

Week 6: Common Meter Variants

Eternal God, Whose Power Upholds

Text: Henry Hallam Tweedy (1868–1953), 1929

- Born in Binghamton, New York and trained as a Congregationalist minister at Yale University and Union Theological Seminary
- Pastored churches in Utica, New York and Bridgeport, Connecticut
- Became Professor of Practical Theology at the Yale Divinity School in 1909
- Studied hymns and their use in worship as part of his professorship, leading him to write his own hymns
- This text was submitted to a 1928 contest by Hymn Society of America for the “best missionary hymn”, and eventually won
- Later edited the hymnal *Christian Worship and Praise*, published in 1939

Tune: Traditional English, 1708

- Originally a folk tune commonly sung as a ballad, “The Ploughboy’s Dream”
 - Harmonized and arranged into a hymn tune by Ralph Vaughan Williams in 1906
 - Initial publication in *The English Hymnal* used it for “O Little Town of Bethlehem”
 - Today we mainly know it from its association with “I Sing the Almighty Power of God”
 - The name FOREST GREEN comes from the name of the village in Surrey, England where Vaughan Williams heard it sung
1. Although explicitly written as a “missionary hymn”, the text is really applicable to all Christians everywhere. What does this hymn teach you about how to share the gospel in your own personal life?
 2. While FOREST GREEN is a popular tune for this hymn, it’s by no means the only choice and many hymnals use other tunes instead. Do you think this tune is a good fit for the text? Why or why not? What about the tune MATERNA (usually seen with “O Beautiful For Spacious Skies”)?

Hail To The Lord’s Anointed

Text: James Montgomery (1771–1854), 1821

- Son of a missionary couple, attended a Moravian boarding school in England while his parents were overseas
- There he was inspired by the Moravian hymn tradition to write his own hymns and poetry
- Ran away at 16 to find work in the newspaper industry, where he advocated foreign missions, abolition of the slave trade, and other various social and political causes
- This text was written as a loose paraphrase of Psalm 72, for use at Christmas
- Montgomery recited the text at a missionary meeting in 1822, where the Methodist theologian Adam Clarke heard it and included it in his 1822 *Commentary on the Bible*
- “Angels from the Realms of Glory” and “Go to Dark Gethsemane” are two of his other well-known hymns

Tune: Traditional German, 1784

- First published in 1784 in the chapel hymnal for the Duke of Württemberg (the *Gesangbuch der Herzog*)
 - Through the early 1800s the tune was used in a number of German hymnals, with various modifications
 - Its first use with an English hymn is in the 1868 *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, for the children’s hymn “Come, Sing with Holy Gladness”
 - The harmonization there by William Henry Monk (also known for EVENTIDE, tune for “Abide With Me”, among others) is the one mainly used today
 - Also commonly paired with “Hosanna, Loud Hosanna” (another children’s hymn) and “O Church of God, United”
1. Isaac Watts is generally credited with opening the door to psalm “paraphrases” rather than the strict translations in use at the time. Montgomery’s paraphrase, however, is far looser than any of Watts’ (including his own paraphrase of Psalm 72, “Jesus Shall Reign Where’er the Sun”). Read the text of Psalm 72. Do you think Montgomery strayed too far from the scripture?
 2. Three verses of the original text, which are usually omitted from hymnals, mention nations from around the world paying tribute to Christ. How do they compare to the “missionary” lessons of “Eternal God”? Do you think hymnal editors are right to exclude them?

Exercises

The hymn "Eternal God, Whose Power Upholds" is written in common meter doubled (CMD, or 8.6.8.6D), exactly the same as common meter but with two verses combined into one. "Hail to the Lord's Anointed", on the other hand, drops a syllable in the first and third lines to make it 7.6.7.6D.

Compare:

× / × / × / × /
E - ter - nal God, whose power up - holds

× / × / × /
both flower and flam - ing star

With:

× / × / × / ×
Hail to the Lord's an - oint - ed,

× / × / × /
great Dav - id's great - er son

1. Ignoring rhyme, rewrite the first two lines of "Eternal God" to fit the 7.6.7.6 pattern:

× / × / × / ×
E - ter - nal God, _____ / _____ ×
× / × / × /
_____ / _____ × /

2. Now use the same meter to write two lines about one of the fruits of the spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control). If you like, you can use your common meter exercise from last week as a starting point.