

May 17, 2020

Hymns We Love: God of Grace and God of Glory

One of the most popular hymns of the 20th century, God of Grace and God of Glory was written by Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969) for the inaugural service of Riverside Church in New York City on October 5, 1930. When First Church's Pilgrim Hymnal (the red one) was being compiled back in 1965, more requests were received by the hymnal committee for this hymn to be included than for any other 20th century hymn. Fosdick, who had been hired by John D. Rockefeller to serve as Riverside's first pastor, wrote the hymn with the tune REGENT SQUARE in mind. That's the tune we use for Angels from the Realms of Glory.

In reply to an inquiry about how the hymn came to be sung to the Welsh tune CWM RHONDDA, Dr. Fosdick wrote: ". . . about my hymn's divorce from REGENT SQUARE and re-marriage to CWM RHONDDA: the Methodists did it! And both here and abroad they are being followed."

CWM RHONDDA (pronounced ko'om ron'-duh; the letter "w" is a vowel in Welsh) was composed by John Hughes (1873-1932) for the inauguration of the organ in 1907 at Capel Rhondda, in Hopkinstown. It soon became extremely popular throughout Wales. The English translation of the tune name is "valley of the Rhondda," a river in South Wales. Hughes was a lifelong employee of the Great Western Railway who composed hymn tunes and choral anthems in his spare time. His greatest claim to fame rests on the global popularity of CWM RHONDDA, nowhere sung more fervently than in his native Wales, especially at rugby and football (soccer) matches.

Here is a line from the hymn that I believe is especially appropriate as we meet the challenges of a global pandemic: "Grant us wisdom, grant us courage for the facing of this hour."

Listen to God of Grace and God of Glory:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KcFDuUDLsHo&t=39s>

Take care, and keep singing!

