

Week 8: Celtic Hymns

Alas, And Did My Savior Bleed

Text: Isaac Watts (1674–1748), 1707

- Born in Southampton, England, into a strong Christian, but non-Anglican family (a serious offense at that time)
- Rather than studying at Oxford (which would require him to join the Church of England), completed his college education in Stoke Newington, near London
- For two years after, returned to Southampton and began writing hymns (in large number) for the Congregational church where his family were members
- Many of the 222 hymns in his first published collection, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* of 1707 came from this period in his late teens and early twenties
- In the collection, this hymn was given the title “Godly Sorrow Arising from the Sufferings of Christ”
- He later returned to Stoke Newington to pastor a church there, and wrote over 600 hymns in his life

Tune: Traditional Scottish, 1800

- Originally a Scottish folk tune used for a ballad called “Helen of Kirkconnel”
 - Two composers wrote hymn tunes from the melody around the same time, Hugh Wilson in 1800 and Robert Smith in 1825
 - A lawsuit over ownership of the tune was eventually settled in favor of Wilson, although Smith’s is the more widely used today
 - Interestingly, Wilson set his version in duple meter while Smith opted for triple meter instead
 - The name MARTYRDOM is likely the product of a misunderstanding, as the tune was first named FENWICK after the town where Wilson lived, but was renamed after an editor assumed it was named for James Fenwick, a Scottish martyr
1. One of Watts’ main goals was to translate the “passion” of the Psalms in such a way that the common person could relate to it, and although it drew him much criticism, it also helped his hymns stand the test of time. What different emotions do you see present in this text? Are there any you tend to “gloss over” when thinking about Christ’s death and resurrection?

Christ Be Beside Me

Text: Saint Patrick (387–461), ca. 430

- Born in Britain in the Roman Empire, captured by Irish raiders at 16 and taken to Ireland as a slave
- In captivity, worked as a shepherd and with prayer and meditation converted to Christianity
- After six years, escaped from his master and sailed home where he became a Catholic priest
- Prompted by a vision several years after, returned to Ireland as a Christian missionary
- Later appointed a bishop, with few details about his work surviving outside of legends and tradition
- Original text was a lorica (prayer for protection, literally translated “breastplate” from Latin) leading to its common title of “St. Patrick’s Breastplate”
- Earliest appearance is in Old Irish from the 9th century Book of Armagh and gives its name as “Fáeth Fiada” (meaning “Deer’s Cry”)
- A full versification “I Bind Myself Today” was done by Cecil Alexander (author of “All Things Bright and Beautiful”, “Jesus Calls Us O’er The Tumult”, “Once in Royal David’s City”) in 1889
- This excerpt was adapted by James Quinn, a Scottish Jesuit priest, in 1969

Tune: Traditional Gaelic, 1888

- First recorded by Mary Macdonald, a Gaelic-speaking hymnwriter who used it for her Christmas hymn “Leanabh an àigh” (“Child of Joy”)
 - Published in *Songs and Hymns of the Gael* by Lachlan Macbean, who translated the hymn into English
 - Macbean assigned the name BUNESSAN, after the closest village to where Macdonald lived in the Ross of Mull, an island west of the Scottish highlands
 - When Percy Dearmer and Ralph Vaughan Williams heard the tune, they commissioned a new text “Morning Has Broken” from Eleanor Farjeon to accompany it
1. Despite the simple, repetitive format, there is a surprising amount of depth in the text. As a class, look at each phrase and discuss the deeper implications of each.

For the Fruit of All Creation

Text: Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000), 1970

- Born in Liverpool, England, ordained a Methodist minister in 1928
- Continued in ministry for over 40 years, serving congregations in both the north and south of England
- One of the most prominent and prolific modern hymnwriters, said his goal was to “fill the gap between the hymns of the first part of this century and the ‘far-out’ compositions that have crowded into some churches in the last decade or more.”
- Wrote this text to accompany the tune EAST ACKLAM which was intended as a better alternative to AR HYD Y NOS
- However, the enduring popularity of AR HYD Y NOS still outweighs all other tunes, even for this text

Tune: Traditional Welsh, 1784

- First published in *Musical and Poetical Relicks of the Welsh Bards* for harp and solo voice
 - The Welsh harp is a unique instrument that has three rows of strings rather than a single row as found on concert harps, and features prominently in Welsh folk music
 - The name AR HYD Y NOS is the refrain from the original Welsh lyrics, translated “All Through the Night”
1. This hymn clearly fits in the category of a “harvest hymn” (or, for Americans, a “Thanksgiving hymn”), but what can you see (if anything) that makes this hymn unique compared to similar ones?