

## Hymnology

#409 “The Spacious Firmament on High” (Creation): This hymn is an adaptation of the chorus “The heavens are telling” from Haydn’s oratorio *The Creation*. The work, composed in 1797-1798, was first performed at the Palais Schwarzenberg, Vienna, on 29 April 1798. The text of the oratorio chorus was a paraphrase of Psalm 19: 1-2. *The Creation* is considered Haydn’s greatest composition. Down East Singers performed it for Memorial Day in 2017. The celebrated paraphrase text by Joseph Addison has appeared unaltered in every edition of the *Hymnal* since the first edition in 1789. Addison’s poem is the capstone of his discussion of “the proper Means of strengthening and confirming the Faith in the Mind of Man.” Addison maintains that faith is strengthened by morality. Even more effective, he then acknowledges, is “an habitual Adoration of the Supreme Being.” This latter attitude is nourished by “frequent Retirement from the World, accompanied with religious Meditation.” In enumerating the distractions of everyday life, Addison specifically mentions “the Silence and Darkness of the Night” as helpful means of concentrating the mind on higher concerns. Among the illustrations supporting his argument, he cites Psalm 19: 1-4. Addison’s poem – which never uses the word “God” – is a quintessential expression of what is known as “natural theology” as distinguished from “revealed theology.” Even in his own day, Addison’s language and imagery (especially his references to an earth-centered universe) would have seemed archaic. This very artifice of antique formality, however, appeals to an ageless human longing for an ordered creation overseen by a benevolent Creator and accounts for much of the enduring popularity of this hymn. The musical adaptation from Haydn’s oratorio was made by Bishop Simms, organist of St. Philip’s Church, Birmingham, England, and published in 1810.

#675 “Take up your cross, the Savior said” (Bourbon): The original poem was written by the nineteen-year-old Charles William Everest, who later became an Episcopal rector in Connecticut. It was published in the author’s *Vision of Death, and Other Poems* (Hartford, 1833). Hymnologist Percy Dearmer commented: “This is one of those hymns of poor quality which have to be always changed in order to make them possible for use.” Thus an altered form of the text appeared in the *Salisbury Hymn Book* (Salisbury, England, 1858). The first appearance of the tune Bourbon was in a four-part version in the shape-note tunebook *Beauties of Harmony* (Pittsburgh, 1814). In that book the tune was linked with stanzas from Isaac Watts’s metrical version of Psalm 143, beginning with “Look down in pity, Lord, and see.” The name Bourbon may have come from an association with Bourbon County, Kentucky, which was the site of the famous Cane Ridge meeting of August 1801, led by Barton W. Stone. This county, however, is more popularly known for its association with a particular type of corn whiskey, distilled according to a process invented by the Baptist preacher, the Rev. Elijah Craig.

#431 “The stars declare his glory” (Aldine): One of the important aspects of the liturgical movement in the twentieth century is the restoration of the Psalter to its historic place as a reading in the Eucharist. A side effect of this is the impetus it has given poets for the creation of metrical forms of the psalms. This contemporary paraphrase of Psalm 19 is matched here with a tune written for it. “The stars declare his glory” is the work of Timothy Dudley-Smith, a bishop of the Church of England and a major force among contemporary British hymn writers. Written in Sevenoaks, Kent, on 7 April 1970, the text first appeared in *Psalms Praise* (London, 1973). The tune Aldine was written in 1983 by Richard Proulx for use

in our present hymnal. The tune name honors the street in Chicago where the composer resided when he wrote the tune.

#312 “Strengthen for service, Lord” (Malabar): Among the earlier hymns composed by Ephrem of Edessa were several intended for use at the Eucharist. In the collection *Songs of Nisibis* from the time before the Parthian conquest drove the Christians of that area to settle in Edessa, this hymn forms the basis of the prayer chanted by the deacon at the Communion in the Syriac Liturgy of St. James. In the fifth century, the Nestorian Christians of South India created a hymn for Communion derived from this Syriac model. A translation of the Syriac prayer was included in the *Uniat Missal* (Rome, 1844). From the Indian *Liturgy of Malabar*, John Mason Neale made a prose translation for his collection *Liturgies of S. Mark, S. James, S. Clement, S. Chrysostom, and the Church of Malabar* (London, 1859). From Neale’s translation, which was the third remove from Ephrem’s original, C.W. Humphreys produced a metrical rendition. The tune Malabar was composed by David McK. Williams in 1941 for use with this text.

#574 “Before thy throne, O God, we kneel” (St. Petersburg): This text is not found in general use in other English-language hymnals. It first appeared in the *Hymnal 1940*. The editors of that hymnal state that it was published in H.D.A. Major’s *Life and Letters of William Boyd Carpenter* (London, 1925). The tune is by the Ukrainian-Russian composer, Dmitry Bortniansky. Musicologist Konstantin Kovalev-Sluchevsky states that Bortniansky probably wrote the music for Kol’ slaven in 1769 while studying in Italy but it is not clear whether the Russian version or the German version came first. At that time his studies included the setting of German texts. The composer may have met the author of the German version, Gerhard Tersteegen (1697–1769), during the last year of the poet’s life and may have been motivated to write a choral setting of his poem, “Ich bete an die Macht der Liebe.” [I pray to the power of Love]. Tersteegen was a respected spiritual leader and mystic whose poetry had been published in 1731. It was this collection of poetry that became a source for the texts of many Lutheran hymns that were subsequently translated into English. John Wesley translated several of Tersteegen’s hymns into English and they appeared in Methodist hymnals in England. The Russian version, Kol’ slaven, sets the poetry of M.M. Kheraskov (1733–1807), a Mason. The hymn was first associated with Freemasonry in Russia but its popularity quickly grew and it became an unofficial national anthem until it was superseded by Lvov’s “God save the Tsar.” Except during the Soviet period (1917–1991) Kol’ slaven has been used in Russia at public gatherings and military ceremonies such as the christening of ships, lowering or raising of the flag and at military funerals. The singing of hymns with multiple verses in chorale style is not a part of Russian Orthodox worship. For this reason Bortniansky’s hymn is not considered liturgical in the Russian Church but is used mostly for secular ceremonies. In Germany, the hymn is used not only in worship but also for military ceremonies and is occasionally sung as a prelude to the German national anthem.

Material appearing in *Hymnology* is excerpted from *The Hymnal 1982 Companion* (Four Volumes) New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1994, edited by Raymond Glover. Material about Dmitry Bortniansky is taken from the preface to Anthony Antolini’s edition of *Kol’ slaven* published by E.C. Schirmer in 2014.