

O sacred head, once wounded

'Salve caput cruentatum'

Words: in Latin, Arnulf von Loewen (1200—1251)
in German, Paul Gerhardt (1607—1676)
in English, James Waddell Alexander (1804—1859)
Tune: *Passion Chorale* (Hans Leo Hassler, 1601, set by Bach)

p 1. O sac - red head, once wound - ed, With grief and pain— weighed down,
f 2. O Lord of life and glo - ry, What bliss till now— was thine!
3. see alternate harmonies overleaf
pp 4. Be near me, Lord, when dy - ing; O show thy - self— to me,

How scorn - ful - ly sur - round - ed With thorns, thine on - ly crown!
I read the won - drous sto - ry, I joy to call— thee mine.
And for my suc - cour fly - ing, Come, Lord, to set— me free!

How pale— art thou with an - guish, With sore a - buse and scorn!
Thy grief— and thy com - pas - sion Were all for sin - ners' gain;
These eyes, new faith re - ceiv - ing, From Je - sus shall not move;

How does— that vis - age lan - guish, Which once was bright as morn!
Mine, mine— was the trans - gres - sion, But thine the dead - ly pain.
For he— who dies be - liev - ing Dies safe - ly through thy love.

Alternate harmonies

mp

3. What lan - guage shall I bor - row To praise thee, heav'n - ly friend?

mp

p

For this thy dy - ing sor - row, Thy pi - ty with - out end?

p

mp

Lord, make me thine for ev - er, Nor let me faith - less prove;

mp

f

O! nev - er let me, nev - er A - buse such dy - ing love.

f

The text is from a long prayer ascribed to Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153) but almost certainly written by a thirteenth-century poet, perhaps Arnulf von Loewen. There were originally seven four-verse sections, addressed respectively to the feet, the knees, the hands, the side, the breast, the heart and the head of Jesus.

The words were translated into German for a 1656 chorale book and used by Bach in the St Matthew Passion. The English translation is from the German, not direct from Latin.

Twentieth-century hymn books amend the first line to 'O sacred head, sore wounded'.

The chorale tune was originally a German secular love song, published in 1601 and later associated with various hymns. It was set to the present words in 1656.