



Hymn for Stewardship: A Hymn of Thanksgiving & Gratitude

The words to Hymn 397, Hymnal 1982, “Now thank we all our God” were written by Martin Rinkart, an Archdeacon in his native town of Eilenburg, just as the Thirty Years’ War broke out in 1618. The residents of this walled town endured many horrors during this time, and Rinkart stood by his flock while he himself endured the hardship and peril of war. He was a faithful, caring pastor who attended to the needs of the sick and the hungry during extreme circumstances.

“O may this bounteous God Through all our life be near us,

With ever joyful hearts And blessed peace to cheer us;

And keep us in his grace, And guide us when perplexed,

And free us from all ills In this world and the next.”

Eilenburg became an overcrowded refuge for those from the country districts where the Swedes had spread devastation and destruction. A steady stream of refugees poured into the city as the Swedish army surrounded it. In 1637 the plague claimed 8,000 people including an exorbitant number of children, clergymen from a neighboring parish, and Rinkart’s wife.

Now he had to do the work of three men, and buried 40 to 50 people a day — a total of 4,480 — but through it all he remained well.

After the plague, the town was hit by a famine. Rinkart did his best to help and gave away everything, keeping only the barest rations for his own family. In time, he was forced to mortgage his future income to buy bread and clothes for his children.

Through grief, and loss, suffering and death, Rinkart always looked to his Savior, and could thank God for the blessings he still had. “Now Thank We All Our God” began as a family prayer before meals, and later was sung as a national thanksgiving at a celebration service when the Thirty Years’ War ended. With the exception of “A Mighty Fortress is Our God,” it is the most widely sung hymn in Germany, sung on numerous occasions of national rejoicing.

This hymn is a testament to his faith that, after such misery, he was able to write a hymn of abiding trust and gratitude toward God. “And we know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God, and if we are fitting into His plans.” Romans 8:28

“All praise and thanks to God The Father now be given,

The Son, and him who reigns, With them in highest heaven,

The one eternal God, Whom earth and heaven adore;

For thus it was, is now, And shall be evermore.”

The words are as applicable today, as they were in centuries past.