

A Hymn's Story

A well known and often sung Harvest hymn is Martin Rinkart's "Now Thank we all our God." A powerful hymn of adoration and praise the context of its composition in the sense of what time and place is little known. One could be forgiven for assuming that Rinkart lived in a prosperous location at a happy time in history. One could hardly be more wrong. Rinkart lived in the years 1586 to 1649 in what was later to become Germany. He was the Lutheran pastor of the church at Eilenberg. Sadly this was the time of the vicious inter-Christian conflict known as the 30 Years War. As Protestant and Catholic armies sea-sawed back and forth across Germany the region's population plummeted from 16 million to roughly six million. Rinkart's city, being walled, was a refuge for the homeless and distressed but also, due to its walls, a scene of sieges and vicious battles. Due to the many refugees coupled with the sieges the population repeatedly suffered from outbreaks of disease and famine. During the plague of 1637 Rinkart was the only living minister left in the beleaguered city. The following words and sentiments are a testament to a deep Faith, a Faith which realizes the limitations of human good intentions, a faith which knows all too clearly the shortness and uncertainties of this life, and above all, a Faith which knows, trusts and hopes in God's good will and Providential oversight.

*Now Thank we all our God,
with hearts and hands and voices; Who wondrous things has done,
in Whom this world rejoices;
Who from our mothers' arms
hath blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love, -
and still is ours today.
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.
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 heaven and earth adore; for thus it was, is now,
and shall be evermore.*