

Hymn to the Holy Spirit

Veni, Creator Spiritus

The ancient hymn known as *Veni, Creator Spiritus* has the distinction of being found in both the Ordinal of the Book of Common Prayer and *The Hymnal, 1940*. It is the only metrical hymn and one of two extra-scriptural hymns found in the 1928 BCP (the other being *Te Deum laudamus*). The importance of *Veni, Creator* is further attested by its presence in *The Hymnal, 1940* in no less than four different translations.

Veni, Creator is given such a place of prominence because it is required at Anglican ordinations of priests and bishops, and it is also an excellent choice for Ember Days, Confirmations, Evensong, the Consecration of a Church, and Whitsuntide (Pentecost and the week following).

Scriptural and Liturgical Context

The first few words of the original Latin text recall the role of the Spirit of God in the creation of the world. We read in Genesis that in the beginning *the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.* This Spirit of the Creator, who brought order out of chaos and who lit the darkness of the primordial world, is now invoked in our hymn and invited to dwell in the soul of each believer, enlightening, comforting, anointing, inspiring.

This sort of intimacy with the eternal Spirit of God would be impossible for men to hope for, apart from the saving work of our Lord, and his promise to send the Comforter on the Church. Prior to his Ascension, he instructed his apostles to wait at Jerusalem until they were *endued with Power from on high*. Although our Lord had commissioned them to go out into the world and make disciples of all men, they were powerless to do so until the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them.

The legacy of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Church at Pentecost has continued to unfold over the centuries of the life of the Church. Over the years the Holy Spirit has called into being a catholic Church out of all peoples and languages, inspired the formation of Holy Scripture into one Canon in two Testaments, strengthened the Church in times of intense persecution and in struggles with various forms of heresy, overseen the formulation of the Creeds, guided the development of a universally recognizable form of ordained ministry, given authority to administer the Word of God and the Sacraments, and empowered the proclamation of the Good News..

Yet we not only celebrate the memory of an event in the distant past, and its unfolding legacy. Generations of devout believers have themselves

received the laying on of hands by the bishops, and have heard the prayer for the strengthening gifts of the Holy Spirit. Generations of men being ordained to the sacred ministry have knelt to receive the imposition of apostolic hands, with the words, *Receive the Holy Ghost, for the office and work of a Priest (or Bishop)*.

The hymn *Veni, Creator Spiritus*, sung at these momentous occasions, teaches that we can hope to receive the strengthening of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit orders the life of the Church generally, and gives power enabling individual Christians to lead a life of devotion to God, charity for their neighbor and witness for the Gospel. If there were no spiritual power available to Christians, then the Church would have died out centuries ago in the face of intense, ongoing opposition from the world.

History: a hymn for all time

For Ordinations, Ember Days, Confirmations and Whitsuntide, the *Veni, Creator Spiritus* is the premiere hymn of the Church, and it should be sung well and often, whether by choir or congregation. The hymn has a long history in the catholic Church, and was present from the very beginning of the development of Anglican forms of liturgy. It is worth mentioning that the presence of the *Veni, Creator Spiritus* in the prayer book caused it to play a central role in the formation of the tradition of Anglican Hymnody as we know it. Winfred Douglas reports that the Anglican clergy who assembled in the mid-19th century to compile *Hymns Ancient and Modern* began their work with an invocation of the Holy Spirit, singing the hymn *Veni, Creator Spiritus*.

Veni, Creator is generally dated to the 9th century, and its authorship (while not certain) attributed to Rabanus Maurus (d. 856), Abbott of Fulda and Archbishop of Mainz. The words of the hymn echo other, more ancient hymns to the Holy Spirit, such as the hymn of St. Ambrose, *Nunc Sancte nobis Spiritus*, found in the hymnal, number 160.

On the eve of the Reformation in England, we find the *Veni* in the Pontifical used for the ordination of new clergy, and also in the Sarum Missal where it was part of the priest's preparation for Mass. Archbishop Cranmer included it in the new Anglican Ordinal, and his translation appears still in the 1662 book. It is the translation by Bishop John Cosin however, in his *Collection of Private Devotions* of 1627, which has become the standard translation appearing in every other traditional Anglican Ordinal. An alternate translation was provided in the 1928 revision of the American prayer book, but it is unique.



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The *Veni, Creator* appears in our hymnal in several places, and in several English translations. The first is number 108, where we find a version of text prepared for the hymnal in 1939 by the Hymnal Commission; at number 217 we find the venerable translation of Bishop John Cosin, with two tunes, and at number 218 the alternate translation unique to the 1928 American prayer book; at hymnal number 371 is a translation by the poet John Dryden, published in 1693. Dryden's translation of the *Veni* is situated in the midst of a portion of *The Hymnal, 1940* for hymns devoted to the Holy Spirit (hymns 368-379). For this designation and for other hymn subject categories, you may investigate the Subject Index of General Hymns on page 799 of the hymnal.

EMBER DAYS AND ORDINATION

217 *VENI CREATOR, 1st Tune* Plainsong

COME, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
And lighten with celestial fire.

- 2 Thou the anointing Spirit art,
Who dost thy sevenfold gifts impart.
- 3 Thy blessèd unction from above
Is comfort, life, and fire of love.
- 4 Enable with perpetual light
The dullness of our blinded sight.
- 5 Anoint and cheer our soilèd face
With the abundance of thy grace.
- 6 Keep far our foes, give peace at home:
Where thou art guide, no ill can come.
- 7 Teach us to know the Father, Son,
And thee, of both, to be but One,

8 That through the ages all along,
This may be our endless song:

9 Praise to thy eternal merit,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.
Latin, 9th cent.

Textual Analysis

The Holy Spirit displayed marvelous power in the creation of the world, bringing order from chaos, shaping that which was formless, and filling the void with God's good creation. Thus we begin *Veni, Creator* seeking inspiration and praying that the same Spirit may now enter our souls, configuring them to God's will. "Come Holy Ghost

our souls inspire, and lighten with celestial fire." The hymn recalls Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost descended upon the congregation of believers as cloven tongues of fire. Various New Testament images for the Holy Spirit are also referenced, for example the "Fountain of Living Water" (John vii.38), "Finger of God" (Luke xi.20) "Fire of Love" (Luke xii.49 & Rom. v.5) and the "Anointing from the Holy One" (1 John ii.20, 27).

We catch a glimpse of the Order for Confirmation in the phrase, "Who dost thy seven-fold gifts to us impart". These are the "manifold gifts" of the Holy Spirit sought by the bishop prior to laying his hand on the head of each confirmand. In this prayer the gifts are enumerated as "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength, the spirit of knowledge and true godliness...and...the spirit of [God's] holy fear." (BCP, 297) In the hymn these gifts are portrayed metaphorically as light, love, strength, protection, peace, and knowledge. The hymn then leads us to hope that we will worship the most Holy Trinity, One God for eternity in heaven. After this life, our "endless song" throughout the ages will be a song of praise to God's "eternal merit".

Available Tunes for 217

For hymn 217 there are two tunes available. The first is a very well-known Sarum Plainsong melody, used also for 108. Although many people seem to have a deep-seated fear of plainsong, this fear is unfounded and may be overcome. With proper instruction and a little effort, most people find it very rewarding to learn plainsong settings. For this setting it is helpful to take note of the barring, or grouping of the notes: wherever the text is set as one syllable to a note of music, the musical notation consists of single, separate notes. However, when the text is set to more than one note for a syllable, the notes are either barred together or grouped by a slur. When performing the Sarum Plainsong, it should be sung A Capella, although an organ harmonization is provided for additional support if it is really needed. The second tune was composed by John Henry Hopkins, an enthusiast of plainsong, and should be sung as plainsong, in flowing manner which does not drag. This tune will be learned more easily by congregations, although there is a surprising cadence on the final 'Amen' that requires the underlying harmony is heard for proper context. Thus the second tune ought to be accompanied by the organist, or sung in four-part harmony A Capella for best effect. Hopkins' setting is used most often at ordinations, for the rubric in the Ordinal requires that the hymn be sung responsorially by the bishop and the priests (and/or others present), and this tune lends itself more easily to that arrangement. Although both tunes are enjoyable, this writer prefers the ancient Sarum Plainsong for general use.

On Justification

Bishop Tom Wright's Perspective

(Note this was part of a debate conducted by e-mail on the Internet: for full details of Bishop Tom's teaching consult the books listed on page 3 above)

1. It's best to begin at the end, with Paul's view of the future.

(a) The one true God will finally judge the whole world; on that day, some will be found guilty and others will be upheld (Rom. 2.1-16). God's vindication of these latter on the last day is his act of final "justification" (Rom. 2.13). The word carries overtones of the law court.

(b) But not only the law court. Justification is part of Paul's picture of the family God promised (i.e. covenanted) to Abraham. When God, as judge, finds in favor of people on the last day, they are declared to be part of this family (Rom. 4; cf. Gal. 3). This is why law court imagery is appropriate: the covenant was there, from Genesis onwards, so that through it God could deal with sin and death, could (in other words) put his creation to rights.

(c) This double declaration will take the form of an event. All God's people will receive resurrection bodies, to share the promised inheritance, the renewed creation (Rom. 8). This event, which from one point of view is their 'justification', is therefore from another their "salvation": their rescue from the corruption of death, which for Paul is the result of sin. The final resurrection is the ultimate rescue which God promised from the beginning (Rom. 4).

2. Moving back from the future to the past, God's action in Jesus forms Paul's template for this final justification.

(a) Jesus has been faithful, obedient to God's saving purposes right up to death (Rom. 5.12-21; Phil. 2.6-9); God has now declared decisively that he is the Son of God, the Messiah, in whom Israel's destiny has been summed up (Rom. 1.3f.).

(b) Jesus' resurrection was, for Paul, the evidence that God really had dealt with sin on the cross (1 Cor. 15.12-19). In the death of Jesus God accomplished what had been promised to Abraham, and "what the law could not do" (Rom. 8.3): for those who belong to the Messiah, there is "no condemnation" (Rom. 8.1, 8.31-9).

(c) The event in which all this actually happened was the resurrection of the crucified Jesus.

3. Justification in the present is based on God's

past accomplishment in Christ, and anticipates the future verdict. This present justification has exactly the same pattern.

(a) God vindicates in the present, in advance of the last day, all those who believe in Jesus as Messiah and Lord (Rom. 3.21-31; 4.13-25; 10.9-13). The law court language indicates what is meant. "Justification" itself is not God's act of changing the heart or character of the person; that is what Paul means by the "call", which comes through the word and the Spirit. "Justification" has a specific, and narrower, reference: it is God's declaration that the person is now in the right, which confers on them the status "righteous". (We may note that, since "righteous" here, within the law court metaphor, refers to "status", not "character", we correctly say that God's declaration makes the person "righteous", i.e. in good standing.)

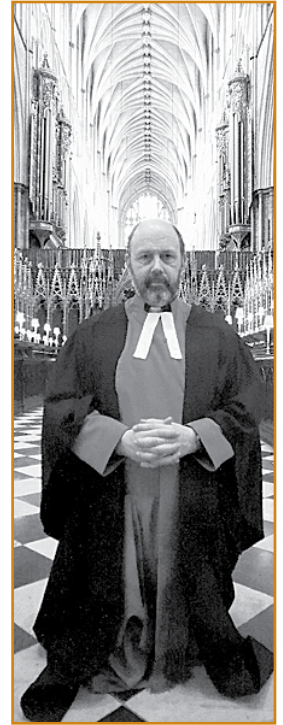
(b) This present declaration constitutes all believers as the single people, the one family, promised to Abraham (Gal. 2.14 - 3.29; Rom. 3.27 - 4.17), the people whose sins have been dealt with as part of the fulfilled promise of covenant renewal (Jer. 31.31-34). Membership in this family cannot be played off against forgiveness of sins: the two belong together.

(c) The event in the present which corresponds to Jesus' death and resurrection in the past, and the resurrection of all believers in the future, is baptism into Christ (Gal. 3.26-9; Rom. 6.2-11). Baptism is not, as some have supposed, a "work" which one "performs" to earn God's favor. It is, for Paul, the sacrament of God's free grace. Paul can speak of those who have believed and been baptized as already "saved", albeit "in hope" (Rom. 8.24).

Among the remaining questions, three matters stand out at the moment.

The "faith" in question is faith in "the God who raised Jesus from the dead". It comes about through the announcement of God's word, the gospel, which works powerfully in the hearts of hearers, "calling" them to believe, or indeed (as Paul often puts it) to "obey" the gospel (Rom. 1.16f.; 1 Thess. 1.3f., 2.13; 2 Thess. 1.8). This faith looks backwards to what God has done in Christ, by means of his own obedient faithfulness to God's purpose (Rom. 5.19; Phil. 2.6), relying on that rather than on anything that is true of oneself. For Paul, this meant refusing to regard the badges of Jewish law-observance ("the works

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On obtaining Prayer Books and associated literature

Where to obtain *The Book of Common Prayer* (1928)

The Book of Common Prayer (1928) in bonded leather is available from Oxford University Press in NYC—1-800-451-7556. However, the pew edition of this same Prayer Book is only available from Anglican Parishes Association, 800 Timothy Road, Athens, Georgia 30606. This press also has available in either leather or hardback the joint BCP 1928 & KJV 1611. See the advert at www.anglicanmarketplace.com or visit www.anglicanbooks.com

Prayer Book Society 1928 Prayer Book Resources

The PBS office does not stock the BCP (1928) in any complete edition. Please obtain from the publishers. However, it does have:

- (a) the 1928 Service of Holy Communion with annotations as a booklet, and
- (b) the major 1928 Services in a paperback, wherein the classic text is on one side and a rendering into a contemporary form of English is on the other side
- (c) the major 1928 Services in Spanish in a booklet; and (d) The Altar Edition of the BCP with the Order for Holy Communion, plus Collects, Epistles and Gospels for the year.

The purpose of (a) and (b), and others which explain the content of traditional Common Prayer, is to help people enter into the doctrinal and devotional world of traditional public worship and prayer. They are available from www.anglicanmarketplace.com or by calling 1-800-PBS-1928

Books on CD

Also, to assist with the understanding and right use of the traditional Prayer Book, the PBS has a growing number of CD's on which are multiple books in digital form, and these books are commentaries on the content of the Prayer Book, Ordinal and Articles of Religion. Again, to see the list visit www.anglicanmarketplace.com

Essays and booklets

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