

The Hymn Tunes of Richard Wayne Dirksen

CLARK KIMBERLING

There is something almost magical about a great hymn tune, something awesome in the fact that music with so great a mission can be expressed on a mere page of a hymnal. The mystery deepens when we ask how great tunes originate—a question that interests not only those who sing great tunes, but also those who compose them. One such composer is Richard Wayne Dirksen, who

gave us VINEYARD HAVEN, and who wrote that in general “often a tune will be already ‘sketched’ in my head.”¹

Within a year after its first use in worship, VINEYARD HAVEN² was widely hailed as “the hymn tune of the decade.” It now appears in at least eight hymnals and stands out as one of the great tunes of the twentieth century.

VINEYARD HAVEN

Edward Hayes Plumptre Richard Wayne Dirksen

With majesty (♩ = ca. 72)

1. Re-joice, ye pure in heart!— Re-joice, give thanks, and sing!— Your
 2. With all the an-gel choirs,— With all the saints of earth,— Pour
 3. Your clear ho-san-nas raise,— And al-le-lu-ias loud:— While
 4. Yes, on through life's long path,— Still chant-ing as ye go,— From
 5. Still lift your stand-ard high,— Still march in firm ar-ray:— As

glo-ri-ous ban-ner wave on high, The cross of Christ your King.—
 out the strains of joy and bliss, True rap-ture, no-blest mirth.—
 an-swer-ing ech-oes up-ward float, Like wreaths of in-cense cloud.—
 youth to age, by night and day, In glad-ness and in woe.—
 war-riors through the dark-ness toil, Till dawns the gold-en day.—

Ho-san-na,

Ho-san-na, Ho-san-na, Re-joice, give thanks and sing.—

Ho-san-na,

Figure 1. The hymn tune VINEYARD HAVEN

Music: Richard Wayne Dirksen
 From Rejoice Ye Pure in Heart
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Early in December 2000, Dirksen received my letter asking for his insights into the experience of composing hymn tunes. A few days later, he sent me most of what follows, excerpted from “things previously written—when you are eighty, most things have been . . .”

Under the heading “My Process of Writing a Hymn,” Dirksen has written:

The writing of music for a hymn begins with the words chosen. Is it to be a prayer of the faithful in time of grief, or of a great thanksgiving in time of joy?

The season of the Church year and the nature of the services during that season will have a strong influence on the music. Will it be used in the service as a gradual (connecting readings), a communion hymn, an opening or closing hymn, or during a procession. These are major considerations. The number of lines in a stanza, meter, and the number of stanzas and the differing climaxes in each one will determine the progression of the melody, and the singability or range will be important. The text may be given to me if a congregation is asking for a new hymn tune. (I should interject that the words must satisfy me, else, no marriage is possible.) I will want to know about the musical forces available, the nature of the service, and even something about the acoustical space if it is a very large occasion such as an installation or consecration.

Thinking of all the above is hardly a conscious work anymore. I just do it. First, I write the text out on a yellow legal pad—I have always done this and have used many pages. It fixes the text in memory and makes me the more able to “see” the music while “hearing” the text. Then I take it to the piano, prop the words on the rack and start playing them. Very often the tune will be already “sketched” in my head and my fingers will adjust it as it progresses. That is the fun part—the beginning.

Now comes the middle, the harder work: fine tuning the aria so that it fits the scansion and feeling in all the right places in all of the verses, and how it closes as well as begins so that the verses sing along one after the other with immediacy and freshness. And finally the harmonization, and organ accompaniment, has to be filled in. Let it stand for a week or so nearby, and play it over a couple of times a day, and invite some friends to sing it. That’s about all there is to it.

Under the heading “The Theological Role of Hymn Singing,” Dirksen recommends an essay³ by Carl P. Daw, Jr., “as one of the very best and most pithy explanations of what happens in worship when hymns are

sung. I share all of his observations.” Dirksen then adds:

Louis Pasteur wrote this: “The Greeks understood the hidden power of things infinite. They bequeathed to us one of the most beautiful words in our language^[4]—the word, ‘enthusiasm’—*en theos*—a God within. The grandeur of human actions is measured by the inspiration from which they spring. Happy is he who bears a God within and who obeys it. The ideals of art, of science, are lighted by reflections from the infinite.”

My succinct perspective is this: when people sing together, that enthusiasm within each engenders a community-wide awareness of those reflections from the infinite. The sharing of “a God within” through making music puts us in unison touch with the infinite God, and intensifies our knowledge of and enthusiasm for Him. Collectively, do we therefore embody and live our theology.”

Dirksen at the National Cathedral



Figure 2. Richard Wayne Dirksen, Canon Precentor Emeritus, Washington National Cathedral, 1993.

Many of Dirksen’s hymn tunes were composed for use in or near Washington National Cathedral,⁵ where he served from 1942 to 1991 in an astonishing array of capacities, including Organist and Choirmaster, Precentor, Canon Precentor, Director of St. Albans Glee Club, Director of National Cathedral School Glee Club, and Director of Cathedral Choral Society.⁶

In a catalog⁷ of Dirksen’s compositions, accounts are given for the naming of tunes. For example, Vineyard Haven is the home of Dirksen’s close friend, Francis B. Sayre, Jr.⁸ Innisfree Farm is the home and studio of Rowan Le Compte, whose majestic rose window graces the nave of the National Cathedral, high in the west wall.⁹ Dirksen writes, “It was not until evensong in the spring (1983) when we sang INNISFREE FARM that the connection between the words, music, and window stunned me (and others) with glory.”¹⁰ INNISFREE FARM is found in *The Hymnal 1982* at Hymn 34. In Figure 3, you see Dirksen’s beautiful descant, published here for the first time.

INNISFREE FARM

Mozarabic, 10th cent.;
tr. Alan G. McDougall
rev. Anne K. LeCroy

Richard Wayne Dirksen

Descant

3 There - fore we come now even - ing hymns to of - fer,
5 Though bod - ies slum - ber, hearts shall keep their vi - gil.

Tune

1 Christ, migh - ty Sav - ior, Light of all cre - a - tion,
2 Now comes the day's end as the sun is set - ting:
3 There - fore we come now even - ing hymns to of - fer,
4 Give heed, we pray you, to our sup - pli - ca - tion:
5 Though bo - dies slum - ber, hearts shall keep their vi - gil,

joy - ful - ly chant - ing ho - ly hymns to praise you, with all cre - a - tion
for ev - er rest - ing in the peace of Je - sus, in light or dark - ness

you make the day - time ra - diant with the sun - light and to the night give
mir - ror of day - break pledge of re - sur - rect - ion; while in the hea - vens
joy - ful - ly chant - ing ho - ly hymns to praise you, with all cre - a - tion
that you may grant us par - don for of - fenc - es, strength for our weak hearts,
for ev - er rest - ing in the peace of Je - sus, in light and dark - ness

join - ing hearts and voic - es sing - ing your glor - ry.
wor - ship - ping our Sa - vior now and for ev - er.

glit - ter - ing a - dorn - ment stars in the hea - vens.
choirs of start a - pear - ing hal - low the night - fall.
join - ing hearts and voic - es sing - ing your glo - ry.
rest for ach - ing bo - dies, sooth - ing the wea - ry.
wor - ship - ing our Sa - vior now and for ev - er.

Figure 3. INNISFREE FARM, with descant, by Richard Wayne Dirksen.
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At the request of the Hymn Music Committee for the preparation of *The Hymnal 1982*, Dirksen arranged INNISFREE FARM in a metrical version. The result is the often-sung DECATUR PLACE, at Hymn 51. The name honors the home of Dirksen's friend and predecessor at the National Cathedral, Paul Callaway.¹¹

The tune CHEVY CHASE was commissioned in 1974 by the Chevy Chase Presbyterian Church¹² for celebration of its 50th anniversary.

Saint Paul writes of the diversity of gifts, and were that list extended, it would surely include the power to compose music. Dirksen writes about the gift, indicating that composing is a mystery—that the ability to receive raw musical starting material—or themes from heaven, to borrow from Copland (see note 1)—cannot be taught:

Composers Are Born And Not Made

I thought back to members of the CCM¹³ who had the great privilege of studying composition under Leo (Sowerby)¹⁴. . . It may be an apocryphal story, but it was reported to me separately by three present around Leo at the piano as he was cautioning the students about the deplorable overuse of consecutive fourths or thirds as a cheap musical device. One present said, "Dr. Sowerby, 'Dirksen does it all the time!'" Leo quietly replied, "What Dirksen does is unquestionable, for he is a composer. . . ." From that creator whose work I admired and, yes, dared emulate as I discovered my own substance—such a rejoinder had to be humbling for me, memorable and also emboldening.

It reminded me of what he said to me on the organ bench at St. James¹⁵ in Chicago in 1948 when I played for him my difficult and first extended work, a sonata for organ. I was twenty-seven years old and had just found myself interested in composing. "Wayne, every instinct is right. There are many things wrong I could point out, but you already know what they are. Correct them all, and keep going on to the next work."

I had never taken a lesson in composition, nor have I to this day, which explains my great reticence to pretend to be able to teach it. It is a mystery. Beethoven declared he learned nothing from Haydn about composition, but he certainly learned something about orchestration and music. Who taught Bach, Handel, Mozart and Mendelssohn and Brahms, Tchaikowsky, Mous-sourgsky, Dvorak, Schubert and Schumann composition? Influenced, yes—inspired, yes—but "taught" in terms of pedagogical exchange about composition? Nada! . . . Composers just know and absorb and understand and try and do music. They are born and not made.

I was most pleased to receive from Mr. Dirksen a collection of hymn tunes that have not been published previously. Among them are the tunes shown in Figures 4–7.

Another of the hymn tunes Dirksen sent me is BARLEY, along with an eight-page tribute to Barley himself. There is a special humor and charm in this tribute, as there are in Dirksen's tunes. Excerpts follow:

Mister Barley, the Great Cat

On a rainy evening in November of 1983, shortly before dinner a knock at the door was made by a neighbor . . . carrying a small, wet and bedraggled kitten . . .

The kitten quickly grew into a cat and adopted us immediately. It was a male, and when it had made itself well at home, we knew we had been found. We named him Barley—he was the color of ripe barley . . . extremely well-marked, and in all his orange-yellow stripes and white bib and face and paws he was a perfect ringer for the cat on the Purina Chow box.

In 1991 in December, I had just completed a hymn tune for the American Guild of Organists Convention to be held in Atlanta in June 1992. The matter of naming the tune was foremost in my mind. The act of doing so was about to take place as I sat at my computer in the back room. . . . Barley was on the window sill on a stack of my music where he was most happy to sleep any time I was working. I had just pulled up the title bar where the hymn tune name would be entered when the phone rang. Going to the kitchen, I answered and spoke to Ada McKee . . . with great enthusiasm she told me that the people [in Atlanta] were overjoyed with the tune . . . and were eager to know what I would name it.

Returning to the computer screen, in the title bar I saw "kkkkkk." Barley was at the window over on the other side of the computer watching a squirrel. The six "kays" were entered in that title bar as one of his foot pads had rested on that "k" key while he crossed the keyboard from east to west! The hymn tune was instantly named "Barley," those six letters replacing the "kays."

The overall character of a hymn tune is like the character of a human being: "character" is mysterious in origin and hard to define. On first meeting a tune or person, you have only a first impression, but as a result of further meetings, "character" develops. Sometimes, the chemistry is right for character to develop to the extent that it has a considerable power of influence on you. The hymn tunes of Richard Wayne Dirksen are full of character. If on first playing or singing one of them, you don't perceive that character, let me assure you that repeated experience will make a big difference.

CHEVY CHASE (IRVIN)

Horatio Bonar

Richard Wayne Dirksen

1- Here, O my Lord, I see thee face to face; here would I
 2- Here would I feed up-on the Bread of God; here drink with
 3- I have no help but thine; nor do I need an-oth-er
 4- Mine is the sin, but thine the right-eous-ness; mine is the

touch and han-die things un-seen; here grasp with
 thee the roy-al Wine of heav'n; here would I
 am save thine to lean up-on; it is e-
 guilt, but thine the cleans-ing Blood. Here is my

firm-er hand e-ter-nal grace, and all my wea-ni-ness up-
 lay a-side each earth-ly load, here taste a fresh the calm of
 nough, my Lord, e-nough in-deed; my strength is is thy might, thy
 my robe, re-fuge, and my peace; thy Blood, thy right-eous-ness, O

w 1, 2, and 3 4.
 on thee lean.
 sin for-giv'n.
 might a-lone.
 Lord, my God.

Figure 4. CHEVY CHASE (IRVIN), by Richard Wayne Dirksen. Music copyright 1992, Hope Publishing Company, Carol Stream, IL, in Hymns of Hope. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Isaac Watts, alt.

CREIGHTON

Richard Wayne Dirksen

1 - Give us the wings of faith to rise with in the veil, and see
 2 - We ask them whence their vic-tory came; they, with u-nit-ed breath,
 3 - They marked the foot-steps that he trod, his zeal in-spired their quest,
 4 - Our glo-rious lead-er claims our praise for his own pat-tern given;

the saints a-bove, how great their joys, how bright their glo-ries be.
 a-scribe the con-quest to the Lamb, their tri-umph to his death,
 and fol-lowing their in-car-nate God, they reached the pro-mised rest.
 while the long cloud of wit-ness-es show the same path to heaven.

Figure 5. CREIGHTON, by Richard Wayne Dirksen.
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ALL GLORY, LAUD, AND HONOR

Theodulph of Orleans;

Richard Wayne Dirksen

tr. John Mason Neale, alt.

Refrain: repeat each time.
 Unison

All glo-ry, laud, and hon-or To
 thee, Re-deem-er, King! To whom the lips of
 chil-dren Made sweet ho-san-nas ring.

Last time to Final Ending

Figure 6. ALL GLORY, LAUD, AND HONOR, by Richard Wayne Dirksen.
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Figure 6. (Continued)

2.

ring.

Verses

J = ♩

1- Thou art the King of Is - ra - el, Thou
 2- The com - pa - ny of an - gels is
 3- The peo - ple of the He - brews With
 4- To thee be - fore thy pas - sion They
 5- Thou didst ac - cept their prais - es; Ac -

Da - vid's roy - al Son, Who in the Lord's Name
 prais - ing thee on high; And we with all cre -
 palms be - fore thee went; Our praise and prayers and
 sang their hymns of praise; To thee, now high ex -
 cept the prayers we bring, Who in all good de -

com - est, The King and Bless - ed One, the
 a - lion in cho - us make re - ply, in
 an - them Be - fore thee we pre - sent, be -
 alt - ed, Our mel - o - dy we raise, our
 light - est, Thou good and gra - cious King, thou

J = ♩ *D.S.*

King and Bless - ed One.
 cho - rus make re - ply. All
 fore thee we pre - sent.
 mel - o - dy we raise.
 good and gra - cious King.

Final Ending

sweet ho - san - nas ring.

CONSECRATION

St. 1, F. Bland Tucker
 st. 2, att. to John Donne
 st. 3, Richard Wayne Dirksen, 1983

Richard Wayne Dirksen

Gently moving with quiet joy

1- When Je - sus died to save us, a word, an act he gave us;
 2- He was the word that spake it, he took the bread and brake it;
 3- The cup of our sal - va - tion he passed with con - se - cra - tion,

and still that word is spo - ken, and still the bread is bro - ken.
 and what that Word did make it, I do be - lieve and take it.
 that we in high thanks - giv - ing, might know Him in us liv - ing.

*Figure 7. CONSECRATION, by Richard Wayne Dirksen.
 Used by permission of Richard Wayne Dirksen. All rights reserved.*

While the *character* of a tune is subjective and largely unsusceptible to verbal characterization (character speaks for itself and needs no verbal description), the *characteristics* of a tune are quite describable. One of the characteristics of Dirksen's hymn tunes is the progression from one tonality to another and then back to the original. BARLEY, for example, opens in B-flat, slides into D-flat for two measures, and then returns to B-flat. To achieve such breadth within the limited form of a hymn-tune—that is, to get not only the contrast but also smooth transitions—requires a real composer.

From a composer's point of view, migrating to a new tonality is relatively easy. Such migrating is also highly desirable if the composer wants the tune—and worshipers—to really *go* somewhere. However, getting back home can be a challenge. The hymn tunes shown in this article venture further from home than most tunes do, and the skill with which the composer brings

each venture back home is great. Surely one of the most venturesome tunes in all of hymnody is Dirksen's VINEYARD HAVEN, and surely its return to C is a most special homecoming.

Clark Kimberling is Professor of Mathematics at the University of Evansville. He sings in the choir of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Evansville, Indiana, where his wife Margaret is the organist.

Notes

¹"The really important question," writes Aaron Copland, is: "What does the composer start with . . . ?" "The composer starts with his theme; and the theme is a gift from heaven. He doesn't know where it comes from—has no control over it." Copland, like Dirksen, refers to musical themes as already sketched; in Copland's words, a theme "comes almost like automatic writing. That's why [the composer] keeps a book very often and writes themes down whenever they come" (from Chapter 3, "The Creative Process in Music," in Copland's *What to Listen for in Music* [New York: Mentor, 1999]).

BARLEY

Michael Hewlett

Richard Wayne Dirksen

1- Praise the Spir- it, in cre- a- tion, breath of God, life's
 2- Praise the Spir- it, close com- pan- ion of our in- most
 3- Praise the Spir- it, who en- light- ened priests and pro- phets
 4- Tell of how the a- scend- ed Je- sus armed a peo- ple
 5- Pray we then, O Lord the Spir- it, on our lives de-
 6- Praise, O praise the Ho- ly Spir- it, praise the Fa- ther,

or- i- gin: Spir- it mov- ing on the wa- ters quick- ening worlds to
 thoughts and ways; who, in show- ing us God's won- ders, is him- self the
 with the word; his the truth be- hind the wis- doms which as yet know
 for his own; how a hun- dred men and wo- men turned the known world
 scend in might; let your flame break out with- in us, fire our hearts and
 praise the Word, Source, and Truth, and In- spi- ra- tion, Trin- i- ty in

life with- in, source of breath to all things breath- ing,
 pow'r to gaze; and God's will, to those who lis- ten,
 not our Lord; by whose love and power, in Je- sus
 up- side down, to its dark and fur- thest cor- ners
 clear our sight, till, white- hot in your pos- ses- sion,
 deep ac- cord: through your voice which speaks with- in us

life in whom all lives be- gin.
 by a still small voice con- veys.
 God him- self was seen and heard.
 by the wind of hea- ven blown.
 we, too, set the world a- light.
 we, your crea- tures, call you Lord.

Figure 8. The hymn tune BARLEY

Music: Richard Wayne Dirksen
 From Praise the Spirit in Creation
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²VINEYARD HAVEN was composed for the installation of John Maury Allin as Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church. The installation was held in the National Cathedral, June 11, 1974. The arrangement of the tune for that occasion is available in expanded form as an anthem, "Rejoice Ye Pure in Heart," A-5677, from Harold Flammer Music, a Division of Shawnee Press, Inc.

³Carl P. Daw, Jr., "The Spirituality of Anglican Hymnody: A Twentieth-Century American Perspective," an Introductory Essay in *The Hymnal 1982 Companion* (vols. I, II, IIIA, IIIB), Raymond F. Glover, General Editor, (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1990), I, 6-12. "At its most profound," writes Daw, "the very act of singing hymns represents a kind of miniature reenactment of what it means for the Word to become flesh: the text and tune of the printed page are given life and breath; they cease to be merely an idea full of potential and become a present reality."

⁴The translation is quite similar to the original:

Les Grecs avaient compris la mystérieuse puissance de ce dessous des choses. Ce sont eux qui nous ont légué un des plus beaux mots de notre langue, le mot enthousiasme—'Ev Θεός—un dieu intérieur.

La grandeur des actions humaines se mesure à l'inspiration qui les fait naître. Heureux celui qui porte en soi un dieu, un idéal de beauté et qui lui obéit: idéal de l'art, idéal de la science, idéal de la patrie, idéal des vertus de l'Évangile. Ce sont là les sources vives des grandes pensées et des grandes actions. Toutes s'éclairent des reflets de l'infini.

From *Oeuvres de Pasteur*, v. 7, Mélanges scientifiques et littéraires, (Paris: Masson, 1939), page 339.

⁵Washington National Cathedral: <http://www.cathedral.org/cathedral/>

⁶Cathedral Choral Society: <http://www.cathedralchoralsociety.org/index.htm>

⁷From *The Music of Richard Wayne Dirksen Composed at the Cathedral Church of St. Peter and St. Paul*, Washington, D.C., privately published, 1993. This 41-page annotated catalog includes sacred choral works, canons, chants, service music, liturgical drama, secular vocal, five operettas, five extended works, and much else.

⁸Francis Bowes Sayre, Jr., in whose honor Dirksen named VINEYARD HAVEN, was Dean of the National Cathedral from 1951 to 1978. He resides in Vineyard Haven, on the island of Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. (Vineyard Haven is also known as Tisbury but is, strictly speaking, a village within Tisbury.) Dean Sayre's paternal grandfather was Woodrow Wilson, and his father, Francis Bowes Sayre (1885-1972) assistant Secretary of State under F. D. Roosevelt, 1933-39, and U. S. High Commissioner to the Philippines, 1939-42. During the month that Dirksen began working at the National Cathedral, Sayre's father escaped from Corregidor by submarine. Sayre once said, as recalled by Richard Hewlett, Historiographer of the National Cathedral,

Cathedrals do not belong to a single generation, but are churches of history. They gather up the faith of a whole people and proclaim the goodly Providence which has welded that people together as they have hoped and suffered and believed, across the centuries. [And on another occasion:] I have felt that the cathedral was an instrument in some sense beyond the confines of the church as an institution—an instrument that could be effective (in the nation's capital) in the political center—in the arena of politics and public decision and welfare.

⁹The West Rose Window is 25 feet in diameter and contains 10,500 pieces of glass.

¹⁰Quoted in *The Hymnal 1982 Companion* (note 3), IIIA, 34.

¹¹*The Hymnal 1982 Companion* (note 3), IIIA, 51.

¹²Chevy Chase Presbyterian Church: <http://www.chevychasepc.org/>

¹³College of Church Musicians at the National Cathedral, founded in 1962 by Leo Sowerby.

¹⁴Leo Sowerby (1895-1968), composer and organist. His oratorio *The Canticle of the Sun* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1946. Among his published hymn tunes, two have masterful, distinctive harmony

(as well as melody): ROSEDALE (305 in *The Hymnal 1982*) and BERKELEY (394 in *Worship III*).

¹⁵St. James Episcopal Church (which became a cathedral in 1955), Chicago, where Leo Sowerby was organist and choirmaster for 30 years.

Richard Wayne Dirksen was born on February 8, 1921, in Freeport, Illinois. His mother, Maude Logemann Dirksen, a singer and pianist, saw to his earliest musical training. From grade six through high school, Dirksen played bassoon. Karl Henry Kubitz, as director of instrumental music in the public school system, exerted a strong influence in young Dirksen's musical development. Dirksen's father, Richard Watson Dirksen, was an organ builder and founder of The Freeport Organ Company. The company occupied the barn behind the Dirksen house, and this fact along with his father's considerable talent and dedication were important influences. "Following my graduation from high school in 1938," Dirksen writes, "Dr. Hugh Price, a gifted faculty member of the American Conservatory in Chicago became my teacher and good friend." In September of 1940, Dirksen began organ study with Virgil Fox at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore. Early in June of 1942, Dirksen graduated *magna cum laude* with the Church Organist Certificate. "The next morning I enlisted, and the United States Army claimed my full attention until October of 1945." Already, however, in February of 1942, Dirksen had become a part-time assistant to Paul Callaway, organist and choirmaster at the National Cathedral. Almost four years later, after both organists had served in the army, they rejoined the cathedral music department and then worked together for thirty-one years. Callaway retired in 1977 and Dirksen continued until 1991. Regarding Callaway's influence and the fact that he performed Dirksen's many compositions at the cathedral, Dirksen writes, "For his unstinting support I am immeasurably thankful and indebted." He continues: "Finally, the vast dimension of the cathedral itself in my life and work must be noted. Its magnitude and beauty offer endless inspiration to the artist and ennoble the richness of its worship and culture. An incomparable esthetic paragon, it is unlimited in challenge for special gifts and service, ever inviting discerning attention and attracting excellence. Nevertheless, its essence is that of the Eternal and Mysterious Holy One, accessible to human aspiration. Therein lies its greatest power. *Hosanna in excelsis! Amen.*"