



Lord of Our Life and God of Our Salvation

Text: Matthäus Appeles von Löwenstern (1594-1648)

Tune: Johann Crüger (1598-1662)

Throughout the Church Year the theme of the Church Militant comes up frequently. Many of the hymns found in *The Lutheran Hymnal's* "Reformation" section touch on this topic. Hymns like "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," "O Little Flock, Fear Not the Foe" and "Lord of Our Life and God of Our Salvation" are well-known and beloved hymns that speak to this topic of the Church's and the Christian's fight against the devil, the world, and our sinful nature. Especially in the season of Lent, it is appropriate that our corpus of excellent Lenten hymnody be supplemented with hymns from our hymnal's "Reformation" section when the Readings speak to the topic of spiritual warfare.

This excellent hymn on the topic was given to the Church by Matthäus Appeles von Löwenstern. Löwenstern was born April 20, 1594 in Oppeln, Silesia, the son of the town's saddler. Early in his life he distinguished himself by his musical abilities. In 1625 he was appointed music director and treasurer at Bernstadt by Duke Heinrich Wenzel. The Duke promoted him in 1626 to director of the princely school and in 1631 to Rath (adviser), Secretary, and Director of Finance of Bernstadt. Because of his skill with finances he was employed by Emperors Ferdinand II and Ferdinand III to advise on their financial affairs. Later in his life he was appointed *Staatsrath* (head of state) at Oels by Duke Karl Friedrich of Münsterberg. He died at Breslau, April 11, 1648.

Löwenstern's hymnwriting seems to have been a hobby. We have manuscripts of thirty hymns written by him, of varying degrees of worth. In his writing he sought to imitate older forms of poetry. For subject matter, he took the mottoes of the Dukes under whom he served and turned them into hymns. Quite often his hymns were

coupled with tunes he wrote for them, though of his hymns still use, only one tune has survived. In *The Lutheran Hymnal*, Löwenstern has two hymns: "Lord of Our Life and God of Our Salvation" and "Now Let All Loudly Sing Praise to God Above" (number 28; he was both author of the text and composer of the tune). One more hymn which has been translated into English, but is not in our hymnals, is an excellent paraphrase on Psalm 121, entitled "When Anguished and Perplexed."

"Lord of Our Life and God of Our Salvation" is an excellent hymn for times of national calamity, especially wars. Its five stanzas are excellent prayers for God to defeat our physical enemies who are assaulting us. However, it prays not only for defeat, but for our enemies spiritual wellbeing. In stanza five we pray, "Grant them Thy truth that they may be forgiven." This reminds us of Our Lord's command to pray for our enemies (Matthew 5:44).

This hymn's themes, however, are more concerned with spiritual warfare. The imagery of this hymn is excellent. In stanza two, reminiscent of the Flood (Genesis 6-9), the Church is likened unto the Ark. The Faithful are safe in the ark, but around it the "hungry billows" are curling while the foes unfurl their banners and hurl their envenomed darts. War is raging, and it is not a pretty scene. Armor fails, deadly sins assail us. Despite that, Christ has promised that nothing can overcome His Church (st. 3). Because we are members of His Church, that promise extends to us, too. We will be defended and granted the peace that comes from that promise. But even in the Church, there are sad divisions as theological battles affect congregations, church bodies, and even our own families ("Peace in Thy Church where brothers are engaging..." st. 4). In all this, we pray for the Lord of the Church to defend us, strengthen our faith, and keep us steadfast. Finally, we pray that we will see peace either on earth or "after we have striven, peace in Thy heaven." May this hymn be our prayer in our times of spiritual warfare!

