

# The Faith and Artistry of Fanny Crosby (1820-1915) - An Analysis of Six Hymns

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## INTRODUCTION

### Harris G. Ives

It pleases me greatly to join Dr. James Smythe, professor emeritus of Pepperdine University, in this collaborative work on the artistry and faith of Fanny Crosby. The subject of our research, a blind hymnist, was one of the most recognizable names of the late 1800s and early 1900s in the United States.

The hymns of Fanny Crosby, like those of other writers, fall neatly into the categories hymns of providence, petition and praise. Smythe has chosen to explicate three of her works on the themes of providence, evangelism, God's grace and heaven: *All The Way My Savior<sup>1</sup> Leads Me, Rescue the Perishing, and Some Day the Silver Cord Will Break*. My contribution consists of meditations upon another three songs, all of them being hymns of petition: *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross; Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior; and I Am Thine, O Lord (Draw Me Nearer)*.

In discussing which hymns each of us would handle, we discovered that both of us had a special love for *Some Day the Silver Cord Will Break*.<sup>2</sup> I deferred to my former literature teacher and department chairman, though, of course, there was no serious wrestling over the matter; the Fanny Crosby catalogue is extensive enough to include many "favorites." Smythe's treatment of *Some Day* is typical of his commitment to detailed exegesis.

Presently Smythe is the manager of the archives located on Pepperdine's Malibu campus. He has served Pepperdine for over 50 years in several capacities. He is former chairman of the Humanities Division. For most of his adult life, he has maintained a

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1. American hymnals variously use the British and American spellings. *Savior* is used in the title of this hymn in *Sacred Selections* edited by Ellis Crum, Kendallville, Indiana: Sacred Selections Press, 1969, p. 170. It is spelled *Saviour* in *The Hymnal (Army and Navy)*, Ivan L. Bennett, ed, Washington, D.C.: United States Government Press, p. 375.
  2. Indices vary in their titles for this work; it is sometimes referred to as *Saved by Grace*. Frequently, there will be separate indices for the titles and for the first line of the hymn. In this case, however, the hymn title can be listed as either *Saved by Grace* or *Some Day the Silver Cord Will Break*.

dual career: professor of English Literature, and preacher for the Church of Christ. Both his faith and credentials make Smythe<sup>3</sup> an excellent choice to expound on the imagery and allusions in the works of Fanny Crosby.

Pepperdine University and Ibaraki Christian University share a common heritage. Both owe their existence to the hard work of members of the Church of Christ who were eager to build academically sound schools which emphasized Christian charity. We do not speak of charity in the sense that has become popular: the tossing of coins to the poor. Rather we speak of charity as it refers to love and tolerance. George Pepperdine, founder of the university that bears his name, extended his invitation to Christians and non-Christians alike to come and study at the Los Angeles campus. Similarly, the host of good men who founded Ibaraki Christian University (several of them had connections to the American school), wanted to serve this prefecture by creating a community where no academic query would be stifled (There is great poetry in the placement of the immense rock at the entrance to the Ibaraki campus—the single word “Ask” is engraved there). It is a credit to the founders of both schools that large numbers of non-Christians are comfortable on these campuses.

This paper is an analysis of the poetry of a woman who had a great impact on the Christian churches of America in the nineteenth century. Fanny Crosby, like Helen Keller, was blind. Her handicap did not diminish her faith nor did it negate her creativity. A study of Crosby takes us into the ambience and milieu of 19<sup>th</sup> Century American evangelism. She worked at the soup kitchens serving those who were dispossessed by several social forces at the time: (1) the shift from an agrarian to an industrial society, (2) the migration to the cities (3) the descent of many men into alcoholism, (4) the exploitation of some women in the “red light” districts, and (5) the influx of Europeans who, having survived the processing at Ellis Island, New York, found themselves in the urban ghettos of America.<sup>4</sup> All of these conditions are reflected in the novels of social realism by such writers as Steven Crane (1871-1900)<sup>5</sup>,

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3. Smythe, himself, has been a subject of my research. See Harris G. Ives, *James Smythe—Product and Advocate of Christian Education*, Parts I, II, and III in *The Journal of Language and Culture*, Ibaraki Christian University, March 2003, 2004, 2005. From him I learned much of what I know of literature and of Christian Faith. He was my professor in many courses at Pepperdine University, and he was my “boss” when I taught at the same university.

4. Beginning in the 1820s, “the huddled masses” (a phrase that would eventually find fame at the base of the Statue of Liberty), attempted to escape the poverty, war, and discrimination in Northern and Western Europe. All too many of these people found themselves locked into the miserable conditions of the ghettos of urban America. See Randee Falk, *Spotlight on the USA*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 2.

5. Stephen Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* was published in 1893. This novel described tenement life in the Bowery and the several miseries which afflict Maggie Johnson.

Frank Norris (1870-1902)<sup>6</sup>, William Dean Howells (1837-1920)<sup>7</sup> and Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945).<sup>8</sup> It was a time when American society took note of the “derelicts” among them and coined the phrases, “tramps, “hoboes,”<sup>9</sup> etc. The plight of unemployed farmers, alcoholics, prostitutes, and neglected and abused children appealed to Christians of tender conscience. Crosby ministered to these people through her work in the rescue missions and through the messages of her songs. To people smarting from such hurts, Crosby’s hymns were a balm. To many of us today who still love those two great words, *Jesus Saves*,<sup>10</sup> Crosby remains a vibrant force in our community.

The social welfare work of Jane Addams (1860-1935)<sup>11</sup> at Hull House in Chicago taught Americans that we should be responsive to such derelicts as depicted in the novels and newspapers of the time.<sup>12</sup> The ministry of Fanny Crosby taught Americans that we are all derelict<sup>13</sup> and require the grace of God.

A careful scrutiny of hymns by Fanny Crosby is certainly appropriate for an academic journal.

Included in *Benet’s Reader’s Encyclopedia of American Literature*, Fanny Crosby

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6. Frank Norris, *McTeague* was published in 1899 and details the descent of a dentist into alcoholism.
  7. William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* was published in 1885 and contains the famous scene where the newly wealthy Lapham disgraces himself by getting drunk at a dinner party.
  8. Theodore Dreiser, *An American Tragedy* was published in 1925, details the events in the life of Clyde Griffiths whose extreme poverty caused him to develop a passion for “getting on” in society. The son of an insensitive street preacher and a devout mother, the boy left the teachings of his early home life and ended up on death row. The scenes of vagrants in the soup kitchen have import for the topic of this paper.
  9. Unfortunately, there are still many people in America (and other countries as well) who live lonely and alienated lives on the street. The words “homeless,” and “bag lady” have frequent currency among us.
  10. For many years, there was a great electric *Jesus Saves* sign in downtown Los Angeles above the old BIOLA Building (Bible Institute of Los Angeles). Those words are beloved by evangelical Christians. It is also the title of a popular hymn by Priscilla Owens.
  11. Robert A. Divine, et. al., eds. *America: Past and Present*, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994, p. 335. Addams was particularly interested in relieving the plight of the European immigrants. Her settlement house movement not only provided food for the indigent, but there was an attempt to introduce cultural and educational programs. Shakespeare was taught on occasions in these places for the “down and out.”
  12. The realism movement of the late 1800s sought to incorporate the desperate dramas of real life into fiction. William Dean Howells campaigned for a more authentic representation of the experience of America’s indigent.
  13. In the first instance, the word derelicts is a noun indicating someone who behaves irresponsibly; in the second instance the word is an adjective describing personal failure. It is an important Christian teaching that only Jesus was perfect. The rest of humanity is flawed: “For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

is an important part of American religious culture.<sup>14</sup> Having contributed thousands of hymns to Christian songbooks, the diminutive Crosby achieved a well-deserved celebrity. She, of course, was a product of that time in America when Gospel meetings and church gatherings attracted not only the pious, but also those who were in search of a social, and sometimes “dramatic” experience. Today, our diversions are many, and preachers and hymn writers do not get the “billing” that they once did. Before this present day of movie stars and NBA players, evangelists and gifted proclaimers of the power of God had the limelight. If Crosby’s name does not have the recognition value it once did, it is because our times are different. Certainly, for those who are interested in faith and hymnody, a review of Crosby’s work suggests that her celebrity may have faded but her talent is timeless.

Readers of this journal may not immediately recognize the Crosby name, but there is a good chance that they have encountered her work. American movies frequently include a Crosby hymn in church scenes.<sup>15</sup> American novelists are likely to refer to a Crosby title when delineating a scene of people at a family reunion, a funeral or a worship service. Her *Some Day the Silver Cord Will Break* serves as a key element in the Ernest Hemingway short story, *Three Shots*.<sup>16</sup> Crosby hymns are primarily featured in Evangelical churches, though I have encountered them in Anglican worship in England and Fiji. Thankfully, these are times of cross-denominational embrace, and one may well find himself singing a Crosby hymn in a Roman Catholic Church as well. In preparing my part of this paper, I sat at the lunch table with my Roman Catholic cousin Joyce Hayward who recognized several of the titles. When I recited a long list of Crosby titles, Joyce and I both happily noted that the recitation was a prayer in itself.

In Japan, I worship with, and preach for, the Omika Church of Christ on the campus of Ibaraki Christian University. During my many trips abroad, I seek the company of as many Christian groups as I can find. It is a delight of my life that my work and research afford me many opportunities to sit in worship with many different groups of people. I sit in congregations that are beautifully “integrated.” And, I sit in congregations which are amazingly uniform in “profile.” The one consistent element of

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14. George Perkins, Barbara Perkins, and Phillip Leininger, eds. *Benet's Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature*, New York: Harper Collins and Company, 1991, p. 231.

15. For a fuller treatment of this theme of Protestant hymns in films, see Harris G. Ives, *The Use of Christian Songs as Commentary on the Theme and Plot in Over 40 Significant American films*, Journal of Ibaraki Christian University, December, 1997, Vol. 31, pp.23-47. Consider just these examples: *Blessed Assurance* is a featured song in *The Trip to Bountiful*, 1985, starring Geraldine Paige. It is also featured in *Places in the Heart* starring Sally Field, 1984. Both films are Academy Award honorees. *Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior* is featured in the Whoopi Goldberg film, *The Long Walk Home*, 1995.

16. Ernest Hemingway, *Three Shots* in *Indian Camp*, Tokyo, Japan: Asahi Press, p. 2.

these Sunday mornings is the frequency with which the order of worship includes hymns by Fanny Crosby. Whether the group is a mixed group of Christians, or whether it is overwhelmingly composed of African Americans, White Americans, military personnel, or Japanese Christians, I am overjoyed when we sing *Blessed Assurance*, or *Pass Me Not, Oh Gentle Savior*, or *Safe in the Arms of Jesus*, or any one of the other several thousand hymns composed by this gifted woman.

In the hundreds of hymnals that are used weekly in American churches, the hymns of Fanny Crosby predominate. Recently, I worshipped with two groups widely different in racial composition and doctrine. As I sat in the pew of The Church of Christian Fellowship (a congregation composed almost solely of African Americans of high achievement and education) I flipped open the lavishly published *African American Heritage Hymnal*,<sup>17</sup> a work which celebrates hymns beloved by that community. Fanny Crosby, though not African American, had eleven entries. Similarly, as I sat in worship with James and Betty Smythe at the Redondo Beach Church of Christ on September 11, 2005, I noted 14 Fanny Crosby entries in *Great Songs of the Church*. Peruse any popular hymnal and you are likely to encounter an overwhelming number of Crosby entries.

In this study, both of us draw upon our dual careers as preachers and as literature teachers to share some insights into the work of this unassuming and gifted writer of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## All the Way My Savior Leads Me

### James Smythe

This hymn is completely concerned about God's providence. The word providence is derived from the verb provide. In reference to God, it means that He provides for our special needs.<sup>18</sup> Frequently when a Christian has a great need and does not know how it will be cared for and then suddenly it is met from an unexpected source, he recognizes that Divine Providence was at work in his life.

In our early years of marriage, Betty and I had a most limited income. Many times we would run out of money at least a week before we could expect our next paycheck. We did not know what we would live on until it arrived. Without fail, an unexpected check would arrive—enough to care for us during that week. We never doubted that Divine Providence was supplying our needs.

Outside of the great characters of the Bible, perhaps few people have given so

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17. Delores Carpenter, ed. *The African American Hymnal*, New York: GIA Publications.

18. *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, Springfield, Massachusetts: G. C. Merriam, 1971, p. 687.

great spiritual inspiration as has Fanny Crosby. When in her infancy she had a serious illness, an inept medical doctor caused her to lose her sight.<sup>19</sup> Her grandmother, in addition to providing loving care, taught her never to fear because of her handicap but to know that God was always near and would always care for her. As a result, she rose above her handicap to become one of the brightest souls to bless the Christian world during the past two centuries. She did not allow her blindness to make her bitter, to count her life useless because of it, or to blame God for her tragic loss. Rather she believed that God had compensated for that loss by giving her an abundance of spiritual sight. In one of her poems she wrote:

Sightless, I see, and seeing find soul-vision, though my eyes are blind.<sup>20</sup>

According to Crosby, "It was Grandma who brought the Bible to me and me to the Bible." From her, stories of the Bible entered Fanny's heart and took deep root.<sup>21</sup> She says, "This Holy Book nurtured my early life." As a girl she memorized long passages from the Bible—the first five books of the Bible, many of the Psalms, and most of the New Testament. She derived much of her early poetry from Biblical subjects.<sup>22</sup> This love for the Bible grew stronger with each passing year. Toward the end of her life she wrote:

My love for the Holy Bible and its sacred truth is stronger and more precious to me at ninety than it was at nineteen. . . It is my bread of life, the anchor of my hope, my pillar of fire by night, my pillar of cloud by day. It is the lantern that lights my pathway to my Paradise home.<sup>23</sup>

She also believed that it was the light for all who would receive it. Therefore, it was essential that all Christians hear God's voice in every passage and accept its message as "absolutely binding for their lives."<sup>24</sup> She was confident that God was guiding her not only by His Providence but through His word. Therefore it is natural that biblical phrases, biblical allusions, and biblical cadences appear in all of her hymns.

A recurring theme in her hymns is her complete, unreserved dependence upon

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19. Bernard Ruffin, *Fanny Crosby*, (United Church Press, 1976), p. 20.

20. *Ibid.* p. 220.

21. S. Trevena Jackson, *Fanny Crosby's Story of Ninety-Four Years*, New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1915, p. 33.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 178-179

24. Ruffin, p. 221.

God;<sup>25</sup> however, it is *All the Way My Savior Leads Me*, which is devoted exclusively to this subject. Crosby tells how she came to compose the hymn. One day in 1874 she did not know how she could pay for her rent; therefore she prayed about it. Just as her prayer concluded, a man whom she had never met knocked at her door. He quickly pressed a ten dollar bill in her hand and left immediately. It was exactly what she needed for her rent. She was so moved by this evidence of God's Providence that almost spontaneously the words of the hymn came to her that very evening.<sup>26</sup>

In the following analysis, we will notice the beautiful imagery and biblical allusions combining with the rhythm and rhymes to form a truly majestic hymn.

All the way my Savior leads me; What have I to ask beside?  
Can I doubt His tender mercy, Who through life has been my guide?  
Heavenly peace, divinest comfort, Here by faith in Him to dwell!  
For I know whate'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well;  
For I know whate'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well.

This hymn like many of Crosby's hymns is most personal, written in the first person: "All the way my Savior leads me." Each Christian, however, in singing it applies the message to himself. The controlling image in the hymn is that life is a journey and that God has sent Jesus to save man from the destructive power of sin and to serve as his Guide. For this reason Jesus is called Savior throughout the New Testament.<sup>27</sup> Nothing, not even her blindness, could shake Crosby's faith in the tender mercy<sup>28</sup> of Jesus, whom God has supplied as her Guide. Freed from the burden of sin,

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25. "Hold Thou my hand, so weak I am and helpless.

"I dare not take one step without thine aid."

She proclaimed that God had compensated for her blindness:

"Visions of rapture now burst on my sight.

Angels descending bring from above

Echoes of mercy, whispers of love."

26. Ruffin, p. 141.

27. On the night when Jesus was born, an angel appeared to shepherds watching over their sheep and announced: "Today in the town of David a savior has been born to you." Then the sky around them was filled with angels singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests" (Luke 2:8-13) . Micah 5:2 had prophesied that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. The underlining throughout this paper is to enable the reader to relate the exegesis to the stanza under discussion Also the New International version (NIV) is the source of Biblical citations unless otherwise indicated.

28. At the birth of John the Baptist, his father Zacharias spoke of the "tender mercies of our God," who has provided salvation for man (Luke 1:78). The adjective tender has several meanings which are relevant here: loving, caring, and that which is offered in payment for a debt (*Webster 7<sup>th</sup> Collegiate Dictionary*, p. 909). Jesus by His death on the cross paid for man's sins, a debt that man could never pay.

she and all Christians can experience a deep sense of inner peace, knowing that their souls are well with God. Jesus told His followers that the man of the world can never experience this divine peace.<sup>29</sup> This peace gives the assurance that God will provide his children comfort even in the most severe trials of life, even death, because they know that they are not alone; God is with them.<sup>30</sup> This assurance should cause the Christian to continue his journey with complete trust in Jesus, even though he does not know what the future holds.<sup>31</sup> His assurance is that Jesus, His Guide, will not err; Jesus always does all things well.<sup>32</sup> Crosby concludes the stanza by repeating the final line. Doing so, she not only emphasizes her point, but captures the cadence of Psalms.<sup>33</sup>

All the way my Savior leads me, Cheers each winding path I tread,  
Gives me grace for every trial, feeds me with the living bread;  
Though my weary steps my falter, And my soul athirst may be,  
Gushing from the Rock before me, Lo! A spring of joy I see;  
Gushing from the Rock before me, Lo! A spring of joy I see.

Crosby begins each stanza with “All the way my Savior leads me”; therefore she emphasizes that there is never a moment when she feels alone and unprotected. Similarly, the psalmist David reports that God, his Shepherd, leads him through “green pastures” and “beside quiet waters” and “in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” The path might be circuitous and uncertain, but he need fear no evil because his Guide, will bring him safely to the end of the journey, even though they must pass through areas infested by hostile enemies.<sup>34</sup> In this stanza Crosby expresses the same confidence. There will be difficulties and trials along the way,<sup>35</sup> but her Guide always provides the grace<sup>36</sup> to escape them or to endure them without

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29. Jesus promised to give his disciples a peace which the world could never give them. They would face troubles, but they should never let their hearts be troubled (John 14:27; 16:33). This is a heavenly peace, which Paul says is “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding” for all who turn their anxieties over to God (Philippians 4:6-7).

30. According to Paul, “The God of all comfort, who comforts us in all of our troubles” (II Corinthians 1:3). David’s beloved psalm presents God as a Shepherd caring for His sheep: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4).

31. II Corinthians 5:7: “We live by faith, not by sight.”

32. After Jesus had healed a man who was born deaf and mute, the people, overwhelmed with amazement, exclaimed, “He has done everything well” (Mark 7:37).

33. Notice Psalm 104:35 “Praise the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord” (See also Psalm 103:20-22).

34. Psalm 23:2-5.

35. I Peter 4:12. (Peter speaks of these as “painful trials”).

36. According to the *Webster 7<sup>th</sup> Collegiate Dictionary*, p. 362 “grace” means “divine assistance” or “reprieve.”

breaking, if she looks to him for help.<sup>37</sup> He provides the spiritual strength for the journey; Crosby expresses it in this way: “Feeds me with the living bread.” This, as well as her final image—“Gushing from the rock before me, Lo! A spring of joy I see”—are based on God’s providential caring for the Israelites when they wandered in the desert.<sup>38</sup> However, Crosby is speaking of spiritual food and drink. It is the “soul,” not the body that is thirsty. The satisfaction is spiritual—“Lo! a spring of joy I see.”<sup>39</sup> Again she provides emphasis to her climactic point by repeating the last line.

All the way my Savior leads me. O the fullness of His love!  
Perfect rest to me is promised in my Father’s house above;  
When my spirit, clothed immortal, Wings its flight to realms of day,  
This my song through endless ages: Jesus led me all the way!  
This my song through endless ages; Jesus led me all the way!

This final stanza presents the perfect extent of God’s providence—the greatest expression of his love in Christ. According to Paul, the width, length, height, and depth of the love of Christ surpasses all knowledge.<sup>40</sup> This is true because the human mind is unable to comprehend the full blessedness reserved for God’s children in heaven. In this stanza Crosby seeks to capture it. First, perfect rest is reserved for her in the Father’s house above.<sup>41</sup> Jesus has gone to heaven to prepare this place of rest for his followers.<sup>42</sup> There, Paul reports, “We have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven.”<sup>43</sup> Crosby exults in anticipating her soul’s taking flight in this new immortal body<sup>44</sup> when she shall rise to meet Jesus in the air to be with him throughout

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37. I Corinthians 10:13 “God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted (or tested) beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted (or tested), he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” The Greek word peira is translated both “temptation” and “trial” in the New Testament.

38. God provided for them manna each morning which is called “bread from heaven” (Exodus 16:4). Later when they were in a desert area, he caused water to gush from a rock at Horeb so that they and their livestock could drink (Exodus 17:1-6).

39. Jesus Himself said, “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). When Jewish leaders demanded that he produce manna as Moses had, He told them “I am the bread of life. . . .If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever” (John 6:47-51). Concerning the spiritual water, He said, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this He meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive” (John 7:37-39).

40. Ephesians 3:17-19.

41. Jesus promises this rest to all who come to Him (Matthew 11:28). And John in his vision of heaven says that those who die in the Lord will rest from their labor (Revelation 14:13).

42. John 14:2

43. II Corinthians 5:1-2.

44. In Psalm 90:10 Moses pictures the soul at death as flying away.

eternity.<sup>45</sup> At that time, Paul writes, our perishable bodies will be “clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’”<sup>46</sup> This will be Crosby’s entrance into the realms of eternal day. God and Jesus the Lamb are the light; therefore there is no night there.<sup>47</sup> At that time all the redeemed will unite with her in singing throughout the endless ages that Jesus has been the perfect Guide in life: “Jesus led me all the way!”

## Rescue the Perishing

### James Smythe

Fanny Crosby is best known by the dozens of hymns which have become a part of the Christian repertoire of their songs of faith. The great 19<sup>th</sup> century evangelist Dwight Moody and his Minister of Music, Ira B. Sankey, reported that her hymns contributed tremendously to their evangelistic campaigns.<sup>48</sup> *Rescue the Perishing* is among the five most famous of these hymns.<sup>49</sup>

Although blind, Crosby did not feel she could reach out to the lost only through her hymns; she prayed continually for God to allow her personally to lead to Christ the lost persons she contacted. She traveled extensively seeking to lead as many as she could to Jesus. She sincerely believed that Jesus was speaking to her when He commanded; “Go out into the highways and hedges and urge them to come in” (Luke 14:23).

Crosby spent considerable time in one of Manhattan’s worst slums, the notorious Bowery, the red-light district and center for pornographers and alcoholics.<sup>50</sup> She also worked at the McAuley Water Street Mission, in the prisons, and at the Door of Hope for women.<sup>51</sup> She referred to the men with whom she worked as “my boys,” and through the years she “adopted” over 600 as her boys.<sup>52</sup>

The U.S. Senate invited her occasionally to open their session by reading one of

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45. Paul describes the scene in I Thessalonians 4:16-17 when Jesus will come down from heaven at the “Trumpet call of God and the dead in Christ will rise first, after that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”

46. I Corinthians 15:54-55.

47. Revelation 21:23, 25.

48. Bernard Ruffin, *Fanny Crosby*, A Pilgrim Press Book for United Church Press, 1976, p. 15.

49. Elsie E. Egermeier, “The Girl Whose Songs Resounded around the World,” *Girl’s Stories of Great Women*, The Warner Press (Anderson, Indiana, 1930), p. 50. The others are *Blessed Assurance*, *Pass Me Not*, *Oh Gentle Savior*, *Safe in the Arms of Jesus*, and *Saved by Grace*.

50. Ruffin, p. 132.

51. Delores T. Burger, *Women Who Changed the Heart of the City; The Untold Story of the City Rescue Mission Movement*, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregal Publications, 1997, p. 87.

52. Ruffin, p. 138.

her poems. During one of these occasions the Senators were noisily chatting with each other. Worried because the session would be started late, she approached the presiding officer and said, "If you don't get these boys quieted down, I'm going to have to leave, for my boys at the mission need me more than you do."<sup>53</sup> She had left no doubt where she placed her priority. She considered her mission work as even more important than her hymn writing. Concerning it she said, "It is the most wonderful work in the world, and it gives such an opportunity for love. That is what all people want—love."<sup>54</sup>

She had a special way of selecting the man she would seek to win to Jesus. Unable to see, when she entered the mission hall, she would "sniff out the worst smelling man," sit down next to him and begin talking to him. She spoke of this as "conversational evangelism." To her, each man was one her boys"; it was her greatest desire to lead him to Jesus by showing him Jesus' love.<sup>55</sup>

It was during a hot summer night when she was speaking at the Bowery Mission that she received the inspiration to write *Rescue the Perishing*. Several days earlier W.H. Doan, who composed the music for a number of her hymns, had requested that she write a hymn on that subject.<sup>56</sup> In her autobiography she reports that as she spoke she kept thinking "some mother's boy" was present "who must be reached that night" or he would be eternally lost. Therefore, she pleaded with the group pressing the point that if anyone had wandered from his mother's teaching, she desired to assist him to return to his early training. A young 18 year-old lad came to her and said, "Did you mean me, Miss Crosby? I promised my mother to meet her in heaven, but as I am now living, that will be impossible." With her encouragement, he gave his life to Jesus and with joy in his heart, he told her, "Now I can meet my mother in heaven, for I have found God."<sup>57</sup> She reported to Trevena Jackson, "While I sat there that evening, the line came to me, "Rescue the perishing, care for the dying." I could think of nothing else that night. When I arrived home, I went to work on the hymn at once, and before I retired it was ready for the melody."<sup>58</sup>

There was an interesting sequel to this event. Many years later in November, 1903, when Crosby was speaking at the Young Men's Christian Association in Lynn,

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53. Burger, pp. 86-88, In fact, Crosby was the first woman to speak before the U.S. Senate (Cited from James Stuart Smith and Betty Carlson, *Favorite Hymn Writers*, Westchester, Illinois: Good News Publishers, Crossway Books, 1990.)

54. Ruffin, p. 136.

55. Burger, p. 87.

56. S. Trevena Jackson, *Fanny Crosby's Story of Ninety-Four Years*, N.Y.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1915, p. 77.

57. Fanny J. Crosby, *Memories of Eighty Years*, Boston, Massachusetts: James H. Earle and Company, 1906, p. 145.

58. Jackson, pp. 76-77.

Massachusetts, she told of the incident which led her to writing the hymn. After the service among a number of men who shook her hand was one who seemed deeply moved. She records:

You may imagine my surprise when he said: 'Miss Crosby, I was the boy who told you more than 35 years ago that I had wandered from my mother's God. That evening you spoke at the mission, I sought and found peace, and I have tried to live a consistent Christian life ever since. If we never meet again on earth, we will meet up yonder.' He raised my hand to his lips, and before I had recovered from my surprise he had gone and remains to this day a nameless friend, who touched a deep chord of sympathy in my heart.<sup>59</sup>

*Rescue the Perishing* was to become "the battle cry" for the rescue missions and other evangelistic outreaches to the lost and broken lives.<sup>60</sup>

Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,  
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;  
Weep o'er the erring ones, lift up the fallen,  
Tell them of Jesus the mighty to save.

In this stanza Crosby presents life as a spiritual journey—leading to eternal life or death.<sup>61</sup> The spirits of men and women who are living in sin are spiritually ill; their spirits are doomed to perish and die eternally.<sup>62</sup> Jesus alone can save them from this spiritual death. As God's Son, He has complete power to save them from spiritual death.<sup>63</sup> Christians therefore, should have a deep pity for all who will experience

59. Crosby, pp. 145-146.

60. Burger, p. 87.

61. In Matthew 7:13-14 Jesus uses this symbol: "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road, that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow is the road, which leads to life, and only few find it."

62. Writing to the Romans, the Apostle Paul said, "For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Speaking to the Ephesians about Jesus, he said, "God . . . made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions" (Ephesians 2:15).

63. John the Baptist told the people that Jesus was "mightier" (that is, more powerful) than he was (Matthew 3:11 KJV). Jesus' many miracles—healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind, raising the dead—were called "mighty works" (Matthew 11:21, 23 KJV). His mightiest work, of course was to save sinners from eternal death by offering himself on the cross for their sins. The author of Hebrews says that "He is able to save completely those who come to God by Him" (Hebrews 7:25). The Apocalypse (Revelation) pictures a group of those who have been saved as falling before the Lamb who had been sacrificed for their sins and singing "You are worthy. . . because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God" (Revelation 5:9).

spiritual death, that is, eternal separation from God, Jesus, and all that is good. This pity should cause them to weep over those who are about to suffer this tragic fate. This pity should also lead them to assure the sinners that Jesus has the power to save them:

Though they are slighting Him, still He is waiting,  
Waiting the penitent child to receive.  
Plead with them earnestly, plead with them gently.  
He will forgive if they truly believe.

In this second stanza Crosby presents Jesus as yearning to give salvation to sinners who are indifferent. Like God, He is patient and longsuffering, unwilling for any to perish, desiring all to repent or turn to Him.<sup>64</sup> Jesus pleads with the lost to come to Him.<sup>65</sup> The most likely source of Crosby's imagery in this stanza is Jesus' own portrait of Himself in Revelation 3:20: waiting, knocking, and pleading for the sinner to let him come into his heart. "Here I am, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hear my voice and opens the door, I will come in and will eat with him, and he with me." In His beloved parable of the prodigal son, Jesus describes the father, who represents himself and God, as longingly watching for the son's return. Seeing him "a long way off," he had "compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."<sup>66</sup> Crosby calls upon Christians to join Jesus in bringing sinful men to Him. They can be successful, however, only if they are earnest and gentle in working with them. Paul urges the Galatian Christians who see a fellow Christian caught in sin to "restore him gently."<sup>67</sup> This is the way Crosby herself sought to win sinners to Christ. She wrote:

You can't save a man by telling him of his sins. He knows them already.  
Tell him there is pardon and love waiting for him. Win his confidence and  
Make him understand that you believe in him, and never give up.<sup>68</sup>

She concludes the stanza: "He will forgive if they truly believe." Jesus can enable sinners to change their lives only if they put their complete trust in him. Jesus told

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64. II Peter 3:9.

65. John 5:40. "You refuse to come to me to have life." Matthew 11:28 "Come to me all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

66. Luke 15:20.

67. Galatians 6:1. In Matthew 11:29 after calling the lost to him, Jesus tells them "I am gentle and humble in heart."

68. Ruffin, p. 136.

Nicodemus that “Whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”<sup>69</sup>

Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,  
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore,  
Touched by a loving hand, wakened by kindness,  
Cords that were broken, will vibrate once more.

This third stanza uses the biblical imagery for the evil force in the world: Satan or the devil. He seeks to undermine the goodness which God planned for man, created in His image. He seeks to destroy all noble promptings and to cause man to yield to his baser instincts. The Bible describes him as both deceptive and destructive.<sup>70</sup> But kindness and love prompted by God’s grace can restore man’s noble promptings. Like replacing a broken string on a violin, God uses the actions and words of Christians to restore the cords of goodness which Satan had destroyed.<sup>71</sup> Crosby wrote:

I could give more than one instance where men have been reclaimed, after a long struggle and many attempts at reformation because someone spoke a kind word to them at what appeared to be the last moment. I have also known many others who turned away from a meeting simply because the cheering word had not been spoken nor the helping hand extended. . . . I firmly believe that harsh words only serve to harden hearts that might otherwise be softened into repentance.<sup>72</sup>

At her memorial service George Brown observed, “No discouraged mortals ever went to her for help but carried away a new song of hope in their hearts. Her great desire was to help the sinful to a better life.”<sup>73</sup>

Rescue the perishing, duty demands it;  
Strength for thy labor the Lord will provide.  
Back to the narrow way patiently win them.  
Tell the poor wand’rer a Savior has died.

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69. John 3:16. Paul also affirms that “in Jesus we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14).

70. Satan is presented as tempting Eve, David, Job, Jesus, Peter, and Paul. Both Job and Jesus withstood the temptation. Also he is presented as working through others to undermine good and noble endeavors. Paul writes that to deceive, Satan “masquerades as an angel of light” (II Corinthians 11:4); but as Peter writes, he is prowling “around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (I Peter 5:8).

71. Again notice the instructions Paul gave in Galatians 6:1.

72. Fanny Crosby, pp. 146-147.

73. Jackson, p. 190.

In this final stanza Crosby states that every Christian is responsible for leading the sinner to Christ. Jesus requires this of them.<sup>74</sup> It is a challenging and difficult task, but He will give them the power and wisdom equal to the task.<sup>75</sup> Crosby concludes with the controlling image of the poem—that life is a journey—man can be detoured by Satan to the “broad road” which leads to destruction. The Christian is to seek to redirect them to the “narrow way,” which leads to God and eternal life.<sup>76</sup> Throughout the poem she insists that success will result only by the loving touch, kind words, and patience. The poor sinner, wandering in the wrong direction, can be drawn to Jesus and eternal life by the message that Jesus died on the cross to purchase his salvation.<sup>77</sup>

Crosby gives emphasis the thesis of her hymn by concluding each stanza with a refrain or chorus: that each to Christian is to seek out those who are dying in sin because Jesus in His mercy has both the desire and the power to save them.

Rescue the perishing, care for the dying  
Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save.

## Some Day the Silver Cord Will Break

### James Smythe

Fanny Crosby is among the most beloved hymn writers of all times, and *Some Day the Silver Cord Will Break* is among the five most popular of her hymns.<sup>78</sup> Her success as a hymn writer resulted in part from her mother’s insistence that she not allow her blindness to cause her to feel useless. Crosby records that while she was still a girl, “my dear mother told me . . . that two of the world’s greatest poets were blind,<sup>79</sup> and that sometimes Providence deprived persons of some physical faculty in order that the

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74. Matthew 28:19 “Go make disciples of all nations”; Mark 16:15 “Go into all the world and preach the good news”; John 4:35, 38 “Open your eyes and look at the fields; they are ripe for harvest. . . I send you to reap.”

75. John 15:5 “Apart from me you can do nothing”; John 16:13 “The Spirit of Truth will guide you into all truth.”

76. Matthew 7:13-14 “Broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it. . . . narrow is the road that leads to life and only a few find it.”

77. John 12:32-33: “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself. He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.” Romans 5:8: “But God demonstrated his own love for us in this: while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

78. Elsie E. Egermeier, “The Girl Whose Songs Resound Around the World,” *Girls Stories of Great Women*, Andersen, Indiana: The Warner Press, 1930, p. 50.

79. These are, of course, Homer, the greatest of the ancient Greek poets, and John Milton, whom many consider second only to Shakespeare among the English poets.

spiritual insight might be more fully awake.”<sup>80</sup> That Providence had blessed Crosby with a deep spiritual sight is revealed in her hymns through the frequent recurring images related to sight:

Near the cross I'll watch and wait,  
Hoping trusting ever. . .<sup>81</sup>

He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock  
Where rivers of pleasure I see . . .<sup>82</sup>

Let my soul look up with a steadfast hope  
And my will be lost in thine. . .<sup>83</sup>

Gushing from the rock before me  
Lo a spring of joy I see. . .<sup>84</sup>

Perfect submission, perfect delight!  
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight  
Watching and waiting, looking above,  
Filled with his goodness, lost in his love . . .<sup>85</sup>

Another relative, Dr. Howard Crosby, inspired her to write *Some Day the Silver Cord Will Break*. He was a gospel minister, who shortly before his death had preached a sermon which had been published in a newspaper. Knowing that Crosby would like to hear it, Mr. Bigelow read it to her. She was deeply moved by his statement that “No Christian should fear death, for if each of us was faithful to the grace given us by Christ, the same grace that teaches us how to live would also teach us how to die.”<sup>86</sup> A few hours later she began to write the hymn and completed it “in a matter of minutes and under “divine inspiration.”<sup>87</sup> This is therefore, a striking example of Providence

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80. S. Trevena Jackson, *Fanny Crosby's Story of Ninety-Four Years*, New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1915, p. 26. In one of her poems she wrote: “Sightless I see, and seeing, find soul vision.” Bernard Ruffin, *Fanny Crosby*, A Pilgrim Press Book from United Church Press, 1976. p. 220.

81. *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross*

82. *A Wonderful Savior is Jesus, My Lord*

83. *I Am Thine, O Lord*

84. *All The Way My Savior Leads Me*

85. *Blessed Assurance Jesus Is Mine*

86. Fanny Crosby, *Memories of Eighty-Four Years*, Boston, Massachusetts: James Earle and Company, 1906, pp. 184-85.

87. Ruffin, p.171.

awakening her spiritual insight.

The hymn completed, she sent it to the Bigelow and Main Company and received for it the regular payment for a hymn. It was placed in their safe with many other hymns and forgotten. But it remained in her heart. It was so personal that she shared it with no one for several years. Three years later when she attended Sankey's summer conference in East Northfield, Massachusetts, Sankey asked her to speak. Having made no preparation and feeling intimidated by the presence of many notable persons, she sought to be excused, but Sankey insisted. She quietly arose and said, "There is a hymn I have written which has never been published. I call it my soul's poem. Some time when I am troubled I repeat it to myself, for it brings comfort to my heart." She then recited for the first time to an audience *Some Day the Silver Cord Will Break*. The audience wept as they listened. Sankey himself was deeply moved and, inquiring about it, learned that she has sold it to him three years earlier. He lost no time in retrieving it and having Stebbins to prepare the music.<sup>88</sup> A newspaper reporter was in the audience and arranged for it to be published in an English periodical.<sup>89</sup>

Of all of her hymns it was her favorite.<sup>90</sup> It was a favorite of the great nineteenth century evangelist, Dwight Moody.<sup>91</sup> And it has been the favorite of multitudes from the first, including myself.

Some day the silver cord will break,  
And I no more as now shall sing,  
But O the joy when I shall wake  
Within the palace of the King!

Crosby uses the first personal pronoun throughout the hymn even as she had in *All the Way My Savior Leads Me*. It is intensely personal. But as each person sings it, it becomes his own and expresses his own deep feelings. She opens with a biblical allusion: "the silver cord will break." This is a metaphor the author of Ecclesiastes uses to refer to the thread of life which is severed at death and releases the soul from the body to take its flight to God who gave it.<sup>92</sup> At that time she will cease her role of singing and composing songs which inspire faith and joy in others. Most Christians discover joy when singing her hymns in their private or public devotions. But a greater

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88. Jackson, pp. 69-70.

89. Ruffin, p. 174.

90. Ibid.

91. Ibid., p. 175.

92. Ecclesiastes 12:6-7 "The silver cord is severed. . . and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it."

joy awaits her and all Christians. Death is not the end. It is merely a sleep from which they will awaken to eternal life. Jesus used the metaphors of sleeping and waking to refer to death and the resurrection when he raised two from the dead—the daughter of Jairus and his dear friend Lazarus.<sup>93</sup> Paul referred to those Christians as sleeping who had died and were awaiting the second coming of Jesus.<sup>94</sup> The awaking is joyful beyond measure because it is in the heavenly dwelling of God. Jesus told his disciples that it was necessary for him to return to heaven to prepare dwelling places for them (the KJV uses the term mansions) where they will be with him forever.<sup>95</sup>

Some day my earthly house will fall,  
I cannot tell how soon 'twill be,  
But this I know my all in all  
Has now a place in heaven for me.

Crosby opens this stanza as she had the first with a metaphor for death: the destructing of the house we live in while on earth. By this she means the body. She took this image from the apostle Paul: “Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.”<sup>96</sup> Then she speaks of the uncertainty of life but certainty of eternal life in heaven. Of this she has no doubt. “This I know my All in All has now a place in heaven for me.” Jesus told his disciples “I am going there to prepare a place for you.”<sup>97</sup> On two occasions Paul speaks of Jesus as “all in all.”<sup>98</sup> This description gives the assurance that in Jesus everything is unified and made complete.

Some day when fades the golden sun  
Beneath the rosy-tinted west,  
My Blessed Lord will say, “Well Done!”  
And I shall enter into rest.

In this stanza Crosby uses a third image to refer to the end of life—the setting of the sun. Jesus had used this image in the parable of the laborers who were called to work in the master’s vineyard. Those who began work in the eleventh hour (5:00 P.M.)

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93. Matthew 9:24 and John 11:11-13. Daniel also uses this imagery for death and the resurrection (12:2).

94. I Thessalonians 4-13-15.

95. John 14:1-3.

96. II Corinthians 5:1-6 (The KJV uses the expression “our earthly house” rather than “tent.” Crosby would have used the KJV for her study).

97. John 14:2

98. Colossians 3:11; Ephesians 1:23 says he “filleth all and in all” (both KJV).

represented those who began to serve the Lord at the very end of their lives. Thus a single twelve-hour day metaphorically represented the full measure of a person's life.<sup>99</sup> The beautiful description of the fading sun "beneath the rosy-tinted west" refers to the end of life.<sup>100</sup> But the end of life is really a commencement—the beginning of a fuller, more glorious life which shall never end. Because of her deep faith in Jesus as God's dear Son, Crosby is certain that He will welcome her to this new life, commending her for her service to Him: "Well done!" She derives this greeting from another of Jesus' parables, that of the talents. The master welcomed both the servant who had doubled his five talents and the one who had doubled his two talents with these words: "Well done, good faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness."<sup>101</sup> Crosby concludes the stanza "And I shall enter into rest." Again she takes her imagery from the Bible. The Apostle John in his vision of heaven writes, "I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. 'Yes,' says the Spirit, "They will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."<sup>102</sup> Jesus promised to supply rest for those who come to him.<sup>103</sup>

Some day, till then, I'll watch and wait,  
My lamp all trimmed and burning bright,  
That when My Savior opes<sup>104</sup> the gate,  
My soul to heaven may take its flight.

This final stanza is based entirely on Jesus' parable of the ten virgins with their lamps awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom. They are to accompany him to the wedding feast, which represents the second coming of Jesus. Five of the virgins were foolishly unprepared; they had not brought extra oil for their lamps. The bridegroom's arrival was delayed until late in the night. While they were searching for oil, the wedding party arrived, entered the festal area, and door (gate)<sup>105</sup> was locked. They were refused admission. The five wise virgins, "whose lamps were all trimmed and burning bright" entered the gate and joined in the joyous celebration.<sup>106</sup> Numerous

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99. Matthew 20:1-15. Moses in Psalm 90:5-6 makes a similar comparison of man's life to that of a plant which in the morning "springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered."

100. Other writers used this same metaphor for the close of life—Henry Lyte: "Abide with me, fast falls the even tide./The darkness deepens: Lord with me abide"; And Alfred Tennyson: "Sunset and evening star,/and one clear call for me!/And may there be no moaning at the bar/When I put out to sea."

101. Matthew 25:21, 23.

102. Revelation 14:13.

103. Matthew 11:28-29.

104. Opens.

105. Revelation speaks of the twelve gates of heaven each made with a single pearl (21:21).

106. Matthew 25:1-13.

passages in the Bible urge us to be watchful<sup>107</sup> and to wait on the Lord.<sup>108</sup> God's schedule of events does not conform to man's. Therefore as Crosby learned, we must patiently wait for Him to act. When He does act, we need to be prepared. The final line "My soul to him may take its flight" also uses biblical imagery. The terms man's soul and spirit are often used interchangeably. Both Mark and Luke refer to God's Spirit descending on Jesus like a dove at the time of his baptism.<sup>109</sup> Moses describes death in four words: "and we fly away."<sup>110</sup> A more recent hymn, *I'll Fly Away* is based on this concept. Its refrain concludes: "When I die, Hallelujah, by and by, I'll fly away."<sup>111</sup>

And I shall see Him face to face  
And tell the story saved by grace.  
And I shall see Him face to face  
And tell the story saved by grace.

After each of the four stanzas, Crosby has the above chorus or refrain. She repeats the first two lines to emphasize the message she desires the hymn to give. Although the four stanzas concern death, the hymn is neither morose nor morbid; rather it is a song of victory. She had been preparing for this event all of her life. She believed firmly the assurance of Revelation that the imperfections we experience on earth will be made perfect in heaven.<sup>112</sup> Her blindness would immediately become sight. The first face she would ever behold would be that of Jesus, her Master and King. Once a well-intentioned minister, amazed at her unusual gifts and thinking that they would be magnified if she had sight, said to her "I think it a great pity that the Master, when he showered so many gifts upon you did not give you sight." Without hesitation she answered, "Do you know, if at birth, I had been able to make one petition of my Creator, it would have been that I should be born blind." Incredulous, he asked "Why?" Her answer: "Because when I get to heaven, the first sight that shall gladden my eyes will be my Savior!" Of this reality she never had a doubt.<sup>113</sup> She was certain that she would see her Savior face to face. She once commented, "I am a great admirer of the poetry of Lord Tennyson, but I do not like one line of his poem *Crossing the Bar*. I

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107. Matthew 24:42; 25:13; Mark 13:35, 37.

108. Psalm 27:14; 37:7; Isaiah 30:18; Micah 7; 7.

109. Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22

110. Psalm 90:10.

111. Alfred Brumley, the author.

112. Revelation 7:16-17; 21:4; 22:2-5, 17.

113. A recurring theme in her hymns is that she will see her Savior in heaven. "Great things He has taught us": "But purer and higher and greater will be/Our wondrous transport when Jesus we see." "Take the World but Give Me Jesus": "Till with clearer brighter vision,/Face to face my Lord I see." "Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb": "I shall see in the beauty/ The King in whose law I delight."

would say 'I know *I'll see my Pilot face to face, when I have crossed the bar.*'"<sup>114</sup>

The two lines of the chorus are also echoes of scriptures from the Apostle Paul. He contrasted the limitation of our vision and understanding in the world with our vision in heaven: "Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face."<sup>115</sup> Crosby knew that nothing she had accomplished on earth would merit the blessings she would receive in heaven. These blessings would be completely the gift of her Savior's matchless grace. The foundation of Paul's message was this truth. His letters repeatedly express it. "For it is by grace you have been saved."<sup>116</sup>

Ira Sankey, the minister of music for Dwight Moody's evangelistic campaigns, arranged for the publication of this hymn and used it frequently in these campaigns. Thinking that Crosby would precede him in death, he once said to her "When I get there, I'll take you by the hand and lead you along the golden street, up to the throne of God, and there we'll stand before the Lamb and say to Him: "And now we see Thee face to face, saved by thy matchless, boundless grace, and we are satisfied."<sup>117</sup> But it was Sankey who died first. Those who were present at his death report that he "drifted off into a coma, singing the opening lines of Fanny's *Saved by Grace*: 'Some day the silver cord will break/And I no more as now shall sing/But O the joy when I awake/Within the palace of the King.' By nighttime he was gone."<sup>118</sup> Fanny Crosby lived for a few more years. At the age of 94, after writing 9000 hymns,<sup>119</sup> she was called home. Her blindness faded; in its place was glorious sight. And she saw her Lord in all His glory. Her prayer had been answered! No longer in this world, she then with clear and bright vision saw her Savior face to face.

## Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross

### Harris G. Ives

I think if I were blind, my first prayer would be that God would heal me instantly. If it should become clear to me that the gift of sight was not what the Lord intended for me, then I should pray for my endurance. In any case, I am probably like many people whose prayers are self-centered.

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114. Jackson, pp. 175-176. Tennyson's poem reads: "I hope to see my Pilot face to face, When I have crossed the bar."

115. I Corinthians 13:12 KJV. See also I John 3:2 "We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." And Revelation 22:4; "They shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads" (KJV).

116. Ephesians 2:8 (Paul refers to the grace of God 88 times in his letters. Four of the most striking references are Romans 3:24; 4:16; 5:20; and I Corinthians 5:10).

117. Jackson, p. 68.

118. Ruffin, p. 226.

119. Ibid., p. 255.

We learn much about a person when we analyze his prayers (and certainly there are sufficient prayers included in the world's great novels; these utterances to God give us added insight into the character's personality). Fanny Crosby was that special type of human being whose prayers were not Christmas lists to a Santa-type God. She prayed that Jesus would keep all of us near the Cross.

For years, I did not understand such a petition. Why would anyone want to be planted near the "emblem of suffering and shame"?<sup>120</sup>

It was particularly disturbing for me to sit in the old San Pedro Church of Christ one Sunday morning. An all-Black congregation, the worshipers were old enough to have known much of suffering inflicted upon them by American society. Sister Edith, one of my favorite people in the group, was also an outstanding singer. As usual, I found my seat beside her so that I could hear her singing. But on this Sunday, the Communion selection was *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross*. Sister Edith's son had been murdered in a street crime just weeks before. She sang beautifully; she sang as if she found comfort in the words. She was asking God to anchor her in the faith.

Later, I mentioned the incident to a friend who is very studied in music. A Christian also, he had occasionally visited African American congregations, too. He noted the affinity of that community for Fanny Crosby hymns, particularly *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross*. "I think they drag it out too much. They should pick up the tempo just a tad," he commented. Not being at all musical, I offered my own opinion: "Something tells me they sing it just right - for their experience." At San Pedro the song may well have been "dragged out," but the Cross of Jesus Christ is a very real image to many African Americans. Perhaps because of the cruelties inflicted upon them by slavery, discrimination, and delayed inclusion in American society, they feel that they have a special identification with The Man of Sorrows.<sup>121</sup> An emphatically, deliberately, slow tempo may indicate a kind of savoring. Perhaps the people of San Pedro wanted to prolong these minutes of intense identification with Jesus. Indeed African American worship services are often criticized for not being timely. That, too, is part of that prolonging of the experience of the Cross. In my younger days speaking before such groups, I enjoyed the "call and response" - those occasions when Black audiences speak out loud in response to the preacher. More than once, as I presented a scene of the suffering Jesus from the pulpit, an "old timer" would shout back to me, "Take your time son - tell it." The implication was that I should not rush the Passion, but that I should tarry a while with the Lord in His suffering, knowing that Jesus had

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120. This well-known phrase occurs in the beloved hymn, *On a Hill Far Away (The Old Rugged Cross)* by George Bennard.

121. Isaiah 53:3. As interpreted by Christians, this prophetic passage predicted the suffering and passion of Jesus Christ.

me (and all of us personally) in mind when he endured the suffering so that I (and all of mankind) might be freed from the penalty of eternal death.

Eventually it occurred to me that this hymn is a petition to God, begging Him to keep us focused. There is so much in the world that competes with our spirituality. It is humanly impossible to completely screen out all but spiritual stimuli. Historically, there have been groups, both Catholic and Protestant, that have attempted this noble ideal: Calvinists with their suspicions of all earthly pleasures, Perpetual Adorers (Roman Catholic nuns) with cloistered schedules. I am not so sure that God wants us to thoroughly deny the sensual – if that were the case, we would have to burn the *Song of Solomon*, one of the loveliest pieces in the Sacred Canon.<sup>122</sup>

I suspect what God wants (and what Fanny Crosby teaches) is that we should never allow ourselves to be permanently distracted from the Grandest Act of Grace, the suffering of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

This hymn is a unique entry within a particular category of Christian hymnody: blood songs. Although she does not use any form of the word, blood, in this hymn (she does in many others, including the next selection studied in this paper), the implication is plain that the petitioner in *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross*, seeks to make contact with the redeeming Blood of Christ.

The emphasis in Scripture is on the unifying nature of Jesus. In the past, Jews and Gentiles were continually made aware of their ethnic differences. The mission of Christ was to make, of all the disputing tribes, one people. After the Crucifixion, people of various “genetic pools,” and DNA configurations are able to call each other brother and sister because they have made contact with the Holy Blood of Jesus.

Perhaps little boys of a few generations ago in America would understand this profound Christian doctrine; numerous autobiographies and other writings of grown men hearken back to the glad days of their youth when, eager to establish a kinship with a best friend, they cut their fingers and allowed their blood to co-mingle.

I want to impress upon the non-Christian reader the beauty of the Christian concept of the Blood of Jesus. In doing so, I must refer to a “profane” work, *The*

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122. *The Song of Solomon* (also referred to as *Song of Songs* and *Canticles*) is a highly sensual book which makes no mention of God or Jesus. However, it features a beautiful courtship of a certain prince and the Shulamite maiden. Christian exegesis allows for this to be an allegory of Christ and his Church. See the commentary by C. I Scofield in the *Scofield Study Bible*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1945. Speaking of the language of the woman to the man, Samuel Cox says in *The Expositor's Bible*, “What lover could turn aside from such a rapturous invitation?” See, *The Expositor's Bible*, New York: Funk and Wagnalls, p. 26. *The Matthew Henry Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishers, 1960, p. 810) declares that Jewish doctors advised young people not to read the Song of Solomon until they were 30 years old so that they might not be eroticized.

*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain.<sup>123</sup> I fear the juxtaposition is a bit too jarring for mature Christians. I beg their indulgence to make the point here.

In *Huckleberry Finn* the title character is an orphan eager to join a group of other little boys. In their childish wisdom, the group devised a variation of the finger cutting ritual to welcome orphaned Huckleberry. All of the boys pin-pricked their fingers to sign an oath of loyalty to the "band." It is perhaps odd to introduce such a whimsical moment here in a paper on the deep religiosity of Fanny Crosby, but I can think of no other secular passage that might make the Christian Blood imagery understandable to a non-Christian reader. Well, what little boys established on such a juvenile level, Jesus institutionalized on a much more profound level. Jesus requires no mutilation of our bodies so that we might identify with Him. He did the work. He died in our stead. Metaphorically, Christians participate in a weekly ceremony in which we drink a bit of "the fruit of the vine" to remind us of the Sacrifice Jesus Christ made --and our kinship with one another.

The Blood of Jesus is like no other blood; it cleanses rather than stains.<sup>124</sup> Spilling down the wooden cross at the Crucifixion, that Blood was greater than the blood of lambs which was smeared on the doorposts of the Jews at the Passover. Here we see the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. In the former, there is the story of the enslaved Jews awaiting deliverance from their Egyptian bondage. God instructed His people to mark their houses with the blood so that the death angel would pass them by during the night of avenging the suffering of the people of God (Exodus chapters 11, 12, 13). Similarly, the Blood of Jesus, claimed by God's people, protects them from spiritual death.

There is irony and poetry in the Christian's insistence that the Christian's contact with the spilled blood provides spiritual healing and protection.

Remarkably, the Bible, and Fanny Crosby's hymn, alter a primordial image: spilled blood is usually disgusting. There are those who cringe at the sight of it. Many of us marvel that doctors can stand to look nonchalantly at it. Except for those people of particular disposition and training, most human beings have a fear of such a sight. After the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, his widow shocked the world; Jacqueline Kennedy wore that besmeared pink outfit for many hours, intensifying the horror to the nations. People sighed with relief when she finally shed the blood-splattered garments.

Yet Scripture depicts the Blood of Christ as a cleansing agent:

123. Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, originally published in 1884. See: the 1963 Zodiac Press edition, London, p. 20.

124. E. A. Hoffman's *Are You Washed in the Blood!* Is just one of the many hymns which thoroughly exploits this theme: Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing pow'r? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with  
One another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.<sup>125</sup>

It is an amazing image reversal indeed. Crosby, in the tradition of many hymnists, even alludes to fountains and streams of this Sacred Blood which impart Grace to Christians:

Jesus, keep me near the cross,  
There a precious fountain  
Free to all, a healing stream,  
Flows from Calvary's mountain.

Crosby is in concert with Scripture when she emphasizes the copiousness of the blood of Jesus (Fountains and streams); Revelation 7:14 even speaks of the robes of martyrs as having been washed white in the Blood of the Lamb (Jesus). If we were speaking of the blood of any other person, the image would be too vile. But as we associate the spilled Blood of Jesus with the Grace of God and our salvation, it becomes an image of immense beauty.

The theology of Crosby's hymn is simple: the ardent Christian prays that He might ever be mindful of the drama of the Cross. Christians believe that Jesus Christ voluntarily took our place at the execution site. There are many people who cannot comprehend or appreciate the doctrine of the Cross, but it is an immense comfort for believers.

The hymn suggests the Christian's awareness that he is at his best spiritually when he is absorbed in meditation on Christ's suffering on his behalf.

## **I Am Thine, O Lord (Draw Me Nearer)**

**Harris G. Ives**

Fanny Crosby was given to using the words near or nearer. In the previous selection, we noted her petition for God to keep her near the cross; her references to physical nearness serves as a metaphor for spiritual focus; that is, she wished to strengthen her concentration on the Sacrifice of Jesus. Even when those specific words are not employed, her poetry focuses on references to proximity to God and Jesus: *Safe in the Arms of Jesus*, *Hold Thou My Hand*, *Thou My Everlasting Portion (Close to Thee)*, etc. Perhaps, with a blind person's heightened sense of touch, Fanny Crosby

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125. I John 1:7.

had a keen vision of the Christian's walk with God.

In deep contemplation of the Cross, Fanny Crosby considers at least three important images of Scriptural origin:

- A. The surrender
- B. The Call
- C. The arms of faith

### **The Surrender**

The hymn, *I Am Thine, O Lord*, is a statement of surrender. The first words of the hymn declare the Christian's stance. He belongs to the Lord. When early Christians began to align themselves with particularly charismatic preachers, Paul had to warn them that Christ is the head of the church; such allegiance ought to be exclusively to Him. It is human, of course, to develop affection for our teachers, but we must never accord any human being that ultimate trust which belongs to Jesus alone. Paul's words (in the KJV) are: "And ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."<sup>126</sup> Elsewhere in the Bible, there are references to the Redemption, a term which we sometimes forget has commercial implication. When Christ voluntarily suffered in our place, he redeemed us. That is, He purchased us.<sup>127</sup> We belong to him as slaves belonged to the masters who bought them: "For ye were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."<sup>128</sup> For those of us who have some knowledge and "collective memory" of American slavery, the image is one that is quite unsettling. If we understand, however, that only Jesus has the right to own us the image is more palatable.

### **The Call**

"I have heard thy voice" continues Crosby's statement on obedience. Throughout Scripture, God and Jesus make direct addresses to specific people. Paul, the great Christian writer, was prostrate and blinded having been knocked from his horse one day when he heard the voice of Jesus saying, "Rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."<sup>129</sup> Many Christians today tell stories of going about their business when they suddenly had the sensation of a direct address by God, commanding them to change their bad behavior and become Christian. The "call" is an important concept in the Bible. Among people who have heard the voice of God are Samuel (a little boy), Moses (a man reluctant to take up the task of liberator), and Peter (a humble fisherman turned articulate spokesman for Christianity).

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126. I Corinthians 3:23.

127. Fanny Crosby developed this theme more fully in *Redeemed*.

129. Acts 9:1-6.

Interestingly, Crosby uses the coordinate conjunction, but; “I have heard Thy voice, And it told Thy love to me; But I long to rise in the arms of faith and be closer drawn to Thee.” It may require a little meditation to appreciate her use of the coordinate conjunction. The meaning, though, is that the initial call of Jesus is to convince us of His love for us. We do not want to limit our Christian response simply to an understanding of God’s love, but we want to expand our response and do loving works: “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1:22)

### The Arms of Faith

Perhaps there are a couple of interpretations of the “rising into the arms of faith.” One might think of a child who is lovingly picked up by a father and embraced. Crosby in other hymns speaks of the protection Christians experience as they are held *Safe in the Arms of Jesus*. The implication is that the child is fearful of some danger, but the reassuring father-figure embraces her in love. Of course, strictly speaking, Jesus is the Son of God (John 1:12); Christians are the adopted sons of God (Romans 8:15 KJV) – that would really put Jesus in the Elder Brother position. Nevertheless, much Christian poetry cast Jesus in the father role.

To some of us, the hymn might suggest the image of a maiden bowing before her groom in submission. Then He pulls her to a standing position so that she might be enveloped in a loving embrace. This romantic posture is in keeping with many scriptural passages in the Old and New Testament where Jesus, or the Lord, is presented as the groom, and His Church is depicted as the bride (See Revelation 21:2 and the entire book of the Song of Solomon). Whether or not Crosby consciously alludes to such bridegroom passages of the Bible, her deep spiritual surrender to Jesus is in keeping with such Scriptural passages.

The hymn is very similar in sentiment to *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross*. Crosby’s reference to a desire for her will to be lost in obedience to God (*And my will be lost in Thine*) has some of the resonance of Paul’s determination not to boast of anything except in the Cross of Christ Jesus:

But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus  
Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.<sup>130</sup>

As an adult, Crosby checked any tendency within herself to boast in her accomplishments. While attending the New York School for the Blind as an adolescent, she impressed the staff with her gift of poetry. She was frequently called

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130. Galatians 6:14.

upon to write occasional poetry in recognition of an event of great importance. Several distinguished visitors sat in the audience at the school as she amazed them with her poetry. Among such guests were William Cullen Bryant and President John Tyler. Anyone who is the center of such attention would be tempted to great pride. Imagine a young child so honored. In the midst of these heady times, the superintendent of the school, Dr. Silas Jones, worried that Fanny might develop an unbecoming immodesty. He called her into a conference that she was never to forget for the rest of her life. "Do not think too much about rhymes, and the praises that come from them. Store your mind with useful knowledge and think more of what you can be than how you can appear."<sup>131</sup> His prolonged speech indicated that he considered Fanny on the verge of becoming big-headed. To her credit, the young girl took the advice as coming from a loving father and quickly embraced him in tears. Her poetry is marked by a wonderful humility and an intense submission to the will of God.

## Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior

### Harris G. Ives

Among the many Fanny Crosby hymns to be included in the Japanese *Sambika is Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior*. The very title tugs at the heart, implying that there are people whom the world neglects. Such people feel "invisible," and they depend upon Jesus to love them. Such a sentiment is universal. There is no wonder that it achieved international acceptance:

Fanny's first hymn to win world-wide favor was *Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior*. Missionaries carried it across the seas and translated the words into the languages of the people among whom they labored. Thus the Chinese and Japanese Christians began to sing the hymn just as enthusiastically as did their white-faced brothers and sisters in Christian lands.<sup>132</sup>

In attesting to the universal appeal of the hymn, Elsie Egermeier comments that the Asians were as receptive of the hymn as were their "white-faced" brothers. She could have included African-Americans in the comment; I have already mentioned the great respect that community has for all of Crosby's work. *Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior* enjoys great popularity in such churches today.

Fanny Crosby worked among the disenfranchised. It is perfectly logical that she

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131. Bernard Ruffin, *Fanny Crosby*, Westwood, New Jersey: Barbour and Company, p. 39.

132. Elsie E. Egermeier, "The Girl Whose Songs Resounded around the World," *Girls' Stories of Great Women*, Anderson, Indiana: The Warner Press, 1930, p. 48.

should be especially sensitive to the people that are often left only to look longingly at the joyous parade of life. Her hymn is a petition that God (and Jesus) might come into our home and visit with us. The handicapped, the lonely, the physically afflicted often see themselves as outsiders.

The inspiration for the hymn came from the pathetic plea of a prisoner. Fanny, a welcomed speaker at various agencies which served the unfortunate, was visiting a prison one day. “A man yelled out, ‘O Lord do not pass me by.’” Always alert to the idioms and sighs of the disenfranchised, she was able again to use an expression of a desperate human being as the impetus for a hymn. Of the many gifts which God bestowed upon Fanny Crosby, one was the gift of taking notice of people.

I remember hearing a lecture by a highly articulate man whose body was twisted in the most ungainly form. Indeed it was difficult to look at him. But he said something that touched my heart: “Kind mothers often teach their children not to stare at the afflicted; that often translates into ‘You should not look at them.’” In our efforts to be polite, we often avert our eyes when we see someone whose body is so contorted. Such people are often denied the smiles of passersby.<sup>134</sup>

Crosby’s hymn is written in the first person and assumes the perspective of the one who is so ignored by society. Her plea to God is that He will not pass us by. It is a poignant plea for a little attention. The hymn has that humble implication that the implorer does not regard himself as worthy of attention as are other more “presentable” people. But, of course, “God is no respecter of persons,”<sup>135</sup> and He willingly embraces all of us.

Pass me not, O gentle Saviour, Hear my humble cry;  
While on others thou art smiling, Do not pass me by.

Let me at thy throne of mercy Find a sweet relief;  
Kneeling there in deep contrition, Help my unbelief.

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133. Delores T. Burger, “Home Missionary: Fanny Crosby,” *Women Who Changed the Heart of the City*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregal Publications, 1997, p. 87.

134. There is a slight difference in the wording of this hymn as it presented in the *Army and Navy Hymnal* and in the *Great Songs of the Church*. The military version says, “While on others thou art smiling. *The Great Songs* rendition is “While on others thou art calling.”

135. “God is no respecter of persons,” might seem to be a very peculiar phrase when interpreted with twenty-first century thinking. However, the passage comes from the 1611 King James Version and means that God does not make a distinction between “high quality people” and “low quality” people. God is interested in obedience and faith. Peter, a Jew who was very proud of his observance of the laws of God, was to learn in Acts 10:34 that ethnicity, education, and other superficial elements do not determine a man’s standing with God.

Trusting only in thy merit, Would I seek thy face;  
Heal my wounded, broken spirit, Save me by thy grace.

Thou the Spring of all my comfort, More than life to me,  
Whom have I on earth beside thee? Whom in heaven but thee?

This is not the prayer of a proud man. This is the petition of one who is prostrate with feelings of worthlessness. Immediately, several Bible stories come to mind.

First, one thinks of the arrogant Pharisee who went to the temple to pray. Satisfied with his own righteousness, the Pharisee stood up and took note of another man in the temple, a tax collector who apparently was “under the pain of conviction.” The Pharisee, in elegant language, congratulated himself in prayer saying, “God I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. . . .” The tax collector, also absorbed in prayer, obviously heard the condemnation, but he addressed himself solely to God saying “God, be merciful to me a sinner.”<sup>136</sup> Jesus told this story, and it is obvious which man touched the Divine Heart. Crosby captures the tone of the penitent tax collector in her hymn of petition.

I am reminded of my dear deceased brother in Christ. Fred was a humble Christian. He was not highly educated, but his devotion to Jesus was obvious. Once, we were musing on the future scene of Judgment. Both of us thought about our sins. I asked, “Brother Fred, what do you plan to say to God on that day?” thinking that he would have some good excuse for a life less than perfect. Brother Fred replied, “Ain’t gonna be no conversation then. I’ll just stand there with my head bowed.” Instantly, I replied “Amen!”

Fanny Crosby uses the word mercy in the second stanza. She knows what the tax collector knows, “There would be no sense in asking for justice; none of us would fare well with such a plea. We all had better ask for mercy.”

Secondly, the story of Zacchaeus comes to mind. Also a tax collector (they were obviously men of ill-repute in New Testament society because of the implication of corruption), Zacchaeus sought to see Jesus as the Savior was walking among crowds. Zacchaeus was short of stature, and he had difficulty making eye contact with Jesus who was swamped by the taller admirers. Climbing a tree so that he might get a look at the Son of God, Zacchaeus attracted the attention of the Lord. Jesus was impressed with the effort of the short man. Not only did Zacchaeus get a glimpse of Jesus, but he warranted special words. Jesus told him to hurry down from the tree so that he might dine with the tax collector. Greatly touched, Zacchaeus instantly promised to restore any money he may have gained from cheating. The sinner was not passed by that

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136. Luke 18:1-17.

day!<sup>137</sup>

And then, there is that haunting story of the Syro-Phoenician woman. She was of a different ethnic group than Jesus. But believing that He had all power to heal her sick daughter, the poor woman approached the Lord. She did not think herself as worthy of as much attention as other people who were more closely related to Jesus. In the ensuing conversation with Him, Jesus tested her in front of many people. He made the comment that it would not be proper for him to give the “children’s bread to dogs.”

Of course Jesus was only testing her for the purpose of teaching the self-satisfied Jews standing by. He did not really regard her as a dog. Being all-knowing, Jesus had to have known that the woman would come forth with a winsome repartee: “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” She would not be deterred from her goal: to obtain healing for her daughter. What mother, what father, would not swallow all pride if it meant securing a child’s health? That abject surrender and that great humility is suggested in the Crosby hymn when the penitent person of the song implies that Jesus may well be planning a lengthy visit with persons of note, but she would be satisfied with some little attention from him. The Heart of Jesus is opened wide for all such humble people.

No Bible character received much more public acclamation from Jesus as that woman did on that day.

Shakespeare’s sonnet, *When in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes* also captures that humble stance. There, the lover notes how he seems to be less favored with talents and attributes than other men. He notes all of the good things of life from which he is excluded. Yet, he takes such pleasure in the thought that there is one (presumably a woman who loves him) whose smile makes him forget his inadequacies. It is a statement on earthly love, of course, but it could well be applied to Jesus the Lover of our souls.

When in disgrace with Fortune and men’s eyes,  
I all alone beweepe my outcast state,  
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,  
And look upon myself and curse my fate,  
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,  
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,  
Desiring this man’s art and that man’s scope,  
With what I most enjoy contented least,  
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising;

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137. Luke 19:1-10.

138. Mark 7:24-30.

Haply I think on thee, and then my state,  
 (Like to the lark at break of day arising)  
 From sullen earth sings hymns at heaven's gate,  
 For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings  
 That then I scorn to change my state with kings.<sup>139</sup>

Wanting to read both a secular and a profane interpretation into Shakespeare's sonnet, I used to be distracted by the reference to "deaf heaven." Recent meditations upon the work, however, have led me to think that heaven might well be deaf were it not for Jesus Christ, our Advocate:

My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.<sup>140</sup>

Both the social work and the hymnody of Fanny Crosby indicate the love of Jesus for all dispossessed people. I see a kinship in the sonnet and in Crosby's hymn. She invests all of her hope in Jesus when she sings with the persona of her song: "Whom have I on earth beside thee? Whom in heaven but thee."

## CONCLUSION

The hymns of Fanny Crosby were a musical backdrop to the great works of Christian charity in the nineteenth century. Inspired by her emphasis on the worth of all human beings, armies of the good-hearted entered the cities, ladled soup, and brought messages of good cheer to the homeless and to the hopeless. Walking among the alcoholics and the unwashed, Crosby was not repelled by the odors (in fact we mentioned that she "sniffed" out the most offensive derelicts and directed her attentions to them).<sup>141</sup> In her encouragement she shared the aroma of Christ:

For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are  
 Being saved and among those who are perishing. . . <sup>142</sup>

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139. William Shakespeare, *Sonnet 29*.

140. I John 2:1.

141. See footnote 55.

142. II Corinthians 2:15.

This paper, a product of two authors, treats only six of the songs, discussing Fanny Crosby's emphasis on providence, evangelism, the petition of the sinner, God's grace, and heaven

The discussion of *All the Way My Savior Leads Me*, *Rescue the Perishing*, and *Some Day the Silver Cord Will Break* focuses on Crosby's understanding of Providence, evangelism, grace, and heaven. Repeatedly, she invokes Scripture to assure the weary that, if they will trust God, He will take care of them. Such hymns cause the listener to meditate on those times when it seemed that there was no escape from a present trouble, but miraculously and unexplainably there appeared evidence that God was watching and guiding him all along. Christian testimony abounds with happy recollections of His timely deliverance.

In the latter part of the paper, we discussed *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross; Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior*; and *I Am Thine, O Lord*. The emphasis here has been on the Christian's prayer that his faith might grow through more intense meditation upon the Sacrifice for Jesus on our behalf.

Although Fanny Crosby's poetry does have moments of some literary sophistication, it must not be evaluated only on that basis. She was able to communicate the themes of Holy Scripture to a vast audience; many of those people would not have had her command of the sacred writings, but they could at least glean some of the noble concepts as revealed in her songs. Many people who were indeed studied in the complexities of Christian doctrine could appreciate how simply Crosby arranged those ideas in cadences that motivate the common man

Assessing the hymns of Fanny Crosby must involve an appreciation for the impact her work had on American life of the nineteenth century. Bernard Ruffin gives a wonderful illustration of just how the working class revered her in her time. While riding in a carriage in 1910, the driver suddenly realized that he was transporting none other than the renowned Fanny Crosby. Marveling that his passenger, nearly a centenarian by now, was so mentally alert and full of intelligent conversation, the driver could not restrain his admiration. Upon arrival at their destination, the driver alerted a policeman to the celebrity in their midst. The officer was overwhelmed; "We sang *Safe in the Arms of Jesus* at my little girl's funeral last week." Crosby (lovingly called 'Aunt Fanny' by many civil servants of the day) quickly took on her role as counselor and assured him that the child was indeed *Safe in the Arms of Jesus*.<sup>143</sup> Assurance was definitely an attitude of Fanny Crosby - not so much an assurance about herself as about her Lord. Indeed, one of her popular hymns is entitled *Blessed Assurance*. Believing in a God who keeps His promises, Fanny Crosby did not hesitate to affirm that the policeman's innocent little daughter was indeed with Jesus.

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143. Ruffin, p. 1.

Crosby was intent upon motivating “the lost,” she was not especially aiming to join the ranks of Emily Dickinson or Alfred Lord Tennyson. To be sure, she was well-read in the popular poets of her day. The curriculum at the New York State School for the Blind included more than ample time for study of poetry. Given the nineteenth century emphasis on didacticism, the teachers of the blind most assuredly realized the comfort value of “words fitly spoken.”<sup>144</sup> Even though Crosby’s hymns were written expressly to encourage faith, they can be studied by academicians. Elements of her writing which might appeal to such critics include her use of:

Scriptural allusion

Incorporation of ordinary idioms

Heartwarming images

The six hymns studied in this paper are replete with the three elements above. For example, *Some Day the Silver Cord Will Break* is remarkable for its development of the death metaphor in Ecclesiastes 12:6-7. *Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior* demonstrates Crosby’s ability at hearing the idioms and sighs of her times and incorporating them into her music. *Rescue the Perishing* includes the image of the human heart “crushed by the tempter,” and awaiting kind words of encouragement that will lead to a restoration to God.

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144. Proverbs 25:11.

Dominating the hymnbooks, even today, the words of Fanny Crosby still offer encouragement and comfort.

## The Faith and Artistry of Fanny Crosby (1820 -1915)

### Appendix

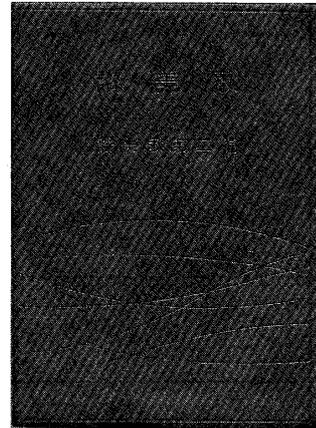
Fanny Crosby dominates Protestant hymnals. A quick survey of hymnals from a variety of communities and time periods provides some insight on her impact on Christian music. Sadly, the 1997 revision of the *Sambika* completely eliminates her work. The 1994 issue of that same hymnal has an impressive catalogue of her hymns. Though, she has no work included in the 1997 *Sambika*, Japanese congregations continue to sing her hymns (in Japanese)—most congregations still use the older editions of the *Sambika*. But no matter which hymnals are in the pews, Japanese Christians sing her songs heartily from memory. On October 23, 2005, just a few days before this appendix was prepared, The Omika Church of Christ sang the beloved 495: *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross*.

The titles, spellings and punctuation are the way they appear in the various hymnals.

#### ***The Japanese Sambika (1994):***

Listings are under her married name, Van Alstyne

- 517 ----- Jesus Is Tenderly Calling
- 518 ----- Some Day<sup>1</sup> The Silver Cord Will Break
- 493 ----- Rescue the Perishing
- 489 ----- We Shall Reach the Summer Land
- 495 ----- Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross
- 498 ----- Come Holy Spirit Like a Dove
- 524 ----- Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior
- 529 ----- Blessed Assurance
- 210 ----- Dedication Service (Translation)
- 492 ----- Untitled (Translation)



#### ***The Japanese Sambika (1997):***

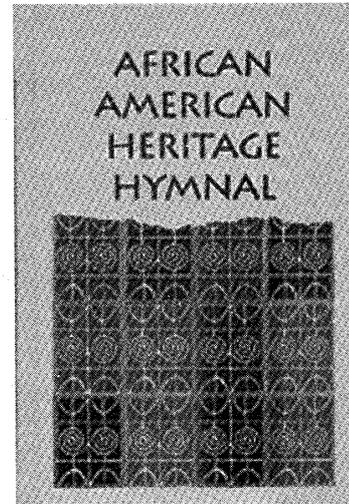
Crosby is completely edited out of this version.

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1. This is the spelling in the *Sambika*.

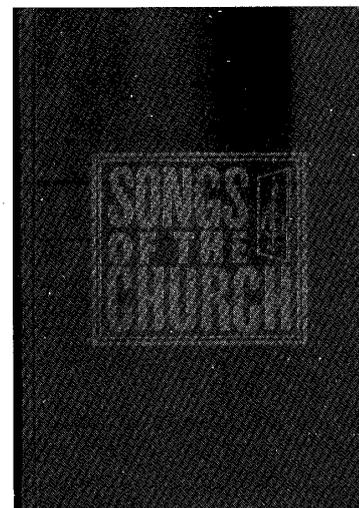
***The African American Heritage Hymnal***

- 157 ----- To God Be the Glory  
 178 ----- Praise Him! Praise Him  
 252 ----- Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross  
 351 ----- Jesus Is Tenderly Calling  
 378 ----- I Am Thine  
 435 ----- Pass Me Not  
 469 ----- All the Way My Savior Leads Me  
 475 ----- Savior, More Than Life to Me  
 508 ----- Blessed Assurance  
 552 ----- Close to Thee  
 553 ----- Close to Thee



***Songs of the Church*** (there is no copyright information printed in this book. It is a fine edition, gold stamped cover, with 735 selections. It must have been an oversight. The Omika Church of Christ on the campus of Ibaraki Christian University has a collection of about 30 of these in "mint" condition, all minus the identifying information. I suspect that this is a 1970s edition, edited by Alton Howard; Howard Publishing Company).

- 26 ----- All the Way My Savior Leads Me  
 43 ----- Blessed Assurance  
 283 ----- Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross  
 579 ----- Thou My Everlasting Portion  
 490 ----- Some Day the Silver Cord Will Break  
 593 ----- To the Work  
 590 ----- 'Tis the Blessed Hour of Prayer  
 203 ----- I Am Thine, Oh Lord  
 423 ----- Praise Him! Praise Him  
 439 ----- Rescue the Perishing  
 438 ----- Redeemed  
 143 ----- Jesus Is Tenderly Calling  
 15 ----- To God Be the Glory  
 506 ----- Tell Me the Story of Jesus  
 721 ----- Will Jesus Find Us Watching  
 452 ----- Safe in the Arms of Jesus



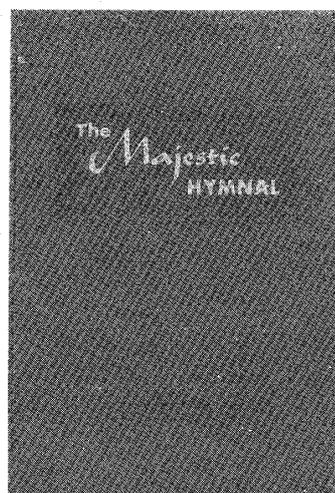
***Precious Memories of Virgil O Stamps***, Stamps Baxter Music and Printing Company, Dallas, Texas, 1941.

83 ----- Pass Me Not

There is only one Fanny Crosby selection in the edition above.

***The Majestic Hymnal***, Reuel Lemmons, ed., Firm Foundation Publishing House, Austin, Texas, 1959.

16 ----- A Wonderful Savior  
38 ----- Blessed Assurance  
121 ----- I Am Thine, O Lord  
173 ----- Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross  
365 ----- To the Work  
268 ----- Rescue the Perishing  
281 ----- Some Day the Silver Cord Will Break  
172 ----- Jesus Is Tenderly Calling  
260 ----- Pass Me Not  
312 ----- Tell Me the Story of Jesus  
273 ----- Safe in the Arms of Jesus  
6 ----- All the Way My Savior Leads Me  
331 ----- Hold Thou My Hand  
432 ----- Redeemed



***Church Gospel Songs and Hymns***. V. E. Howard, ed. Central Printers and Publishers. West Monroe, Louisiana, 1983.

292 ----- Pass Me Not (O Gentle Savior)  
175 ----- Praise Him! Praise Him  
202 ----- Safe in the Arms of Jesus  
199 ----- Some Day the Silver Cord Will Break  
348 ----- Jesus Is Tenderly Calling  
151 ----- Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross  
249 ----- Tell Me the Story of Jesus  
246 ----- 'Tis the Blessed Hour of Prayer  
2 ----- A Wonderful Saviour  
180 ----- Rescue the Perishing

- 24 ----- Blessed Assurance  
 238 ----- To God Be the Glory  
 99 ----- I Am Thine, O Lord  
 5 ----- All the Way My Savior Leads Me

***Great Songs of the Church (1967)***; Abilene Christian University, Abilene Texas,  
 published by The Great Songs Press, 124 W. Monroe St., Room 920, Chicago, Illinois.

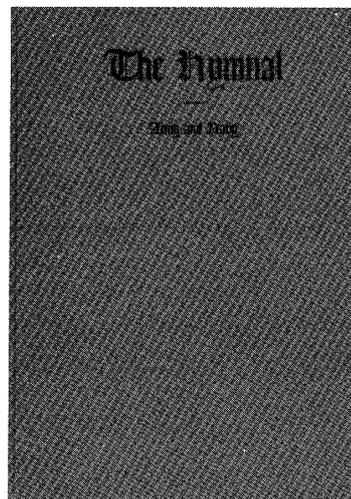
- 21 ----- Blessed Assurance  
 73 ----- I Am Thine, O Lord  
 125 ----- Jesus Is Tenderly Calling  
 126 ----- Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross  
 214 ----- Some Day the Silver Cord Will Break  
 189 ----- Pass Me Not O Gentle Savior  
 193 ----- Rescue the Perishing  
 228 ----- Tell Me the Story of Jesus  
 268 ----- Thou My Everlasting Portion  
 334 ----- All the Way My Savior Leads Me  
 197 ----- Saviour, More than Life to Me  
 270 ----- Though Your Sins Be as Scarlet  
 194 ----- Safe in the Arms of Jesus

***Sacred Selections for the Church***, Ellis J. Crum, ed. Sacred Selections, Kendall-  
 ville, Indiana, 1969.

- 4 ----- I Am Thine, O Lord  
 278 ----- Tell Me the Story of Jesus  
 46 ----- Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross  
 494 ----- Safe in the Arms of Jesus  
 453 ----- Some Day the Silver Cord Will Break  
 170 ----- All the Way My Savior Leads Me  
 477 ----- Blessed Assurance  
 497 ----- Rescue the Perishing  
 11 ----- Praise Him! Praise Him  
 60 ----- Hold Thou My Hand  
 58 ----- Pass Me Not

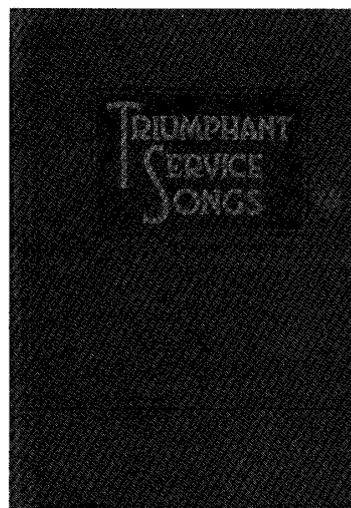
***The Hymnal, Army and Navy (1947)***; Ivan L. Bennett, ed., United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.:

- 205 ----- Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord  
209 ----- Blessed Assurance  
276 ----- Tell Me the Story of Jesus  
293 ----- Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross  
313 ----- Praise Him! Praise Him  
324 ----- Thou My Everlasting Portion  
331 ----- Jesus Is Tenderly Calling<sup>2</sup>  
338 ----- Pass Me Not, O Gentle Saviour  
361 ----- I Am Thine O Lord  
375 ----- All the Way My Saviour<sup>3</sup> Leads Me  
383 ----- Savior More than Life to Me  
384 ----- Though Your Sins Be as Scarlet  
417 ----- Rescue the Perishing  
455 ----- Some Day the Silver Cord Will Break



***Triumphant Service Songs***, 1934; The Rodeheaver Company, Chicago, Illinois.

- 176 ----- All the Way My Savior Leads Me  
12 ----- Blessed Assurance  
115 ----- I Am Thine, O Lord  
162 ----- Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross  
80 ----- Praise Him! Praise Him  
266 ----- Thou My Everlasting Portion  
267 ----- Rescue the Perishing



***The New Manual of Praise For Sabbath and Social Worship***, E.J. Goodrich, ed. Oberlin Ohio(1901);

Listings under Van Alstyne, Mrs. Fannie Jane Crosby<sup>4</sup>

- 119 ----- Pass Me Not, O Gentle Saviour

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2. This is the spelling in the *Army and Navy Hymnal*.

3. Ibid.

4. Her life span is indicated as (1823- ); all other sources say she was born in 1820. She was still living at the time of this 1901 publication

***Christian Hymnal Number Two***, L. O. Sanderson, ed., Gospel Advocate Company, Nashville, Tennessee, 1948.

- 40 ----- To the Work  
 425 ----- He Hideth My Soul  
 153 ----- Blessed Assurance  
 65 ----- Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross  
 76 ----- Pass Me Not  
 221 ----- Safe In the Arms of Jesus  
 81 ----- Rescue the Perishing  
 190 ----- Thou My Everlasting Portion  
 172 ----- I Am Thine, O Lord  
 24 ----- Tell Me the Story of Jesus  
 293 ----- Though Your Sins Be As Scarlet

***World Wide Church Songs***, The Stamps Quartet Music Company Inc. Birmingham, Alabama, 1947.

- 128 ----- A Wonderful Savior  
 102 ----- Blessed Assurance  
 26 ----- I Am Thine, O' Lord  
 43 ----- Safe in the Arms of Jesus  
 216 ----- Pass Me Not  
 25 ----- Tell Me the Story of Jesus



***The New English Hymnal***; a paperback with no copyright dates, editorship, or publishing house. Features a college-aged chorus group on the cover:

- 104 ----- I Am Thine O Lord  
 129 ----- Rescue the Perishing  
 131 ----- Saved By Grace (This is the way Some Day The Silver Cord Will  
 Break is listed)  
 91 ----- Blessed Assurance  
 34 ----- Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross  
 69 ----- Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior  
 53 ----- Praise Him! Praise Him

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*The New English Hymnal* (paperback, no other publishing identification—a collection of hymns in English published for use in Japanese congregations).