CFBC Hymns Class 28

Anne Steele

Anne Steele (Theodosia) (1716–1779)...The disabled woman who became "by far the most gifted Baptist hymn writer" of her day... More than a century after her death, it was written that she "stands at the head" of Baptist hymn writers.

https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/gallery-of-the-hymn-writers-hall-of-fame/

Anne Steele is relatively unknown today, yet her hymns were of great significance to the Particular Baptists of the 18th and 19th centuries. Her hymns are rich theologically and accurately describe Christian experience. Paul Helm, in "Expressing the Ineffable" describes, "The hymns are noteworthy for their intense, nervous, questioning moods, and for their stress on the divine transcendence centering, of course, in the gift of the Saviour, and of his Cross"... Though she did not intend that these be sung by the congregation, they greatly resemble and resonate with any Christian. https://chajohnsblog.wordpress.com/2018/04/25/anne-steele-the-forgotten-particular-baptist-hymn-writer/

Probably half of her hymns deal explicitly with suffering and doubts — it is the normal context in which the Christian life is lived. She has hymns arising from war and famine, funerals, an earthquake, and even sorrow at night...The 1st hymn in her collection expresses the inability of human language to adequately praise God... She had a strong belief that the longing for Heaven puts all other longings in their place.

Kevin Twit

"Lament is the honest cry of a hurting heart wrestling with the paradox of pain and the promise of God's goodness."

From Mark Vroegop's book "Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy" as reviewed by Paul Tautges

"Brokenness is built into the fabric of our humanity. Hardship, disappointment, and pain will eventually enter a person's life. And the time to prepare for suffering is before it happens. Lament models what to do with strong and raw emotions. It validates our struggles while pointing us to God. Lament teaches us how to be real but also how to trust.

Lament is a prayer in pain that leads to trust. The Psalms are full of them. Whether the lament is corporate, individual, repentance-oriented, or imprecatory (strongly expressing a desire for justice), you cannot read the Psalms without encountering laments. It's noteworthy that at least a third of the 150 psalms are laments. Consider this: one out of three psalms in the official songbook of Israel wrestles with pain.

Aren't the Psalms one of the first places you turn to when you're in pain? Minor-key songs were vital to God's people. And if we neglect lament, we miss the wise and comforting balance of the Psalms."

Mark Vroegop

https://www.crossway.org/articles/the-danger-of-neglecting-lament-in-the-local-church/

One night, fifteen years ago, pastor Mark Vroegop was stirred awake by his wife, who had spent hours searching for the heartbeat of their full-term baby. Two days later, he held the lifeless body of his daughter, Sylvia. Days later, the Vroegop family—Mark, Sarah, and their three sons—placed a small casket in the cold Michigan ground in the middle of winter.

"Born five weeks premature, Luke was taken from the delivery room in a reserved panic to the NICU. In his first two weeks of life, his motionless body animated in my mind a myriad of thoughts. Thoughts filled with fear and utter devastating grief. Thoughts like, "Will he be able to do anything for himself?" Or, "Will he even live?"

God gave me the strength to endure this grief, but the process was lonely and scary. Hidden sins of my heart were exposed. One "wants" to be okay with the diagnosis, but when your god of comfort has crumbled under the weight of a near-lifeless body cradled in your arms, it feels as if all of life crumbles, too. Yet in God's gracious leading, He made my suffering an easel which held up the canvas of my heart. In that suffering, God painted a fresh vision of Himself for me and in me.

In all our suffering, we have two alternatives: we can cry in sinful disdain over the work that God is doing in and through us, or we can lament deeply with hope in the joy that is set before us. The weeping itself is not the issue — that is probably the most God-glorifying response. But if our weeping comes simply from angered pride, or the shattered shards of our sin nature, we've moved away from lamenting the way things are to resenting that things are not the way we wanted them to be."

Michael Goff

https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/trust-god-through-your-tears

The Hymns of Anne Steele

Chris Fenner

If Benjamin Keach was the liberator of Baptist hymnody, Anne Steele was its biggest voice. Steele, who lived 1717-1778, was the daughter of Particular Baptist preacher and timber merchant William Steele. She spent her entire life in Broughton, Hampshire, near the southern coast of England, and devoted much of her time to writing.

Some accounts of her life portray her as a lonely, melancholy invalid, but a revival of research in the last decade indicates that she had been more active and social. She was theologically conversant with Dissenting ministers and "found herself at the centre of a literary circle that included family members from various generations, as well as local literati." She chose a life of singleness to focus on her craft. Before Christmas 1742, she declined a marriage proposal from contemporary minister-hymnist Benjamin Beddome.

All the same, some of Steele's sufferings were very real. She lost her mother at age 3, a potential suitor at age 20, her stepmother at 43, and her sister-in-law at 45. She spent many years caring for her father until his death in 1769. For many years, she exhibited symptoms of malaria, including persistent pain, fever, headaches, and stomach aches. One editor of her hymns noted that she had been bedridden for "some years" before her death.

This pervasive connection to suffering gave rise to one of her most enduring hymns, "Dear refuge of my weary soul." This text has been published in over 300 American hymnals. In recent years, it is has been sweetly set to music by Kevin Twit and featured on albums by Indelible Grace, a group that recasts old hymns with new tunes.

Dear refuge of my weary soul, On thee, when sorrows rise: On thee, when waves of trouble roll, My fainting hope relies.

Historically, her most popular hymn has been "Father, whate'er of earthly bliss," a hymn that turns earthly loss or denial into a spirit of thankfulness, published in over 800 American hymnals since 1792. Not all of her hymns deal with personal agony; her work spans a wide doctrinal and ecclesiastical range, and her 47 metrical psalms are among the finest of the genre.

...In the centuries since their first publication, Steele's hymns have been highly regarded and frequently printed. She is still considered "a laureate of hymnody for [the Baptists], just as Watts was the laureate of the Independents, Wesley of the Methodists, and Cowper and Newton of the Evangelicals."

https://equip.sbts.edu/publications/towers/the-hymns-of-anne-steele-boyce-centennial-library-archives-acquires-first-edition/

Excerpts from "Christian Experience In The Hymns Of Anne Steele (1716-1778)"

Kevin Twit

There has been a renewed interest in Anne Steele lately. Well worth reading are the full biography of her by J.R. Broome "A Bruised Reed: The Life and Times of Anne Steele" and the excellent study of her hymns by Cynthia Aalders "To Express The Ineffable: The Hymns and Spirituality Of Anne Steele."

I. A Brief Sketch Of Her Life: She was born in Broughton, England where her father, who was a fairly well-off timber merchant, preached at the Particular Baptist church for 60 years. She actually lived only 15 miles from the great Isaac Watts. Although it is unlikely that they ever met, she mentions his work with fondness in one of her hymns. Her mother died when she was 3 years old, and by 14 it seems she was bothered by chronic recurring malaria which took a progressive toll on her health. She also had painful stomach problems and severe teeth pain and her health was never very good. She received her education through being sent to boarding schools, even though the local pastor condemned her stepmother for doing this. Her home was one in which reading literature and poems was one of the fondest activities.

She was thrown from a horse and injured when she was 19, but makes no mention of this later in her diary and it is not true (as some have reported) that she was an invalid for life from this injury. It has been widely reported that when she was 21, she was engaged to Robert Elcomb, but that the day before the wedding he was drowned while bathing in a river! However, while he may have been courting her, they were not a day from their wedding when this tragedy occurred. In fact, she had numerous wedding proposals after this (including one from Baptist pastor and hymnwriter Benjamin Beddome) but she chose a life of singleness. Her stepsister had a difficult marriage and this may have influenced Anne's decision, but she also felt that singleness provided her the opportunity to serve the Lord in other ways. Had she chosen to become a busy pastor's wife she may not have been able to write so many poems and hymns.

So, she lived with her father and stepmother, who cared for her health problems, and who fixed her an elegant room with a fireplace to write her poems. She assisted her father in his pastoral labors, although for the last 9 years of her life, she was never able to leave her bed.

Still in spite of all of this her disposition was described as "cheerful and helpful" and her life as one of "unaffected humility, warm benevolence, sincere friendship, and genuine devotion." In reading Sharon James' account of her home-life I am reminded of the settings in some of Jane Austen's novels. She was a bright and cheerful woman, but one who suffered greatly from her ongoing health problems. Her hymns reveal that her health problems provoked great spiritual struggles as well and she is often wrestling with doubts and assurance of salvation.

Caleb Evans describes her death, "Having been confined to her chamber for some nine years, she had long waited with Christian dignity for the hour of her departure. And when the time came, she welcomed its arrival; and though her feeble body was excruciated with pain, her mind was perfectly serene. She took a most affectionate leave of her weeping friends around her, and at length, the happy moment of her dismission arriving, she closed her eyes, and with these words upon her dying lips, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth' gently fell asleep in Jesus."

II. Her Poems And Hymns: John Gadsby says that "from early life she was exceedingly fond of poetry, but was very unwilling for her productions to be submitted to the public eye. When at last she gave her consent, she would not have her own name attached to the volumes, but published them under the signature of Theodosia, and gave all the profits to charity." Her father wrote in his diary, "Today Nanny sent part of her composition to London to be printed. I entreat a gracious God, who enabled and stirred her up to such a work, to direct in it and bless it for the good of many. I pray God to make it useful, and keep her humble."

In total 3 volumes of her poems were published. The first two in 1760 as "Poems, On Subjects Chiefly Devotional" by Theodosia – she oversaw the editing of these 2 volumes herself. The third volume was published after her death.

....She wrote 144 hymns, as well as 48 psalms in verse (she does not "Christianize the Psalms like Watts does by the way), and her works also contain a number of miscellaneous poems, prose writings, and letters. Amos Wells (writing in 1914) says she was "the first woman writer whose hymns came to be largely used in hymn-books, and she is the greatest Baptist hymn-writer."

Wells describes her hymns as "very simple, clear, and beautiful, breathing a spirit of Christian faith and resignation."

200 years ago her hymns were very popular...Henry Burrage in "Baptist Hymn Writers And Their Hymns (1888)" says that over 100 of her hymns can be found in "modern" hymnals – more than any other Baptist hymn writer! He says that "her hymns, written to lighten her own burdens, give beautiful expression to the sweetness of her Christian character, and the depth of her Christian experience." I must concur! I find her hymns so rich, and yet easily understood even by those living 250 years after her death!

III. Things To Note About Her Hymns As Watson states in "The English Hymn", she has excellent craft in her hymnwriting.

- An intensity of feeling and language: Watson says her hymns are to be noted for the intensity of language and feeling...Watson compares as well her take on Isaac Watts' ideas in these lines: "Can I survey this scene of woe, Where mingling grief and wonder flow, And yet my heart unmoved remain, Insensible to love or pain?" Watts seems to suggest a more serene setting in which to survey the wondrous cross, but for Anne such a sight can never be serene!
- A powerful use of oxymorons and paradoxical statements (Watson). We see this in the above example, as well as a later verse from the same hymn: 'Tis finished', now aloud He cries, 'No more the law requires.' And now, (amazing sacrifice!) The Lord of life expires." (Hymn 4)
- A frequent use of questions to probe more deeply than statements can (Watson). "And can the ear of Sovereign grace, be deaf I complain?" (Hymn 80) and again: "What less than thy almighty Word Can raise my heart from earth and dust And bid me cleave to thee, my Lord, My life, my treasure, and my trust?" (Hymn 27)
- She is also quite free to use love language toward God (something Watson says had considerable influence of women hymn writers of the next century. "I yield to thy dear conquering arms, I yield my captive soul: O let thy all-subduing charms, My inmost powers control!" (Hymn 4)
- She has a strong belief that the longing for Heaven puts all other longings in their place. She has many hymns about the conflict between worldly pleasures and real pleasures.

- She is honest when it comes to human frailty and weakness. The 1st and last hymns in her works (which she arranged herself and so the placement is significant) dwell on human weakness. The 1st hymn in her collection expresses the inability of human language to adequately praise God.
- She has great creativity in the names by which she addresses God. A few examples (many of which are the 1st lines of hymns): My maker and my king, Thou lovely source of true delight, Dear refuge of my weary soul, Almighty author of my frame, Lord of my life, Eternal source of joys divine, Great source of boundless power and grace, Thou only sovereign of my heart, Father of mercies in Thy word, Come thou desire of all thy saints, Dear center of my best desires. She understands the importance of using different metaphors to lead to deeper reflection on who God is.

She is a voice of lament teaching us to trust in the midst of real suffering. It has been pointed out how neither Wesley nor Watts write true laments as Anne does. Probably half of her hymns deal explicitly with suffering and doubts – it is the normal context in which the Christian life is lived. She has hymns arising from war and famine, funerals, an earthquake, and even sorrow at night. "When I survey life's varied scene, Amid the darkest hours, Sweet rays of comfort shine between, And thorns are mixed with flowers." (Hymn 74) She is brutally honest about her doubts and struggles:

- 1. Dear refuge of my weary soul,
 On Thee, when sorrows rise
 On Thee, when waves of trouble roll,
 My fainting hope relies
 To Thee I tell each rising grief,
 For Thou alone canst heal
 Thy Word can bring a sweet relief,
 For every pain I feel
- 2. But oh! When gloomy doubts prevail, I fear to call Thee mine
 The springs of comfort seem to fail,
 And all my hopes decline
 Yet gracious God, where shall I flee?
 Thou art my only trust
 And still my soul would cleave to Thee
 Though prostrate in the dust

3. Hast Thou not bid me seek Thy face, And shall I seek in vain? And can the ear of sovereign grace, Be deaf when I complain? No still the ear of sovereign grace, Attends the mourner's prayer Oh may I ever find access, To breathe my sorrows there

4. Thy mercy seat is open still,
Here let my soul retreat
With humble hope attend Thy will,
And wait beneath Thy feet,
Thy mercy seat is open still,
Here let my soul retreat
With humble hope attend Thy will,
And wait beneath Thy feet

She is a voice crying out for the assurance of her Heavenly Father:

The topic of assurance is an important one, and a vital part of pastoral ministry, yet one which is generally not discussed enough in most seminaries. Anne has many hymns dealing with the struggles to attain assurance.

Dear Lord and should Thy Spirit rest In such a wretched heart as mine? Unworthy dwelling! Glorious guest! Favor astonishing divine!

When sin prevails and gloomy fear And hope almost expires in night Lord, can thy Spirit then be here Great spring of comfort, life, and light?

Sure the blest Comforter is nigh 'Tis He sustains my fainting heart Else would my hopes for ever die And every cheering ray depart

When some kind promise glads my soul Do I not find his healing voice The tempest of my fears control And bid my drooping powers rejoice?

Whene'er to call the Savior mine With ardent wish my heart aspires Can it be less than power divine Which animates these strong desires?

What less than Thy almighty Word Can raise my heart from earth and dust

And bid me cleave to Thee my Lord My life, my treasure, and my trust?

And when my cheerful hope can say I love my God and taste His grace Lord, is it not Thy blissful ray Which brings this dawn of sacred peace?

Let thy kind Spirit in my heart For ever dwell, O God of love And light and heavenly peace impart Sweet earnest of the joys above.

She is a voice longing for a transforming gaze of Christ's beauty. She well understands what Thomas Chalmers (19th century Scottish Presbyterian) called "The Explusive Power of A New Affection" Here is a great example of this:

Thou lovely source of true delight Whom I unseen adore Unveil Thy beauties to my sight That I might love Thee more,

Thy glory o'er creation shines But in Thy sacred Word I read in fairer, brighter lines My bleeding, dying Lord,

Tis here, whene'er my comforts droop And sin and sorrow rise. Thy love with cheering beams of hope My fainting heart supplies,

But ah! Too soon the pleasing scene Is clouded o'er with pain My gloomy fears rise dark between And I again complain,

Jesus, my Lord, my life, my light Oh come with blissful ray Break radiant through the shades of night And chase my fears away,

Then shall my soul with rapture trace The wonders of Thy love But the full glories of Thy face Are only known above,

http://hymnbook.igracemusic.com/resources/christian-experience-in-the-hymns-of-anne-steele

Father, whate'er of earthly bliss Anne Steele

1 Father, whate'er of earthly bliss Thy sov'reign will denies, Accepted at Thy throne of grace, Let this petition rise.

2 Give me a calm, a thankful heart, From every murmur free; The blessing of Thy grace impart, And let me live to Thee. 3 Let the sweet hope that Thou art mine My life and death attend; Thy presence thro' my journey shine, And crown my journey's end.

O Love incomprehensible

Anne Steele, Augustus Montague Toplady

Chorus: O Love incomprehensible That made Thee bleed for me The Judge of all has suffered death To set His prisoner free

- 1. What pain what soul-oppressing pain The Great Redeemer bore While bloody sweat like drops of rain Distilled from every pore!(Repeat chorus)
- 2. Arraigned at Pilates shameful bar, Unparalleled disgrace! See spotless innocence appear In guilt's detested place(Repeat chorus)
- 3. The spotless Savior lived for me, And died upon the mount The obedience of His life and death, Is placed to my account!(Repeat chorus)
- 4. Tis finished! now aloud He cries, No more the Law requires And now, amazing sacrifice, The Lord of Life expires!(Repeat chorus)
- 5. On Thee alone my hope relies,Beneath Thy cross I fallMy Lord, my Life, my Sacrifice,My Savior and my All!(Repeat chorus)

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Seven Characteristics of Fiery Trials

by Paul Tautges

"I should have been as though I had not been, carried from womb to tomb" are the words of the suffering Job as he voiced his complaints to God (Job 10:19). Having lost every earthly belonging, and all ten of his children—and surrounded by "miserable comforters" (16:2)—he regretted ever being born. Hear Job's lament: "My soul loathes my life; I will give free course to my complaint, I will speak in the bitterness of my soul" (10:1). "Your hands have made me and fashioned me, an intricate unity; yet You would destroy me. Remember, I pray, that You have made me like clay. And will You turn me into dust again?" (10:8, 9). "You renew Your witnesses against me, and increase Your indignation toward me; changes and war are ever with me. Why then have You brought me out of the womb? Oh, that I had perished and no eye had seen me!" (Job 10:17, 18). Intense, prolonged suffering can bring a believer to the point of despair, filled with protest, and wishing he had never been born. This reality draws attention to the power that suffering has to afflict the mind and soul. Therefore, we need to remind ourselves of biblical truth, like that which the Apostle Peter used to counsel his afflicted brethren.

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fi re, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:6–9)

The above passage teaches us seven truths about trials.

Trials are temporary ("now for a little while"). We need to view earthly trials as "light affliction, which is but for a moment... working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor 4:17, 18). By means of the pain of suffering God reminds us of the eternal weight of glory awaiting us and by doing so sends a fresh dose of lovingkindness and compassion, new mercy every morning. Great is His faithfulness! (Lam 3:22, 23).

Trials are necessary for our growth ("if need be"). God in His infinite wisdom knows exactly what kinds of trials must be designed to stimulate the growth necessary for our own spiritual health.

Paul was given a "thorn in the flesh" and, though he did not enjoy it, God assured him it was the necessary treatment to stunt the growth of his cancerous pride, lest he become useless to God. As he learned to submit to God in his trial, he would also learn that God's grace is sufficient (2 Cor 12:7–10). Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest wrote, "To those servants of God whom He purposes to use in a larger, greater way, many trials are allowed to come, for 'we must be ground between the millstones of suffering before we can be bread for the multitude."

Trials are mentally distressing ("you have been grieved"). There is no pretending here. Peter knew his readers were "grieved." This word does not refer to the suffering itself, but to the mental effects of suffering, which many times are worse than what can be identified bodily. The Psalmist admitted this. "Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none" (Psalm 69:20). "My soul clings to the dust . . . my soul melts from heaviness" (Psalm 119:25, 28). Job said, "If I say, 'I will forget my complaint, I will put off my sad face and wear a smile,' I am afraid of all my sufferings; I know that You will not hold me innocent" (9:27, 28). The pain of suffering often compels us to search our hearts to see what may need to be cleansed by God through honest confession and repentance.

Trials are diverse ("various trials"). Trials come in all shapes and sizes. Sometimes they afflict our bodies, other times our minds. Sometimes they disturb our comfort zones and other times our loved ones. Trials occur under the umbrella of God's sovereignty. Job said to his grieving wife, "Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" (2:10). Trials may come from Satan (as permitted by God). Paul's "thorn in the flesh" came via, "a messenger of Satan" sent to "buffet" him (2 Cor 12:7). Trials may come from the world. Jesus warned of this in John 15:19. Trials may even come from our own disobedience. "For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. . . . Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb 12:6, 11).

Trials refine us ("though it is tested by fire"). God's purpose in suffering is "that the genuineness of [our] faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ." God does not ordain trials to set us up for failure but to prove the reality of our faith in a way similar to the process of purifying metals, our faith being more precious than gold itself, which is perishable. Kenneth Wuest provides a memorable illustration.

The picture here is of an ancient goldsmith who puts his crude gold ore in a crucible, subjects it to intense heat, and thus liquefies the mass. The impurities rise to the surface and are skimmed off. When the metalworker is able to see the reflection of his face clearly mirrored in the surface of the liquid, he takes it off the fire, for he knows that the contents are pure gold. So it is with God and His child. He puts us in the crucible of Christian suffering, in which process sin is gradually put out of our lives, our faith is purified from the slag of unbelief that somehow mingles with it so often, and the result is the reflection of the face of Jesus Christ in the character of the Christian. This, above all, God the Father desires to see. Christlikeness is God's ideal for His child. Christian suffering is one of the most potent means to that end.

When we learn to submit our will to the will of God, in the midst of our sufferings, we will learn to say with Job, "When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10).

Trials are faith-building ("whom having not seen you love"). Christians can rejoice in the midst of trials because even though we do not see God we believe in Him. This faith produces joy that exceeds speech and is full of glory—even in the face of pain. "And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:3–5).

Trials are beneficial ("receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls"). Suffering proves the genuineness of faith, which ultimately results in salvation. Trials not only prepare us for eternity, but they make us ache for it. "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us...even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (Rom 8:18-23).

In the end, after his trial was over, Job learned a priceless lesson. "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5, 6). Job no longer wished he were dead because he had gained the godward outlook of faith. As a result, he saw his trial as a gift from above sent for *his* good and God's glory. Do we see our trials from this God-centered perspective?

https://counselingoneanother.com/2013/06/27/7-characteristics-of-fiery-trials/