

From glory into glory
Reflections for worship

by Susan Palo Cherwien. St. Louis: Morningstar Music Publishers, 2009. 381 pp.
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Hymnist, poet, and singer Susan Palo Cherwien has given us a beautiful set of conversations. They are conversations with our forebears who took on the hymnwriting mantle. In the book's prelude, she says, "I have always attempted to compose these reflections in such a way that we who then sing the hymns will see their words and hear their truths in a new way." Her attempt is completely successful. The book emanates a deep love of hymnody and its potential for spiritual transformation.

The book contains 204 reflections grouped by subject, and meant to be the connective tissue between the hymns selected for hymn festivals. Ms. Cherwien says that they are not poetry, but are lined as such, and meant to be read slowly in "thought phrases." The subjects range through the church year and through the major themes of scripture with a heavy emphasis on incarnation.

One set of reflections is about the life and work of Paul Gerhardt. Another is about the role of poets, prophets, and priests. She quotes a great variety of

sages of the church, ancient and modern, in ways that bring their words to life just as the reflections bring the hymns to life.

An index gives a basic form for a hymn festival, and then lists the hymns upon which each reflection is based; hence, the book serves a double purpose: it can be a template and an encouragement for those who put together hymn festivals, but it can also be a ready-to-use work of art.

Artistically, Ms. Cherwien demonstrates the ability to make syllables count. Most of the thought phrases are between three and seven syllables, and she uses sequences beautifully. She does not use words to shock, but occasionally has delightfully poignant phrases, like "drone of doing." Instead of simply saying that we breathe together when we sing, she calls us "Together-breathers." There are delicious words like *noctilucent*, referring to night clouds, high in the sky, that reflect moonlight. She has phrases with prophetic grit, like "to a society lulled by false trinities – three-car garages, three-piece suits, three-day weekends – the prophets cry out 'Awake!'"

The shortcoming of the collection is one that Ms. Cherwien acknowledges, and for which she asks forgiveness in the book's prelude: the repetition of favorite stories, scripture passages, etymologies, and biblical themes. As beautiful as the reflections are, many of them say the same thing in very nearly the same words.

This book is a handsome and spacious product, with print that is very easy to read. Whether you are in the business of putting together a hymn festival or simply feasting on the faith reflections of a gifted writer, this will be a good addition to your library.

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