

The Great "O" Antiphons

Robert W. Bertram

[Sermon preached at Concordia Seminary Chapel, 12-7-64]

The Pastor: O WISDOM, proceeding from the mouth of the Most High, ruling over the universe unto the ends of the earth with tenderness and power, come and teach us the way of wisdom.

The Preacher: The First Exhortation

If there is anyone here this morning who cannot see the "Wisdom" of it all, someone who is unable to make sense of his situation, some Willy Loman who cries, "The trouble with Willy is that he does not know who he is," someone who understands many things a little but nothing enough to live on, someone for whom "the most High" is so high as to be out of reach, then let us say to him as our brother in Christ: The highest wisdom—about yourself and about God—has now come down very near, "from the mouth of the most High...to the ends of the earth," from way up there to way down here, down in the manger, down on the Cross (which is the very "Wisdom of God"); and this Emmanuel, this all-wise, all-understanding God-with-us is with you, too. So rejoice.

The People: O come. Thou Wisdom from on high,
Who ord'rest all things mightily;
To us the path of knowledge show,
And teach us in her ways to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

The Pastor: O LORD, Head of the house of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the burning bush and gave him the Law on Mount Sinai, come open-armed to redeem us.

The Preacher: The Second Exhortation

If there is someone here this morning who has stayed behind in slavish Egypt, who is afraid to brave the desert of her responsibilities, whose sea of obligations comes rushing in upon her and threatens to overwhelm her, someone who sees no one to lead her past Sinai to the Promised Land beyond, then let us say to her as our sister in Christ: That open-armed God who was born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who are under the Law, is Emmanuel—the God-with-us and with you, too. So rejoice.

The People: O come, O come. Thou Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes on Sinai's height
In ancient times didst give the Law,
In cloud, and majesty, and awe.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

The Pastor: O BRANCH OF JESSE, arising as a sign among the nations, before whom kings will keep silence and to whom nations will call for help, come to deliver us; delay no longer.

The Preacher: The Third Exhortation

If there is someone here this morning for whom this hectic life is a killing pace, someone who is left sighing, I am just dead, or I feel like the devil, or I feel like hell-- and for whom these are not mere figures of speech, but the very symptoms of Satan's tyranny, the depths of hell and the grave, then let us say to him as our brother in Christ: The God whose anger like a forest fire burns sinners to the ground has raised up out of the charred stump the stubborn little twig—the root, "the Branch of Jesse"; this Emmanuel, this God-with-us—with all His lasting life and vitality-- is with you too. So rejoice.

The People: O Come, Thou Rod of Jesse's stem,
From every foe deliver them
That trust Thy mighty power to save,
And give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

The Pastor: O KEY OF DAVID, Sceptre of the house of Israel, You open that which no one can close and close that which no one can open; come and deliver the prisoner lying in dark captivity and in the shadow of death.

The Preacher: The Fourth Exhortation

If there is some outcast here this morning for whom all the doors to home have seemed to close, someone who has lost the key to life, someone who has forgotten the combination to heaven, then let us say to her as our sister in Christ: The Combination is the God who combines Himself with our flesh and our misery, He is the Key who opens wide His house to us; and this Emmanuel, this God-with-us, is with you too. So rejoice.

The People: O come, Thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heav'nly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high
And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

The Preacher: The Fifth Exhortation

If there is here this morning some shady character who dares to practice his pleasures only under the cover of darkness, who—like the darkness around him—has become gloomy and has lost all splendor, then let us say to him as our brother

in Christ: There is no darkness too dark for the dawning Sun of righteousness, who comes to make you splendid with His own splendor—this God-with-us and with you too. So rejoice!

The People: O come. Thou Dayspring from on high,
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadow put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

The Pastor: O KING OF NATIONS, You answer their longing; O Cornerstone, You reconcile nations opposed; come and save us whom You made from dust.

The Preacher: The Sixth Exhortation

If there is someone here this morning whose foundations have been shaken, or someone who has never had a firm footing at all because of broken home or poor training or an inadequate church, if there is someone who longs for something more solid than her own feet of clay, then let us say to her as our sister in Christ: Other foundation can no one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ; because He is the God-with-us and with you too, the gates of hell shall not prevail against you. So rejoice!

The People: O come, Desire of nations, bind
In one the hearts of all mankind;
Bid Thou our sad divisions cease,
And be Thyself our King of Peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

The Pastor: O EMMANUEL, Our King and Lawgiver, Hope and Savior of all nations, come and save us, O Lord our God.

The Preacher: The Seventh Exhortation

If there are those here this morning who are the captives of someone other than Christ, those who have sold themselves, sold out—to their lust, to their private resentments and their secret grudges, to their work to their family, to the tyrannical crowd—those who no longer have the price to buy themselves back from their lonely exile from God, then let us say to them as our brothers and sisters in Christ: The Son of God has now appeared and has redeemed us all from our captors with His supreme sacrifice, and He is bound not to let that ransom go to waste; that is why He is Emmanuel, God-with-us, and with you too. So rejoice!

The People: O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,

That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Robert W. Bertram