

## Short Hymns and the Inverse Square Law!

Having been brought up using the Methodist Hymn Book, I was always intrigued by Hymns 339 and 340.

Hymn 339, by Charles Wesley, is the first in “The Christian Life – Repentance and Forgiveness” section of the Hymn Book. It has twelve 6 line verses, the first commencing “*Come O Thou Traveller unknown*”. Initially, the hymn is based on the Old Testament story of Jacob ‘Wrestling with God’ and the set tune, by Samuel Sebastian Wesley, is entitled ‘Wrestling Jacob’. Hymn 340 is a 4 verse abbreviated version of 339! (Verses 1,3,6 and 7 being the four selected.)

Does a hymn improve by being shorter?

I want you to imagine a sheet of paper being lit by a lamp placed 1 metre away. Move the paper to a distance of 2 metres from the lamp and the illumination decreases by a factor of 4 ( $2^2$ ). At three metres distance the illumination is one ninth of that at 1 metre ( $3^2$ ) and at four metres, one sixteenth ( $4^2$ ). The greatest illumination, as we can all appreciate, comes close to the light source – the consequence of the “Inverse Square Law”.

How does this apply to hymns? Some of you may remember me introducing hymns in a service by referring to their short length and the profound declaration they make.

I was surprised to discover there are twenty-nine 2 verse hymns in the 1933 Methodist Hymn Book (one of these being the National Anthem and another - ‘I vow to thee, my country’)!

Of these twenty-nine hymns, seven, have a great impact for me – it is as though they are closest to the light and have the greatest illumination. (Six of these were included in Hymns & Psalms but only three have survived into Singing the Faith.)

This emphasis on two verse hymns does not, of course, reduce the importance, content or message of the longer hymns we find in our Hymn Books, but with only two verses available so much of our faith is declared.

Hymn Number			Author	
MHB	H&P	STF		
69	277	67	Joseph Hart	This, this is the God we adore
105	735	329	Charles Wesley	Jesus, the First and Last
372	-	-	Charles Wesley	The God of love, to earth He came
385	795	-	Charles Wesley	Jesus, I fain would find
388	743	-	Paulus Gerhardt trans. John Wesley	My Saviour! How shall I proclaim .... ?
576	786	-	Charles Wesley	Be it my only wisdom here
594	800	448	Charles Wesley	Lord, in the strength of grace

This, this is the God we adore,  
Our faithful, unchangeable Friend;  
Whose love is as great as His power,  
And neither knows measure nor end.

‘Tis Jesus, the first and the last,  
Whose Spirit shall guide us safe home:  
We’ll praise Him for all is past,  
And trust Him for all that’s to come.

Jesus, the First and Last,  
On Thee my soul is cast:  
Thou didst Thy work begin  
By blotting out my sin;  
Thou wilt the root remove,  
And perfect me in love.

Yet when the work is done,  
The work is but begun:  
Partaker of Thy grace,  
I long to see Thy face;  
The first I prove below,  
The last I die to know.

The God of love, to earth He came,  
That you might come to heaven;  
Believe, believe in Jesu’s name,  
And all your sin’s forgiven.

Believe in Him that died for thee,  
And, sure as He hath died’  
Thy debt is paid, thy soul is free’  
And thou art justified.

Jesus, I fain would find  
Thy zeal for God in me,  
Thy yearning pity for mankind,  
Thy burning charity.

In me Thy Spirit dwell;  
In me Thy mercies move:  
So shall the fervour of my zeal  
Be the pure flame of love.

My Saviour! How shall I proclaim,  
How pay the mighty debt I owe?  
Let all I have, and all I am,  
Ceaseless to all Thy glory show.

Too much to Thee I cannot give;  
Too much I cannot do for Thee;  
Let all Thy love, and all Thy grief  
Graven on my heart for ever be. Amen

Be it my only wisdom here  
To serve the Lord with filial fear,  
With loving gratitude;  
Superior sense may I display,  
By shunning every evil way,  
And walking in the good.

O may I still from sin depart!  
A wise and understanding heart,  
Jesus, to me be given;  
And let me through Thy Spirit know  
To glorify my God below,  
And find my way to heaven. Amen

Lord, in the strength of grace,  
With a glad heart and free,  
Myself, my residue of days,  
I consecrate to Thee.

Thy ransomed servant, I  
Restore to Thee Thy own;  
And from this moment, live or die  
To serve my God alone.