

O SACRED HEAD, NOW WOUNDED

Although Bernard was one of the most influential Christians of the Middle Ages, settling disputes between kings and influencing the selection of popes, he remained a devout monk, single-minded in his devotion to Christ. Even the great reformer Martin Luther, who as a rule disliked medieval theologians, said, "Bernard loved Jesus as much as anyone can."

In his own day Bernard was known as a preacher and churchman; today he is remembered for his hymns of praise. "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" comes from a poem originally having seven sections, each focusing on a wounded part of the crucified Savior's body—His feet, knees, hands, side, breast, heart, and head. The text of this hymn compels us to gaze at the cross until the depth of God's love overwhelms us. Bernard's hymn pictures God's love, not as an abstract theological statement, but as a profoundly personal and awesome vision of the suffering Christ.

O SACRED HEAD, NOW WOUNDED

O sacred Head, now wounded,
With grief and shame weighed down,
Now scornfully surrounded
With thorns Thine only crown:
How pale Thou art with anguish,
With sore abuse and scorn!
How does that visage languish
Which once was bright as morn!

What Thou, my Lord, has suffered
Was all for sinners' gain;
Mine, mine was the transgression,
But Thine the deadly pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Savior!
'Tis I deserve Thy place;
Look on me with Thy favor,
Vouchsafe to me Thy grace.

What language shall I borrow
To thank Thee, dearest Friend,
For this Thy dying sorrow,
Thy pity without end?
O make me Thine forever;
And should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never
Outlive my love to Thee.

Attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153)
Translated from Latin into German by Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676)
Translated into English by John Waddell Alexander (1804-1859)
Hymn #286