**Questions about *Sacred Throne*, 569b, and possible answers**

**Camp Fasola, 2023. Will Fitzgerald**

1. *Why is there a river of blood?*

The image of a river in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures is a rich one. In the creation story, found in Genesis 2, a river waters the primordial garden of Eden, giving it (and our first parents) life. The Israelites often lived in semi-arid conditions, so water and rivers were important. In the last chapter of the the Christian scriptures, a "a pure river of water of life" is described as the garden of Eden is restored on earth. So rivers are images of abundance and life.

Blood is such an interesting image to use. On the one hand, it carries life throughout our bodies. The Hebrew scriptures say, "the life is in the blood," so, like a river, it is an image of abundance and life. But we usually experience blood when something is dying. According to the rituals described in the Hebrew scriptures, the life of animals was offered up to God to cover or restore the death we experience as a result of our sin. In the Christian scriptures, Jesus is described as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." God offers his own self up as a life-giving sacrifice, removing our sin, and restoring us to the life we lost as a result of our sin.

So, the image of the river of blood, is really an image of the superabundant love of God for us, restoring us to life from death.

2. *Why does the river come from under a throne?*

In Kent's image, the river originates from under God's throne. This means primarily that it is God's initiative, God's choice to provide a loving and abundant sacrifice for us. We don't make ourselves good enough for God. God does. God does this out of an abundance of love for the creation; God knew all along that humanity would choose death rather than life, and so God made provision from before the foundations of time.

3. “*Waft” seems like the wrong word. Is it?*

In modern English, "waft" is primarily used of things are carried in the air. (For example, "The scent of fresh bread wafted down the street."). In Kent's time, \*waft\* was also often used for things carried by water. An example from the Oxford English dictionary from 1769: "Great bodies of the Asiatic troops were continually wafted over to the European side of the Hellespont." So, in Kent's poem, salvation is wafted, or floated, down to humanity on the river that originates from the throne of God.

4. *Why does salvation come to man and man's traitors and foes? Who are they?*

"Traitors and foes" refers to humanity, not humanity's traitors and foes. We have acted as traitors and foes to God. Despite this, God still sends his salvation. Kent stands in amazement that God would do such a thing.

5. *"Make away" seems ungrammatical; what is going on?*

We have seen that Kent's original is \*take away\*. The "sacred flood" of salvation takes away the sin of even the greatest sinner.

6. *Who is Mary? What were her “stains”?*

This is most likely a reference to Mary Magdalene, one of Jesus's closest disciples, and the first witness to his resurrection. Once, Jesus was visiting the home of a religious leader named Simon to eat. In the middle of the meal, a woman came in with an alabaster jar of perfume and washed the feet of Jesus with her own tears, rubbing them with perfume. Simon was offended because this woman was well-known as a prostitute. But Jesus commends her, forgives her sins. Although many dispute this was actually Mary Magdalene, Kent most likely is thinking of this story of a woman who turns from a life of prostitution to a key follower of Jesus.

7. *Who is Manasseh? What were his “stains”?*

Manasseh was a king of Judah. He was the only son of Hezekiah. The Hebrew scriptures tend to describe the kings of Israel and Judah as either bad or good. Hezekiah was a good king, who restored worship of God in Judah and stopped the worship of other gods. Manasseh revoked his father's decrees, restoring polytheistic practices. So, this made him a bad king. This happened during the terrible time that Israel and Judah were being conquered and exiled by the Assyrians. According to the Hebrew scriptures, Manasseh was himself brought as a prisoner to Assyria, but eventually restored to his throne. Significantly for our poetry, this experience of imprisonment led Manasseh to repent and return to God. His stains were to allow worship of other gods, which made him a "traitor and foe" of the God of Israel. But God accepted his change of heart.

8. *In Kent’s original poem, he has “Jesu’s blood” instead of “Jesus’s blood”. Why?*

Although “Jesu” is often used when addresses Jesus in older hymns, I don’t think that’s what is going on here. In Kent’s *Original Gospel Hymns*, he uses “Jesu” 49 times, each time in the possessive (Jesu’s blood, Jesu’s side, Jesu’s name, etc), never by itself. He uses "Jesus's" once, but not in a poem, but a theme statement: "Jesus's Love for his bride." I think he’s doing this to make “Jesus’s” scan properly; the kind of elision that he does with “pard’ning” for “pardoning.” Here’s the kicker: if I’m correct, then the elision, indicated by the apostrophe, is of “’s”; that is, an elision of the possesive apostrophe by an elision-marking apostrophe.

9. *In Kent’s original poem, what is a “buckler”?*

It’s a small shield. The image is that we, the “sinner” fight against God, who offers us salvation freely.

**1991 Edition Text**

Beneath the sacred throne of God  
I saw a river rise;  
The streams where peace and pard’ning blood  
Descended from the skies.

I stood amazed and wondered when  
Or why this ocean rose;  
That wafts salvation down to man,  
His traitors and His foes.

That sacred flood from Jesus’ veins  
Was free to make away;  
And Mary’s or Manasseh’s stains,  
Or sins more vile than they.

**Suggested Text**

Beneath the sacred throne of God   
I saw a river rise;  
The stream were peace and pardoning blood   
descending from the skies.

Angelic minds cannot explore   
this deep, unfathomed sea:  
'Tis void of bottom, brim, or shore   
and lost in Deity.

I stood amazed, and wondered when  
 or why this ocean rose,  
That wafts salvation down to men,   
his traitors and his foes.

That sacred flood, from Jesus' veins  
 was free to take away  
A Mary's or Manasseh's stains,   
or sins more vile than they.