Hymn Revision Study Sheet, Sojourn songwriting seminar, April 6, 2014

Isaac Watts’s “Hymn 95” “We Are Changed”

Not all the outward forms on earth, Not any government on earth,  
Nor rites that God has giv'n, No law that God has given  
Nor will of man, nor blood, nor birth, No will of man, no blood, no birth  
Can raise a soul to heav'n. Can raise a soul to heaven  
  
The sovereign will of God alone The sovereign will of God alone  
Creates us heirs of grace Declares the heirs of grace  
Born in the image of his Son, Born in the image of his Son,  
A new, peculiar race. A chosen, holy race

Line 1: Changed “all the outward forms” to “any government.” I thought people might get tripped up by the archaic “outward forms.” And because we live in a democratic republic, and have a propensity to think that we can achieve the good life if we simply elect the right man to the White House or the right party to congress, I saw this as an opportunity to make a statement that is important in our place and time.

Line 2: Changed “Nor rites” to “No law,” because “rites” is archaic and because it doesn’t sing as well as “law.” Also, “law” is a near-rhyme with “God.”

Line 3: Changed each instance of “nor” to “no,” simply because I think the change is a bit more singable and more contemporary.

Lines 4 and 5: No change

Line 6: Changed “creates us heirs of grace” to “declares the heirs of grace” because “creates us heirs” is a little harder to sing. Also, “declares” rhymes with “heirs,” so it gives the line a nice internal rhyme.

Line 7: No change

Line 8: Changed “new, peculiar” to “chosen, holy.” It’s more pleasant to sing and repeat the long O than the U sound, and also the word “peculiar” sometimes has a pejorative connotation these days. Finally, I think “chosen” and “holy” are more uniquely descriptive of the church. “Peculiar” in what way? Because we’re holy, in Christ.