

Week 7: Ancient Hymns

Father, We Praise Thee

Text: Pope Gregory I (c. 540–604), c. 600

- Born to a wealthy Roman family, son of a Roman senator, great-great-grandson of Pope Felix III
- Well-educated (but could not read Greek), trained for a career in public service, becoming Prefect of Rome by age 30
- Following the death of his father, devoted his life work and large inheritance to the church
- Founded no less than six monasteries, living as a Benedictine monk before being made a cardinal in 577 and pope in 590
- Known for advancing missionary work in ancient Britain, and for beginning to standardize church liturgy and music eventually leading to Gregorian plainchant centuries later
- True authorship is unknown, earliest surviving copy is from c. 900; most attribute the hymn to Gregory, others suggest Alcuin of York (735–804)
- Translated from Latin to English by Percy Dearmer for the *English Hymnal* of 1906

Tune: Traditional French, 1681

- Adapted and harmonized from a traditional chant by Ralph Vaughan Williams for the 1906 *English Hymnal*
 - Although mistakenly named CHRISTE SANCTORUM, the original chant was actually “Christe *pastorum*”
 - The first known publication is from a 1681 collection of French chants, *Antiphonarium Parisiense*
 - Scholars agree that the style of the chant is likely not medieval in origin, but from the 17th century
1. What features of the hymn have not aged well, and don’t seem to fit alongside more recent hymns? What features of the hymn still feel natural today?
 - a. Uses Sapphic meter of 11.11.11.5, a traditional meter of classical Greek poetry
 - b. Written as an “evening hymn” which are not commonly sung today

Come, Holy Ghost

Text: Rabanus Maurus (c. 776–856), c. 800

- Frankish by birth; the Franks were a Germanic tribe that controlled much of western Europe during the early medieval period
 - Born in Mainz, became a Benedictine monk in Hesse, both cities in what is today central Germany
 - At the request of his abbot, traveled to Tours (in modern-day France) to study under Alcuin of York
 - Upon return, directed the abbey school and then became abbot himself in 822
 - Following a short retirement in 842, was appointed Archbishop of Mainz in 847
 - In addition to Latin poetry, he wrote extensive commentaries on scripture and an early German-Latin dictionary
 - This English translation is from John Cosin (later an Anglican bishop), from his 1627 *Collection of Private Devotions* and used at the coronation of King Charles I
Tune: Traditional Plainchant, c. 800
 - The tune goes by the same Latin name of VENI CREATOR SPIRITUS, since it originated as a plainchant tune for this text
 - The first recorded occasion on which it was sung was at the Council of Reims in 1049
 - The chant melody is in Mode VIII of the traditional Gregorian system, with the main “final” tone being what we would consider the fifth note of the major scale
1. What features of the hymn have not aged well, and don’t seem to fit alongside more recent hymns? What features of the hymn still feel natural today?
 - a. In its Latin form, used in the Roman Catholic church for Pentecost, as well as at ordination of priests and the election of the pope, bishops, etc.
 - b. The “sevenfold gifts” traditionally are: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord (from Isaiah 11:2)
 - c. Final verse of the original is a doxology (as is also found in “Father, We Praise Thee”)

Not Haughty Is My Heart

Text: Anonymous, 1909

- Of unknown authorship, first published in the Presbyterian *New Metrical Version of the Psalms* from 1909
- The text is a direct paraphrase of Psalm 131, noted as a “Psalm of Ascents”
- Key features shared with other ascent psalms are its brevity, repetition, and hopeful message

Tune: Lowell Mason (1792–1872), 1824

- Born and raised in Massachusetts, moved to Savannah, Georgia as a young adult, and then back to Boston again
 - Despite his interest in music, worked full-time as a banker until 1851
 - Very interested in classical music (and served as President of the “Handel and Haydn Society” of Boston)
 - A large proponent of greater public education (and music education specifically), founded the Boston Academy of Music
 - Known for tunes AZMON (“O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing”), ANTIOCH (“Joy to the World”), and HAMBURG, (“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”), among others
 - This tune OLMUTZ was arranged from a Gregorian chant tune to a four-part hymn
1. What features of the hymn have not aged well, and don’t seem to fit alongside more recent hymns? What features of the hymn still feel natural today?
 - a. Some dated language: “haughty”
 - b. A willingness to “not seek to know” what we’re not supposed to is contrary to the prevailing sentiment today