

Week 7: Holy Spirit

Come Down, O Love Divine

Text: Bianco da Siena (?–1434), 1867

- Born around 1350 in Tuscany, Italy, and worked as a wool carder
 - In 1367, he is recorded as “at a young age” entering the Order of Jesuates (composed of lay persons, pursuing lives of poverty and penitence)
 - Few details known of his life, though he published 122 religious poems widely read in the Middle Ages
 - Translated into English by Richard Littledale, an Irish priest and writer, in 1867
- Tune: Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958), 1906
- The tune DOWN AMPNEY is named after the town in which Vaughan Williams was born
 - His father, an Anglican priest, died when he was three years old
 - Studied at Royal College of Music, where his classmates included Leopold Stokowski and Gustav Holst
 - Alongside Percy Dearmer, acted as editor for the influential *English Hymnal* (1906)
 - Showed a life-long interest in English folk tunes, many of which he adapted as hymn tunes
1. Much of the power of this hymn text comes from its use of “tongues of flame” (Acts 2:3) as consistent imagery throughout. What fire-like references can you see, and what do they tell you about the Holy Spirit?
 - a. “visit it with thine own ardor glowing”: ardor today means “fiery passion”, “zeal”, (“fire in the belly”?); originally from Latin, where it literally means “to burn”
 - b. “within my heart ... kindle it”: the Holy Spirit works on our hearts and conscience in a small way (at least at first), through whispers and small sparks
 - c. “earthly passions ... in its heat consuming”: this is the “refiner’s fire”, purifying us
 - d. “let thy glorious light ... the while my path illuming”: a guide, like the “pillar of fire” for the Israelites
 - e. “the yearning strong”: our longing for God is a burning desire

Love Divine, All Loves Excelling

Text: Charles Wesley (1707–1788), 1747

- Youngest (18th) child of Samuel and Susanna Wesley, educated at Oxford University
- Went with John to the Georgia colony as personal secretary to the governor, but quickly returned home
- Traveled with a group of Moravians on the voyage, where he became impressed with their faith
- Experienced conversion in 1738, began preaching and ministering across the country (and in America)
- John Wesley published *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists* in 1780, of which the majority of the hymns were written by Charles
- Authored at least 6,500 different hymns, probably more

Tune: John Zundel (1815–1882), 1870

- Born in Württemberg, Germany, studied organ and violin as a child
 - Later moved to St. Petersburg, Russia, where he served as organist at Saint Anne Lutheran Church
 - In 1847, emigrated to the United States and was hired in 1850 as organist for Plymouth Church in Brooklyn by Henry Ward Beecher (for whom the tune BEECHER is named)
1. Verse two is distinctively Wesleyan in its references to the doctrine of “Christian perfection” (also referred to as “Christian holiness” or “entire sanctification”) when it suggests the Holy Spirit has power to “take away the love of sinning”. (Many denominations, particularly Calvinist ones, omit the second verse for this reason.) Have you encountered this idea before, and do you agree? What does it mean to “set our hearts at liberty”?
 - a. For the Wesleys, “perfection” was not a state of infallibility or sinlessness but rather having totally dedicated oneself to walking with Christ, to be “inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life” (*A plain account of Christian perfection*, 1766)
 - b. Paul discusses Christian freedom in Galatians 5 (freedom from the law) and Romans 6 (freedom from sin); however, it is not freedom to do whatever we want (“Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means!”)
 2. Wesley uses Christ’s birth at the beginning (“joy of heav’n, to earth come down”) and return in the end (“finish, then, thy new creation”) to frame the hymn. As we live in the middle between these two, what does the hymn text imply our purpose is in the present time, and what is the role of the Holy Spirit for us?

- a. Verse three would say our purpose is to: bless, serve, pray to, and praise, God.
- b. Purpose of the Holy Spirit is to comfort (“thou art all compassion ... enter every trembling heart”), perfect (“take away the love of sinning”), and abide with us (“nevermore thy temples leave”).

Joyful is the Dark, Holy, Hidden God

Text: Brian Wren (1936–), 1986

- Born in England, with undergraduate and doctoral degrees from Oxford University
- Ordained as minister in the United Reformed Church (UK)
- Emeritus Professor of Worship at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia
- Wren has argued for a renewed focus on hymns as poetry, to challenge and grow one’s faith in new and different ways.

In a 1990 interview he said:

There is a double vocation in being a poet in the church. One vocation is to write poems of faith which people will pick up and sing and say, “Yes, this is exactly the way I think.” or “Yes, this is what I believe, although I’ve never put it this way.” The other vocation of the poet is to try to speak truth by stepping beyond the church’s limits of comfort and convention. ... The only way most Americans ever see a hymn is dismembered between lines of music for the benefit of sight-singers. Hymns are literally not seen as poetry. Yet a hymn is a poem, and a poem is a visual art form. The act of reading a hymn aloud helps to recover its poetry and its power to move us—the power of language, image, metaphor, and faith-expression.

Tune: Carlton R. Young (1926–), 1990

- Born and raised in Ohio, studied at Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music and Boston University School of Theology
 - Taught church music at over 12 colleges and universities, including Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, and Candler School of Theology, Emory University, among others.
 - Served as editor of both *The Methodist Hymnal* (1966) and *The United Methodist Hymnal* (1989)
 - In retirement, continues to write and compose from his Nashville, Tennessee home
1. The most prominent feature of this hymn text is the contrasts (and seeming contradictions) in the imagery it presents. This has led some critics to argue it presents a “muddled theology” while others accuse it of “misrepresenting God”. Does the hymn help or hinder your understanding of the spirit of God? What idea do you think Wren is trying to capture in this text?