



## Thy Table I Approach

**Text: Gerhard Walther Molanus (1633-1722)**

**Tune: Genevan Psalter, 1543**

Many of our hymns on the Lord's Supper take the form of a prayer. We pray for right reception of this Gift, that our sin not cause us to receive the Sacrament to our harm (1 Cor. 11:27-31). In these prayers we make a confession that what we receive is greater than what the eye beholds, and for that reason we pray that our faith would be strengthened by the Holy Spirit to see this gift aright.

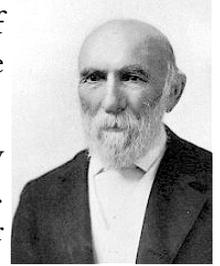


Gerhard Walther Molanus

One of our most memorable Communion hymn-prayers is "Thy Table I Approach," written by Gerhard Walther Molanus. He was born November 1, 1633 in Hameln, a town southwest of Hanover. He received his college education at the University of Helmstedt and in 1659 he became professor of mathematics at the University of Rinteln. At that same University he later became professor of theology in 1665. He left the

University in 1671 to become a member of Loccum Abbey, a Lutheran monastery in Rehburg-Loccum, in Lower Saxony. In 1677 he became abbot of the monastery (an *abbot* is one who is the head of a monastery), and went under the name of Gerhard I. While he was abbot he did much to try to calm the strife during the controversy between the Lutherans and the Reformed, but his sympathies were heavily with the Reformed. Later, Duke John Frederick appointed Molanus to try to end the battles between the Protestants and the Roman Catholics. After listening to both sides, Molanus said that there was no real difference between the Lutherans and the Catholics, saying that they were both saying the

same things but with different terms. Because of this, many felt he had betrayed his office. He remained abbot until his death, September 7, 1722.



Matthias Loy

During his life he wrote five hymns, but only "Thy Table I Approach" has made it into English. This is thanks to Matthias Loy, who translated it for *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnal* in 1880, published by the Ohio Synod. Loy (1828-1915) was a leader of the Ohio Synod, which started as a part of the Synodical Conference (forerunner of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod). But Loy disagreed with C.F.W. Walther on predestination, saying that some cause in man led to his salvation. Because of this, the Ohio Synod joined with the Norwegian Lutherans as well as the Buffalo and Ohio Synods to form the "Old American Lutheran Church," which eventually became the American Lutheran Church, which was a founding member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

"Thy Table I Approach" was originally a seven stanza hymn. The omitted stanza is the original fourth stanza, which reads:

Here I with mouth and soul,  
Incomprehensibly,  
Shall eat the precious Flesh of Christ  
In blest reality.

Stanzas one and two call to mind Jesus' Words in Matthew 5:23-24, teaching us to confess and receive forgiveness for our sins before approaching the Altar. When we confess, we are "sure to find forgiveness at [God's] hands." This forgiveness comes by "Thy Body and Thy Blood, once slain and shed for me" (st. 3), which Jesus gives us with bread and wine. We do not understand "this wondrous mystery" but confess that "God can accomplish vastly more than seemeth plain to me" (st. 4). As we approach the Supper we pray that "earth and hell combined," which seek to "raise doubt within my mind" about this Sacrament would be kept at bay. We end with praise to God for giving us Peace and Light in the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, which keep us in the faith to life everlasting.