

The Hymns of Jochen Klepper

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The greatest hymnwriters of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Germany, Martin Luther and Paul Gerhardt, are well known to North Americans. By contrast, the individual who is arguably the greatest German hymnwriter of the twentieth century is virtually unknown, even though his hymns are at least the equal of Luther's and Gerhardt's. Even in Germany recognition has followed slowly for Jochen Klepper: the Protestant hymnal of 1950 contains just three of his texts. But his work is enjoying a well-deserved renaissance today, and the *Evangelisches Gesangbuch* of 1992 contains eleven original hymns by Klepper and one translation.

Klepper's life

Jochen Klepper was born March 22, 1903 in Beuthen, Silesia, now in southern Poland.¹ Because he suffered from severe asthma, he was not sent to school but rather was tutored by his father, a Lutheran pastor, until he was fourteen. He then attended the *Gymnasium* in nearby Glogau, where he had thoughts of becoming either a pastor or an actor. His classmates thoughtfully informed him, "But they are the same thing!"

As it turned out, he became neither. In 1922 he entered the university at Erlangen to study theology, and a year later he transferred to the university in Breslau, where he completed his degree and began doctoral studies in church history. But he broke off his studies at the end of 1926 in order to help support his family, working first for a church publisher and then as a journalist in Breslau. In 1927 he preached his only sermon, substituting for his father, who was ill.

In 1931 Klepper married Johanna Stein (née Gers-tel), whom he called Hanni and who was thirteen years his elder. The widow of a lawyer, she brought two children into the marriage. The following year the family moved to Berlin, where Klepper found work in radio broadcasting. Life became much more difficult for him after the Nazis came to power in 1933, for his wife and stepdaughters were Jewish. That summer he was released from his position in radio due to his political inclinations (he had formerly been a member of the

Socialist Party) and his wife's lineage. By the mid-1930s, German Protestants opposed to Nazi influence on the German churches had joined together in a "confessing church." Klepper sympathized with its goals and associated with some of its leaders, but it remains unclear how active he was in it.

Already as a young man he had engaged in writing fiction, and in 1933 his first novel, *Der Kahn der fröhlichen Leute* (The Boat of the Joyous), was published.² In 1937 his most famous work, *Der Vater* (The Father), appeared. Best known to his contemporaries as a novelist, in October 1937 a small collection of his religious verse—three hymns and seven other poems—was brought before the public at the Berlin church music festival. Its enthusiastic reception encouraged him to write more hymns, and in 1938 *Kyrie: geistliche Lieder*, a collection of sixteen hymns, was published in Berlin. A second edition followed a year later, and in 1941 a third and final edition appeared with thirty hymns. These, together with a mere handful of other poems, comprise his entire output of religious poetry.³

By 1939 the extent of the actions against Jews was becoming alarming, and the Kleppers sought to have their daughters emigrate for their own safety. In May 1939 the 19-year-old Brigitte was able to travel to England, but the 17-year-old Renate was denied a visa until she recovered from diphtheria. The German invasion of Poland in September and the outbreak of war across Europe postponed plans for Renate's emigration, and so she remained at home with her parents. In April 1940 she was baptized, sixteen months after her mother.

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In December 1940, Klepper was conscripted into military service, but was released nine months later on account of his marriage to a Jewish woman. About the time he was released, Renate received orders to report for "deportation" to parts unknown. Klepper, presenting himself as a faithful soldier and the author of a historical novel on Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm I, was able to obtain a postponement of the order for one year. During this time the Kleppers renewed their efforts to find a haven for Renate outside of Germany, but applications to Switzerland and Sweden were denied, and an earlier application to the United States for permission for her to emigrate to the Philippines also came to naught.

In November 1942 Klepper received orders to report once again for military service, the restriction against men married to Jews having been lifted in April. About the same time the few protections offered to Jews in mixed marriages were officially removed. At the beginning of December 1942, Renate, now 20, finally received a long-awaited immigration visa from

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Sweden; but the postponement of her deportation had expired, and on December 10 she was denied an exit visa from Germany, the decision being delivered to Klepper personally by the infamous Adolf Eichmann, the author of the "final solution to the Jewish question." That evening Klepper's sister Hilde came to visit. She recalls what happened the next morning after she had spent the night with other siblings:

The next morning I drove back to my apartment quite early. The telephone rang; it was Hanni's housekeeper. She told me to come quickly, that something terrible had happened. . . . When I arrived, the three corpses had been laid out in Jochen's study. The housekeeper, Frau Dr. Panick and two or three men in uniform said to me, "We were still able to fold the hands of the two women. That didn't work with your brother; his arms were already too stiff." The Kleppers had told the housekeeper that they did not want to be disturbed, they wanted to sleep late; in the meantime she should deliver a pot of flowers to acquaintances as a congratulatory present. When she returned, she noticed on the kitchen door a note in Hanni's handwriting: "Caution! Gas!" She opened the kitchen door, turned off the gas valve, and ripped open the window. The dead

were lying on a quilt on the floor of the kitchen. The two women were arm in arm; their eyes were closed. Jochen's eyes had stayed open and expressed great astonishment.

The men later took the corpses away in a kind of hearse, into which they shoved them as into an oven. One remarked, "These aren't the first. Already today we've picked up a young woman in Wannsee."⁴

A neighbor later told Hilde that Adolf Hitler had been enraged over Eichmann's "incompetent behavior" in the matter and forbade the news of the deaths from being announced, for Klepper's works were extremely popular among military officers.

The last entry in Jochen Klepper's diary reads:

Now we die—But even that is in God's hands—
Tonight we go together into death. Above us in our last hours stands the picture of the Blessing Christ, who struggles for us. In whose sight our life ends.⁵

At his death Klepper left unfinished *Das ewige Haus* (The Eternal House), a historical novel on the home and family life of Martin Luther. The first section, which he had completed, was published in 1951 as *Die Flucht der Katharina von Bora* (The Flight of Katherine von Bora).

Klepper's hymns

The care Klepper took in crafting his hymns is remarkable. The vocabulary is simple, straightforward German, if perhaps a bit old-fashioned on occasion. The rhyme schemes are tightly constructed, yet nothing sounds forced; in fact, one receives the impression that every word is exactly the right one, and any substitute would weaken the poetry. The imagery is vivid: Klepper does not so much talk about something as paint a picture of it, something that is difficult to capture in a metrical English translation. Breaks in thought usually occur at the ends of lines, making the texts easy to sing. The theology of the hymns is both profound and wholly orthodox; recurring themes are the immensity of sin versus the immensity of God's grace, God's love for sinners, the saving death of Christ on the cross, and the overwhelming concern of God for every detail of our lives.

The collection *Kyrie* is arranged by times of the day and the church year, with a few miscellaneous hymns appended at the end. The quality of Klepper's writing is fairly consistent from one hymn to another, and in writing this article I could have selected nearly any hymn as an example. As it is, I simply selected a few from the initial part of the church year.

The Christmas hymn "Wer warst du, Herr, vor dieser Nacht" (Example 1), written in 1940, is struc-

Example 1. Wer warst du, Herr, vor dieser Nacht?

Weihnachtslied

Nachdem vorzeiten Gott manchmal und mancherleiweise geredet hat zu den Vätern durch die Propheten, hat er am letzten in diesen Tagen zu uns geredet durch den Sohn, welchen er gesetzt hat zum Erben über alles, durch welchen er auch die Welt gemacht hat; welcher sintemal er ist der Glanz seiner Herrlichkeit und das Ebenbild seines Wesens und hat gemacht die Reinigung unserer Sünden durch sich selbst, hat er sich gesetzt zu der Rechten der Majestät in der Höhe. Wir sind nun Gottes Kinder; und es ist noch nicht erschienen, was wir sein werden. Wir wissen aber, wenn es erscheinen wird, wir ihm gleich sein werden.

Die Bibel

1. Wer warst du, Herr, vor dieser Nacht?
Der Engel Lob ward dir gebracht.
Bei Gott warst du vor aller Zeit.
Du warst der Glanz der Herrlichkeit.
Beschlossen war in dir, was lebt.
Geschaffen ward durch dich, was webt.
Himmel und Erde ward durch dich gemacht.
Gott selbst warst du vor dieser Nacht.
2. Wer war ich, Herr, vor dieser Nacht?
Des sei in Scham und Schmerz gedacht!
Denn ich war Fleisch und ganz verderbt,
verloren und des Heils enterbt.
Erloschen war mir alles Licht.
Verfallen war ich dem Gericht.
Ich, dem Gott Heil und Gnade zgedacht,
war Finsternis und Tod und Nacht!
3. Wer wardst du, Herr, in dieser Nacht?
Du, dem der Engel Mund gelacht,
dem nichts an Ruhm und Preis gefehlt,
hast meine Strafe dir erwählt.
Du wardst ein Kind im armen Stall
und sühntest für der Menschheit Fall.
Du, Herr, in deiner Himmel höchster Pracht
wardst ein Gefährte meiner Nacht!
4. Wer ward ich, Herr, in dieser Nacht?
Herz, halte still und poche sacht!
In Gottes Sohn ward ich Sein Kind.
Gott ward als Vater mir gesinnt.
Noch weiß ich nicht: Was werd' ich sein?
Ich spüre nur den hellen Schein!
Den hast du mir in dieser heil'gen Nacht
an deiner Krippe, Herr, entfacht!

Christmas hymn

After God in former days, at various times and in various ways, had spoken to the fathers through the prophets, he has at last in these days spoken to us through the Son, whom he has set as an heir above everything, through whom he also created the world; who, inasmuch as he is the brightness of his splendor and the exact image of his being and has accomplished through himself the purification of our sins, has seated himself on the right of the Majesty on high. We are now God's children, and it has not yet been made known what we shall be. We know, however, when it is made known, we shall be like him.

[Heb. 1:1-3; 1 John 3:2]

1. Who were you, Lord, before this night?
The angels' praise was brought to you.
With God you were before all time.
You were the splendor of majesty.
All that lives was contained in you.
Whatever moves was created through you.
Heaven and earth were made through you.
Before this night you were God himself.
2. Who was I, Lord, before this night?
Of this may I think in shame and hurt!
For I was flesh and entirely corrupted,
lost and disinherited from salvation.
All light had gone out for me.
I had fallen to judgment.
I, for whom God destined salvation and grace,
was darkness and death and night!
3. Who did you become, Lord, in this night?
You, for whom the mouth of angels laughed,
to whom nothing is lacking in renown or praise,
have taken my punishment upon yourself.
You became a child in a poor stable
and atoned for humanity's fall.
You, Lord, [enjoying] highest luxury in your
heaven,
became a companion [in] my night.
4. Who did I become, Lord, in this night?
Heart, keep still and beat gently!
In God's Son I became his child.
God became disposed to me as a father.
I still do not know: What will I become?
I am conscious only of the clear brilliance!
This you have awakened in me, Lord,
in this holy night by your manger!

tured as a series of questions and answers concerning the meaning of the incarnation for Jesus, on the one hand, and the singer, on the other. Stanza one asks “Who were you, Lord, before this night?” Stanza two: “Who was I, Lord, before this night?” Stanza three: “Who did you become, Lord, in this night?” Stanza four: “Who did I become, Lord, in this night?” The answer to the first question comes both from the quoted passages after the hymn’s heading and from the first chapter of John: “With God you were before all time. . . . All that lives was contained in you. Whatever moves was created through you. Heaven and earth were made through you. Before this night you were God himself.”

The answer to the second question is from Galatians 4, or perhaps Ephesians 2, or Romans 7—it doesn’t really matter. The poet was so intimately acquainted with the Bible that biblical references in his texts have a way of enmeshing themselves with one another, so that with nearly every phrase one can say “This comes right from the Bible” even if one would be hard pressed to cite chapter and verse. Question three is answered with a description of the *kenosis*, God the Son emptying himself for our salvation. Question four is the clincher: “Who did I become, Lord, in this night?” The answer to this question is so startling, so earth-shattering, that the singer must pause a moment to quiet his pounding heart. Only then can he manage a response: “In God’s Son I became his child.” After this revelation the singer reminds us that there is yet one more unanswered question, a question to which all of us would love to know the answer, an answer toward which most of us spend our lives striving: “What will I become?” “What will I accomplish in this world?” “What will be my legacy?” And what insightful answer does the poet here give? “I still do not know. I do not know what I will become, but that question no longer has any meaning for me; for the image of you, Lord, so fills my mind that there is no longer any room for myself. This you have awakened in me, Lord, in this holy night by your manger!”

A Christmas text from 1937, *Die Nacht ist vorge-drungen* (Example 2), is Klepper’s best-known hymn and apparently the only one that has appeared in an English-language hymnal. It has been translated at least four times, but the only translation that has succeeded in retaining both the poetic quality and the rhyme scheme of the original is one by Herman Stuempfle that first appeared in the *Hymnal Supplement 98* of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (St. Louis, 1998), where it is set to the Welsh tune LLANGLOFFAN.⁶ Example 3 shows Stuempfle’s translation with the 1939 tune by Johannes Petzold that is used in every other hymnal in which this text has appeared.

The text from Romans on which the hymn is based, “The night has advanced, and the day is near at hand; therefore let us lay aside the works of darkness and put on the weapons of light,” is referenced in the first line. The idea that the day has not quite arrived has caused

this hymn to be placed in the Advent section of every hymnal in which it has appeared, even though Klepper himself called it a Christmas hymn. The beginning of stanza two is noteworthy in that it treats the atonement, a doctrine avoided by some modern hymnwriters who consider it unacceptable theology. The original text reads “God himself has appeared as an atonement for his justice.” The translator, retaining the thought, has rendered it “thus God, the judge offended, bears all our sins deserve.”

The text contains none of the traditional Christmas imagery except for a passing reference to the stable in stanza three. The translation here retains the excitement of the Christian at the Savior’s birth. Klepper wrote “The night is already in decline; set out for the stable,” which is translated “The earth in sure rotation will soon bring morning bright, so run where God’s salvation glows in a stable’s light.” The next line is even better in translation than in the original. Klepper here treats the doctrine of predestination, and Stuempfle brings the doctrine to life with the line “As old as sin’s perversion is mercy’s vast design.” The word “perversion” is the perfect word here and brings to mind Henry Baker’s marvelous line “Perverse and foolish oft I strayed, but yet in love he sought me.” Stuempfle provides another great word in stanza four, which begins “Yet nights will bring their sadness and rob our hearts of peace; and sin in all its madness around us may increase.” The word “madness” here brings home all the devil-inspired chaos in our modern world, from terrorist bombings to school shootings to the tragedy of war. Words of comfort follow: “But now one Star is beaming whose rays have pierced the night: God comes for our redeeming from sin’s oppressive might.” In stanza five the translator provides a wonderful and thoroughly biblical image of God bringing his light into the world and humanity, unable to bear its brilliance, turning and running away. Then, like the Good Shepherd, God seeks us out and brings us home again.

Sieh nicht an, was du selber bist (Example 4) is also a Christmas hymn from 1937. It is based on a verse from Zechariah and a passage from Luther’s Christmas sermon of 1528 on Luke 2:1–25. Stanza one begins with an appeal for sinners to look not to themselves, but to Christ; in Luther’s sermon this appeal is put into the mouth of the angel announcing Christ’s birth. The stanza concludes with the familiar image from Exodus 19 of God bearing us on the wings of an eagle. Stanza two opens by comparing the sinner to a thief who has such a need to steal that he steals even from himself, then offers Christ as the Helper, after Zechariah 9:9. Stanza three is based on the wonderful passage from 2 Timothy that is such a comfort to those who are uncertain of their Christian faith: “The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we shall also live with him; if we endure, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.” Stanza four reinforces the

Example 2. Die Nacht ist vorgedrungen.

Weihnachtslied

Und weil wir solches wissen, nämlich die Zeit, daß die Stunde da ist, aufzustehen vom Schlaf: (sintemal unser Heil jetzt näher ist, denn da wir gläubig wurden; die Nacht ist vorgerückt, der Tag aber nahe herbeigekommen): so lasset uns ablegen die Werke der Finsternis und anlegen die Waffen des Lichtes.

Die Bibel

1. Die Nacht ist vorgedrungen,
der Tag ist nicht mehr fern.
So sei nun Lob gesungen
dem hellen Morgenstern!
Auch wer zur Nacht geweinet,
der stimme froh mit ein.
Der Morgenstern bescheinet
auch deine Angst und Pein.
2. Dem alle Engel dienen,
wird nun ein Kind und Knecht.
Gott selber ist erschienen
zur Sühne für sein Recht.
Wer schuldig ist auf Erden,
verhüll' nicht mehr sein Haupt,
er soll errettet werden,
wenn er dem Kinde glaubt.
3. Die Nacht ist schon im Schwinden,
macht euch zum Stalle auf!
Ihr sollt das Heil dort finden,
das aller Zeiten Lauf
von Anfang an verkündet,
seit eure Schuld geschah.
Nun hat sich euch verbündet,
den Gott selbst ausersah!
4. Noch manche Nacht wird fallen
auf Menschenleid und -schuld.
Doch wandert nun mit allen
der Stern der Gotteshuld.
Beglänzt von seinem Lichte,
hält euch kein Dunkel mehr.
Von Gottes Angesichte
kam euch die Rettung her.
5. Gott will im Dunkel wohnen
und hat es doch erhellt!
Als wollte er belohnen,
so richtet er die Welt!
Der sich den Erdkreis baute,
der läßt den Sünder nicht.
Wer hier dem Sohn vertraute,
kommt dort aus dem Gericht!

Christmas hymn

And because we know such a thing, namely the time, that the hour is come to arise from sleep (inasmuch as our salvation is now nearer than when we became faithful; the night has advanced, and the day is near at hand): therefore let us lay aside the works of darkness and put on the weapons of the light.

[Rom. 13:11–12]

1. The night has advanced;
the day is no longer far.
Therefore let praise now be sung
to the bright morning star.
And let him who wept during the night
join in [the praise] gladly.
The morning star illuminates
your fear and pain.
2. The one whom all angels serve
now becomes a child and servant.
God himself has appeared
as an atonement for his justice.
Whoever is guilty on earth
[need] hide no more his head.
He shall be saved
that believes in the child.
3. The night is already in decline;
set out for the stable!
You will find the salvation there
that has been announced by all times
since the beginning,
since your guilt began.
Now he whom God himself predestined
has allied himself with you.
4. Many nights will yet fall
on human suffering and guilt.
But now the star of God's grace
walks with all.
Illuminated by his light,
darkness can hold you no longer;
from God's countenance
salvation has come to you.
5. God wants to live in the darkness,
and in fact he has enlightened it.
As if he intended to reward the world,
so does he judge it.
He who himself made the world
does not abandon the sinner.
Whoever here trusts the Son
escapes judgment.

Jochen Klepper: *Weihnachtslied* reprinted from *Ziel der Zeit: die gesammelten Gedichte*, 6. Aufl. (Bielefeld: Luther-Verlag, 2001). Used by permission.

Example 3. Metrical translation of Example 2.

The night will soon be ending

1. The night will soon be end - ing; the dawn can - not be far. Let
 2. The one whom an - gels tend - ed comes near, a child, to serve; thus
 3. The earth in surc - ro - ta - tion will soon bring morn - ing bright, so

songs of praise as - cend - ing now greet the Morn - ing Star! All
 God, the judge of - fend - ed, bears all our sins de - serve. The
 run where God's sal - va - tion glows in a sta - ble's light. As

you whom dark - ness fright - ens with guilt or grief or pain, God's
 guilt - y need not cow - er, for God has rec - on - ciled through
 old as sin's per - ver - sion is mer - cy's vast de - sign: God

ra - dant Star now bright - ens and bids you sing a - gain.
 his re - demp - tive pow - er all those who trust this Child.
 brings a new cre - a - tion— this child its seal and sign.
 5. his be - lov - ed Son.

4. Yet nights will bring their sadness
 and rob our hearts of peace;
 and sin in all its madness
 around us may increase.
 But now one Star is beaming
 whose rays have pierced the night:
 God comes for our redeeming
 from sin's oppressive might.

5. God dwells with us in darkness
 and spreads his light abroad;
 but we resist the brightness
 and turn away from God.
 Yet grace does not forsake us
 though far from home we run.
 His children God has made us
 through his beloved Son.

Text: Jochen Klepper, 1938, © Luther-Verlag, Bielefeld; trans. Herman G. Stuempfle, Jr., 1997, © 1998 GIA Publications Inc., Chicago, Illinois. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

Tune: DIE NACHT IST VORGEDRUNGEN: Johannes Petzold, *Neue Weihnachtslieder*, © 1939 Bärenreiter-Verlag, Kassel and Basel; setting: Joseph Herl, 1997.

Example 4. Sieh nicht an, was du selber bist.

Weihnachtslied

Siehe, dein König kommt zu dir, ein Gerechter
und ein Helfer.

Die Bibel

Sieh nicht an, was du bist, sondern sieh hier, was
dir heut widerfährt: Sieh an den, der zu dir kommt;
sieh nicht an, daß du ein armer Sünder bist.

Luther

1. Sieh nicht an, was du selber bist
in deiner Schuld und Schwäche.
Sieh den an, der gekommen ist,
damit er für dich spreche.
Sieh an, was dir heut widerfährt,
heut, da dein Heiland eingekehrt,
dich wieder heimzubringen
auf adlerstarken Schwingen.
2. Sieh nicht, wie arm du Sünder bist,
der du dich selbst beraubtest.
Sieh auf den Helfer Jesus Christ!
und wenn du ihm nur glaubtest,
daß nichts als sein Erharmen frommt
und daß er dich zu retten kommt,
darfst du der Schuld vergessen,
sei sie auch unermessen.
3. Glaubst du auch nicht, bleibt er doch treu,
er hält, was er verkündet.
Er wird Geschöpf—und schafft dich neu,
den er in Unheil findet.
Weil er sich nicht verleugnen kann,
sieh ihn, nicht deine Schuld mehr an.
Er hat sich selbst gebunden.
Er sucht: du wirst gefunden!
4. Sieh nicht mehr an, was du auch seist.
Du bist dir schon entnommen.
Nichts fehlt dir jetzt, als daß du weißt:
Gott selber ist gekommen!
Und er heißt Wunderbar, Rat, Kraft,
ein Fürst, der ewigen Frieden schafft.
Dem Anblick deiner Sünden
will er dich selbst entwinden.
5. Wie schlecht auch deine Windeln sind,
sei dennoch unverdrossen:
Der Gottessohn, das Menschenkind
liegt doch darin umschlossen.
Hier harret er, daß er dich befreit.
Welch' Schuld ihm auch entgegenschreit—
er hat sie aufgehoben.
Nicht klagen sollst du: *loben!*

Christmas hymn

Behold, your king comes to you, a Righteous One
and a Helper.

[Zech. 9:9]

Look not at what you are, but rather look here at
what comes to you today. Look at him who comes to
you; do not consider that you are a poor sinner.

Luther [sermon on Lk. 2:1-25]

1. Look not at what you yourself are
in your guilt and weakness.
Look [rather] at him who has come,
so that he might speak for you.
Look at what today is befalling you,
today, when your Savior comes
to bring you home again
on eagle-strong wings.
2. Look not at how poor a sinner you are,
who steals even from your own self.
Look upon the Helper Jesus Christ,
and if you only believe him,
that nothing but his mercy avails
and that he comes to save you,
you may forget the debt,
though it be beyond measure.
3. Even if you do not believe, he still remains faithful;
he holds to what he proclaims.
He becomes a creature and creates you anew,
whom he finds in ruin.
Because he cannot deny himself,
look to him [and] no longer to your guilt.
He has committed himself.
He searches: you are found!
4. Look no longer at what you are.
You have already been taken away from yourself.
Now you lack nothing, except that you know:
God himself has come!
And he is called Wonderful, Counsel, Might,
a Prince who brings eternal peace.
From the sight of your sins
he will himself wrench you away.
5. How poor are your swaddling clothes;
yet be patient:
the Son of God, the child of man,
is nonetheless wrapped up in them.
Here he awaits his making you free.
Whatever debt cries against him
he has lifted.
Do not complain, [but] praise!

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idea of total dependence on God for salvation and makes use of the familiar titles from Isaiah: Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace. Stanza five is remarkable. It begins "How poor are your swaddling clothes," and we immediately assume that we are speaking here to the newborn Jesus. But, in fact, the speaker does not change for this stanza: it is still the voice of the evangelist speaking to us, who are poor in

our swaddling clothes. But this does not matter, for the Son of God and child of man is wrapped up in them, in our clothes, and bears them to the cross for us, makes us free and lifts our debt, for which we should indeed not complain, but rather thank and praise, serve and obey him.

All three of these Christmas hymns use powerful images to convey their message. But the images are not the familiar ones of a sweet, innocent child lying in a manger. They are rather powerful theological images of darkness and light, sin and salvation, the incarnation and the cross, images more common in medieval Latin hymns than in hymns of the past two centuries. Yet the hymns do not sound like a theology lesson or sermon. This is theology that touches the heart with its message of a God who comes to his creatures precisely where they are and rescues them from a wretched estate.

This concern is made personal in Klepper's 1938 hymn for New Year's Eve, presented here in a translation by Herman Stuempfle (Example 5). This text is a great comfort to anyone worried about old age. Although Klepper was only 35 when he wrote it, he has placed into it the thoughts and fears of those much older, assuaging them with the promise of God never to abandon his children.

It is clear that all these hymns were written by someone who understood what it is to be a sinner in need of grace, who knew the power of receiving that grace and being forgiven, and who knew how to put that experience into words in a way that very few have done before or since. Jochen Klepper's hymns are brilliant hymns, but it is not the brilliance of the poetry that moves us, but rather the brilliance and splendor of Christ shining brightly through the song. This is the mark of a great hymnwriter.

Klepper's hymns in English

The hymns of Jochen Klepper offer a rich opportunity for both translations and new hymns along

similar lines. I would encourage translators to maintain both the meter and the rhyme scheme of the original so that the same tunes can be used in both German and English. In many cases these are potential tunes rather than existing ones, for the majority of Klepper's hymns are unpublished except as poetry, and so any tunes already written for them exist only in manuscript.⁷

Klepper's hymns were in the public domain in the U.S. for several years in the early 1990s, but the Uruguay round of the Global Agreement on Tariffs and Trade talks in 1994 has apparently restored their copyright. Those wishing to translate Klepper's hymns or provide tunes may secure permission from Luther-Verlag, Cansteinstr. 1, 33647 Bielefeld, Germany; phone +49 521 9440-137; fax +49 521 9440-136. ©

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Notes

¹The biographical information in the following paragraphs is from Günter Wirth, *Jochen Klepper* (Berlin: Union, 1972); from Ernst G. Riemschneider, *Der Fall Klepper: eine Dokumentation* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1975); from Rita Thalmann, *Jochen Klepper: ein Leben zwischen Idyllen und Katastrophen* (Munich: Kaiser, 1977); and from Martin Johannes Wecht, *Jochen Klepper: ein christlicher Schriftsteller im jüdischen Schicksal* (Düsseldorf and Görlitz, Archiv der Evangelischen Kirche im Rheinland, 1998). The last named is the most recent and complete biography of Klepper.

²In 1949 this novel was made into a (German-language) film starring Werner Peters, Petra Peters and Paul Esser.

³His complete poems, including those in *Kyrie*, are contained in Jochen Klepper, *"Ziel der Zeit": die gesammelten Gedichte* (Witten and Berlin: Eckart, 1962).

⁴Quoted in Thalmann, 378, 380. The original is in German.

⁵Quoted in Wecht, 316. The original is in German. Excerpts from the diary were published as *Unter dem Schatten deiner Flügel: aus dem Tagebüchern der Jahre 1932-1942* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1955). Klepper's correspondence has also been published in two volumes: *Gast und Fremdling: Briefe an Freunde*, ed. Eva-Juliane Meschke (Witten and Berlin: Eckart, 1960) and *Jochen Klepper: Briefwechsel 1925-1942*, ed. Ernst G. Riemschneider (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1973).

⁶The other translations with which I am familiar are *The night is nearly over*, by Fred Pratt Green (in *The Hymns and Ballads of Fred Pratt Green*, Hope Publishing Company, 1982, no. 183); *The night is far advancing*, by Paul E. Hoffman (in *Laudamus: Hymnal for the Lutheran World Federation*, 5th ed., Budapest, 1984, no. 12); and *The night is marching onwards* (in the *Australian Supplement to Lutheran Hymnal*, Adelaide, S.A.: Lutheran Publishing House, 1987, no. 738).

⁷Johannes Petzold's son Christoph reports that his father composed tunes for fifteen texts by Klepper, including two for his New Year's hymn, one written shortly before his death in 1985. Many tunes are provided with choral or brass arrangements or with organ preludes. Nearly all are unpublished. (Wecht, p. 173) Hymns by Klepper included in the 1992 *Evangelisches Gesang-*

buch (*Stammteil*, i.e., portion common to all territorial church bodies) are *Die Nacht ist vorgedrungen* (no. 16); *Du Kind, zu dieser heiligen Zeit* (no. 50); *Der du die Zeit in Händen hast* (no. 64); *Gott Vater, du hast deinen Namen* (no. 208); *Freuet euch im Herren allewege* (no. 239); *Gott wohnt in einem Lichte* (no. 379);

Ja, ich will euch tragen (no. 380); and *Er weckt mich alle Morgen* (no. 452); *Der Tag ist seiner Höhe nah* (no. 457); *Ich liege, Herr, in deiner Hut* (no. 486); *Nun sich das Herz von allem löste* (no. 532). There is also a translation of the Latin hymn *Jam lucis orto sidere* beginning *Schon bricht des Tages Glanz hervor* (no. 453).

Example 5. Ja, ich will euch tragen.

New Year's Eve hymn

Yes, I will bear you into old age and until you become gray. I will do it; I will lift up and carry and save. Remember the former time, and consider what he accomplished with your forefathers.

[Isa. 46:4; Deut. 32:7]

You May Trust Securely

1. You may trust se - cure - ly, though your years be long.
 2. Child, I still be - hold you when your hair is gray,
 3. With my Word I'll feed you, grant you what is best.

I will bear you sure - ly, for my arm is strong.
 with my love en - fold you ev' - ry pass - ing day.
 Gent - ly I will lead you, give you peace - ful rest.

4. Evils may assail you;
 help is ever near.
 I will never fail you;
 when you pray, I hear.

6. Since your life's first morning
 I have been your guide,
 grace your days adorning,
 ev'ry need supplied.

5. Have I ever tarried
 through the ages past?
 Think how I have carried
 those my love holds fast.

7. Trust that I am present
 midst your darkest fears,
 giving strength sufficient
 for your length of years.

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 Tune: Johann C. H. Rinck (1770-1846); setting by Joseph Herl, 2002.