity, and was in all respects a perfect pattern of a Christian housewife.

But domestic sorrows were also allotted to Gerhardt. The happiest family is also called on to mourn. The loveliest earthly Paradise also bears briars. The death of his first born overwhelmed him with grief. We have no hymn referring particularly to this melancholy event, for it doubtless required all his faith and time, by prayer and exhortation, to support the crushed spirit of his wife.

There were other sources of uneasiness and anxiety. His increased expenses – a small income – the dejection of his wife, together with unpleasant official relations to his colleague, weighed heavily on his mind. These, and other difficulties grew daily. Anna saw no hope of relief – she anticipated the severest privations – she went about mourning all the day. — Gerhardt preached consolation, and quoted that beautiful passage, Ps. 37:5. “Commit thy way unto the Lord: trust in him also, and he shall bring it to pass.” Full of this sentiment, he retired to the garden, and there, under an arbor, wrote that well-known hymn,

Befiehl du deine Wege.
[Commit your ways]

A good English translation of this hymn is included as an Appendix.

It consists of twelve stanzas, each beginning with a word of the scriptural passage. The whole is most admirably managed. He brought it in – read it to the disconsolate wife, and no wonder she was comforted. It expresses the most complete submission to the divine will, and the fullest confidence that God would send deliverance from all their sorrows.

On the evening of the same day, a messenger delivered to him a large sealed letter from the magistracy of Berlin, the very sight of which greatly alarmed the nervous and sensitive Anna. Gerhardt broke the seal and read it. It was a call to the diaconate of St. Nicolai in Berlin! He re-read it with tears – all his anxieties about support were now at an end. In the rapture of his heart, he said to his wife, “see how God provides!—did I not say, ‘commit thy ways to the Lord!’”

But he did not rashly accept the call. It was only after much deliberation, that he yielded to the solicitations of the magistracy, and in July, 1657, he removed to Berlin. Fervent prayer, deep searching of heart, and self-abasement characterized his entrance on the duties of his new station. It was then that he wrote that sweet hymn,

Ich weiss, mein Gott, dass all' mein Thun, etc.
[I know my God that all my doing.]

He moved among a people who loved him – his colleagues revered him – the whole christian community respected him. The first five years were passed without any extraordinary trials. He was, however, afterwards deeply afflicted by the loss of several children. Every father will feel the full force of the following stanza of a hymn, written on such an occasion.

Ach! wie muss doch ein ein'ges Kind
Bei uns auf dieser Erden,
Da man doeh nichts als Bosheit find't,
So hoch geschonet werden.
Wie hitzt, wie brennt der Vatersinn
Wie giebt, wie schenkt er alles hin.
Eh' als Er an das Schenken,
Des Ein'gen nur will denken.

[Rough Translation:]

Oh! how must a single child
With us on this earth,
Since you do not find anything but malice,
To be so high.
How hot, how burning the father's spirit
How gives, how he gives everything.
Eh 'as he to the giving,
One's only want to think.

During this period, he appears to have written many of his finest compositions, and to have attained an extraordinary celebrity.

But the lute of song was not the only instrument on which he was called to play at Berlin. There was another which he was compelled to grasp. It gave out no sweet sounds – it breathed forth no melodious notes. Its tones were rough, discordant, unmusical. It was the war trumpet of the polemic.

The relations of the Lutheran church in Brandenburg, were, at that time, peculiar and critical. Gerhardt was devoted to her interests with all his heart. The difficulties with the Reformed had not diminished. The Elector favored the latter, and many of his measures were regarded by the Lutherans as oppressive, and restrictive of the liberty of conscience. Thus, for instance, Po-

marius was for a time suspended from office for a sharp attack on the Reformed Court Preacher, Bergius, and was at last totally discharged and exiled, for a sermon against the Reformed faith. All this, and more that might be mentioned, only tended to establish the Lutherans more firmly in their creed. The theological war raged most fiercely – the churches resounded with most unlovely anathemas – the pulpits were the arena of a furious gladiatorship – the presses groaned under the weight of the heaviest books, and the whole country was in a heat of polemical wrath. After many futile proclamations to peace on the part of the Elector, one of which even forbade his subjects to study at the Lutheran university of Wittenberg, he at length ordered a conference to be held between the Reformed and Lutheran Theologians of Berlin and Cologne, on the Spree. Gerhardt took an active part in it. — The conference met. There was much parleying, and even dodging, before the preliminaries were settled, and much cross and bush fighting after the contest began. It was a longtime even, before they determined which point, precisely, to fight about. The doctrine of the Lord's Supper was finally hit upon. The combatants entered the arena – the signal was given — the contest raged fiercely for a while – blow succeeded blow, but after all, for the most part, it was blows in the air. There was more noise than pain – more words than wounds. They finally agreed to stop the discussion, and mutually vowed, that whilst each party would most pertinaciously adhere to its dogmas, yet that they would show each other all Christian respect, and most heartily desire each other's salvation!

With this they might have been contented, but it was not only peace which the Reformed desired – it was union, and the Lutherans were expected to make concessions. This occasioned another long discussion. The Elector became impatient, and he took no pains to conceal his displeasure with the Lutherans. They did not yield, and even the electoral displeasure could not bend their sturdy necks. Gerhardt was a prime combatant in all these various and protracted controversies, and during this period, we see but few hymns from his pen. Can there be anything so uncongenial with poetic inspiration, as acrimonious, theological controversy? The war finally terminated, and like most others of a similar character, each party was only the more firmly convinced of the truth of his position, and the less inclined to love his dissentient brother.

Gerhardt's theological writings, which this controversy elicited, are said to display a masterly exhibition of the Lutheran system, associated with ex-

tensive learning, vast comprehensiveness of view, acute discrimination, and wonderful polemical skill.

He had leisure now for the more special discharge of his pastoral duties. His new born son, Paul Frederick, gladdened his heart – but he was not without domestic troubles. His father-in-law's death deeply afflicted him. After a season of tranquility, the ecclesiastical horizon again began to be covered with portentous clouds. The Lutheran clergy trembled, for an edict was issued by the Elector, forbidding the clergy, on pain of deposition, from charging any of their brethren with false doctrine – from condemning opposing parties – from deducing any mischievous result from positions maintained, and he ordered, moreover, that exorcism in baptism should be left to the choice of the parents of the baptized child.

This edict was manifestly aimed at the Lutheran clergy, and of course, it occasioned among them a general alarm. They saw that their liberty of conscience was invaded, and they held it to be their conscientious duty to maintain the purity of their doctrine, and hence, also, publicly to refute false doctrine, and by proper and logical inference, to show its dangerous results.

Gerhardt, and most of his clerical brethren, were in a dreadful predicament. They did not wish to disobey their lawful sovereign, nor, on the other hand, could they respect the edict, which they regarded as manifestly against the word of God. In this state of alarm, they presented an humble petition to his electoral grace, beseeching him to allow them now, as formerly, unrestricted liberty of conscience, and to grant to the Lutherans, the same privileges which even the Romish church enjoyed. The petition was contemptuously thrown aside, and an order was at the same time issued, that every man of them should bind himself by a written pledge, to follow out the edict, on pain of dismissal from office. Many clergymen of the country signed the declaration – many others hesitated long.— The Berliners would not decide for themselves, and asked the opinion and advice of the theologians of Leipzig, Helmstadt, Jena, Wittenberg, Hamburg and Nurnberg.

The opinions of these learned men were various. The scruples of the Berliners were not removed. In the meantime, they sought to escape the pledge by silence. But the Elector was not to be put off – he was not that sort of man. He heard of their asking foreign theologians whether they, his subjects, should obey his laws, and this enraged him. He conceived that herein they showed mistrust and disobedience. He was not to be trifled with, and immediately ordered the recusants to appear before the Consistorium,

there to deliver up the recorded opinions of the foreign theologians, sign the declaration, or be deposed. Two days after, the order was somewhat modified. Only two of the recusants were ordered to appear — time was given to the others for consideration, but final disobedience was to end in dismissal. On the appointed day, two of them were cited. Gerhardt accompanied them! They could not say, as Paul said on an analogous occasion, “no man stood by me.” The aged Lilius, and the unyielding Reinhardt refused to sign, and they were deposed. Gerhardt and the others were threatened with the same punishment. Notwithstanding the alarming example made of Lilius and Reinhardt, they determined not to sign. They declared this to the magistrate, and besought him to use his influence with the Elector, to have the two deposed ministers restored, without signing the pledge. The magistrate interceded. The clergy, at the same time, presented a petition, promising also to send, in a few days, their conscientious scruples, which they humbly hoped, the Elector would respect. A curt, repulsive reply was given, and even the declaration of their scruples, sent in, a few days after, was ungraciously received.

Naturally much alarmed at this, they renewed their petition and promised to refrain from all severe crimination of their opponents and made such other concessions as the edict required. In a word, they yielded. They were not prepared at that time to lose their places, their bread, and, probably, their lives for their theological dogmas.

If the Elector had been impartial in this affair, he might have been satisfied with their acknowledgment. But he was not. He was pledged to one of the parties, and was as bigoted in his faith as were the Lutherans. Still the business had to be settled. The deposition of two worthy ministers had created much excitement. It was regarded as a direct attack against the liberty of conscience, and, particularly, as an assault on the Lutherans. The people complained that the Reformed faith was to be forced on their consciences, and that the Lutheran worship was to be obstructed and changed. These complaints became so loud and general, that the Elector felt compelled, by a public proclamation, to dispel these apprehensions of his subjects, and to justify his conduct towards the two expelled ministers. This encouraged the magistracy and citizens to renew their petition for the restoration of these men. The Elector granted it so far as to give Lilius further time for reflection, but as for Reinhardt, who was the prime disturber of the church’s peace, he was exiled on the spot, and the others were to hold themselves in

readiness to sign. Reinhardt left the country, and his former colleagues in vain, once more, declared their peaceful intentions.

The Electoral legislature now interfered and besought His Grace to exercise moderation. They brought up various acts of the government, that seemed to justify the course of the clergy. Measures were adopted in concert with the Elector to settle the dispute, but they could not agree upon the exact mode. In the mean time, the Council or Legislature adjourned. The Elector went to Cleves and thus the matter was left undecided.

Gerhardt had determined from the beginning, not to sign the declaration. He now hoped to escape it altogether, but when he reflected on the resolute character of the Elector, he was still full of apprehension. He looked forward with dread to the time, when he, like Reinhardt, should be turned away without a home, or bread or hope.

Some time after this, the aged Lilius was induced to recant, — he signed and was restored. The Elector, in his letter to the Consistorium, particularly designated Gerhardt as one of the most obstinate, and ordered him to be cited. He appeared and was informed of the Electoral will, — sign or suffer. He refused. Though charged with contumacy, eight days were allowed him for deliberation. At first, he accepted of the proposition, but immediately after, said that he had considered it long enough and would not change his mind! In the name of the Elector he was deposed, and Paul Gerhardt ceased to be the minister of St. Nicolai!

We need not be in doubt, how he received this long threatened blow. His confidence in God was not shaken, but, how could his sickly, desponding wife, endure the disaster? A general sympathy was felt for him, — the people were overwhelmed with grief at the thought of losing such a gifted pastor as Gerhardt. They united with the town councils in a petition in his behalf. The petition was forwarded to Cleves. The Elector replied that he knew nothing about the remarkable piety of Gerhardt, for which he was so highly extolled in the petition,— he only knew that he was an obstinate, stiff-necked Lutheran, who would not sign himself and influenced his colleagues to follow his pernicious example, and that he did not regard this as any evidence of piety,—he must sign or quit the country.

The publication of this reply alarmed and excited the citizens. They met together and consulted. They renewed their most earnest petition. It was unkindly received. The Elector charged the petitioners with sedition, exaggera-

tion and even falsehood, and he forbade the officer to hand in any other petitions from that quarter.

All access to the Electoral favor was now hemmed up. An application from the Council even met with similar treatment. Nothing was left for Gerhardt now, but for his congregation and numerous friends to show their sympathy, and by their liberality to secure him against want. Thus deposed, what was he to do? He turned again to his long neglected harp, and once more tuned its strings and sang, if possible, more sweetly than ever.

Eleven months were thus passed. His friends in the meanwhile, gathered round him, and he did not suffer, at least, for the necessaries of life. The Elector returned to Berlin.— He sent for the magistrate, and ordered him to reinstate Gerhardt!! He even sent his own private secretary to inform him of the fact, which was an act of extraordinary favor and condescension. The joy was general, and Gerhardt was the only one who did not participate in it. Although he resumed a portion of his official duties, he would not take upon himself the whole. He feared the Elector was under a false impression of his position, and that he had changed his views with regard to the Form of Concord, for he would not purchase his restoration at the expense of even suspected change of principle.—The result of the whole affair was, that Gerhardt could not conscientiously re-enter on his office with the conditions annexed by the Elector. His fate was now decided,—he took leave of his attached people, and retired again into the privacy of domestic life.

An edition of his hymns was published, and it is likely that he derived a portion of his support from that source. He continued to write, and maintained the same simplicity – the same accommodation to the popular feeling and comprehension, that distinguished him from the beginning. He sustained a truly national character, whilst the secular poetry of the Germans of that day was an affected imitation of foreign models, full of conceit, exaggeration and bombast.

His congregation could not be persuaded to give him up. They still hoped to have him restored, and hesitated about calling a successor. Thus he lived, beloved and honored by his congregation and admired by the whole Christian population of Berlin.

Appendix - “God’s Way The Best.”

“BEFIEHL DU DEINE WEGE.”

A Hymn from the German of Paul Gerhardt.

Translated by Henry Mills, D. D., of Auburn, New York.

[1] Commit thy way, confiding,
When trials here arise.
To him whose hand is guiding
The tumults of the skies.

There, clouds and tempests, raging,
Have each its path assigned;
Will God, for thee engaging,
No way of safety find?

[2] Trust in the Lord! His favor
Will for thy wants provide.
Regard his word! — and ever
Thy work shall safe abide.

When sorrows here o’ertake thee,
And self-inflicted care,
Let not thy God forsake thee!—
He listens for thy pray’r.

[3] Thine eye that’s never weary,
Thou God of truth and grace,
Sees all that’s bright, or dreary,
Befalling all our race:

Of faith – whate’er opposes—
Thou wilt’ the cause maintain;
And, when the conflict closes,
Thy vict’ry shall be seen.

[4] Thy way thro' nature reaches,
Nor fails its onward course;
Thy work of goodness teaches
Of good the only source:

Thy skill, by naught impeded.
Will what is best pursue;
All by thy people needed
Thine arm of strength will do.

[5] Should Satan league his forces,
God's purpose to withstand,
Think not their rage and curses
Can stay his lifted hand!

When he makes known his pleasure,
The counsel of his will,
That, in its utmost measure.
Will he at last fulfill.

[6] Hope on then! — weak believer,
Hope on, and falter not!
He will thy soul deliver
From deeps of troubled thought.

Thy graces he will nourish,
With hope thy heart employ,
Till faith and love shall flourish
And yield their fruits of joy.

[7] Up, Up! — bid now to sorrow
And all thy cares — “Good night!”
Why trouble seek, and borrow
A charge that's not thy right? —

Thou art not made controller,
How things should be to tell;
'Tis God that sits the Ruler,
Directing all things well.

[8] The plan to his discretion.
And all its parts, resign?
Thou'lt find, on its completion,
The wonder will be thine—

How, what by thee was noted
As dark, — now understood, —
Most wisely has promoted
His glory, and thy good.

[9] 'Tis true, that for a season
God may his gifts restrain,
And leave thee room to reason—
'If all thy trust be vain;'

Or, — while thy hope shall waver.
Thy fears and griefs prevail,
To ask — “Must then God’s favor
And all his mercies fail?”

[10] But if the trial, ended,
Shall show thy love is true;
His love, to thee extended.
Will show his wisdom too.

From sorrows that oppress thee.
He will thy peace restore.
And by these sorrows bless thee
With heart to love him more.

[11] Well bless'd, — such grace receiving!
God owns thee for a son!
With joy, and with thanksgiving,
Behold the victor’s crown!

Thy hand the palm-branch raises, —
God gives it thee, to bear; —
Then shout aloud his praises
Who has removed thy care!

[12] The sorrows, Lord, that try us,
O bring them to an end!
With needed strength supply us!
Thy love to us commend!

That we, till death, pursuing
The best – thy chosen – way.
May then, our life renewing,
Praise thee in endless day.

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How Can You Find Peace With God?

The most important thing to grasp is that no one is made right with God by the good things he or she might do. Justification is by faith only, and that faith resting on what Jesus Christ did. It is by believing and trusting in His one-time *substitutionary* death for your sins.

Read your Bible steadily. God works His power in human beings through His Word. Where the Word is, God the Holy Spirit is always present.

Suggested Reading: [New Testament Conversions by Pastor George Gerberding](#)

Benediction

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

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