

“God of Grace and God of Glory” was written in 1930 by Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969) for the dedication of the famous Riverside Church in New York City. Fosdick was granted degrees from Colgate University and Union Theological Seminary. He was ordained in 1903 to ministry in the Baptist Church and became pastor of First Baptist Church, Montclair, N.J. Fosdick served as a chaplain during World War I and then was pastor of First Presbyterian Church in New York City. From this congregation he was called to pastor Park Avenue Baptist Church, which was renamed Riverside Church.

As we sing this hymn, perhaps it is helpful to remind ourselves of the events that shaped the “hour” and the “days” that provide the context for this great hymn. It was written while the United States was in the throes of the Great Depression between the two World Wars. Fosdick was a champion of the social gospel, a movement that recognized the plight of the poor, especially in the urban Northeast during the Industrial Revolution.

The language of the hymn is ultimately that of petition. “Grant us wisdom, grant us courage” concludes each stanza with the effect of a refrain. Fosdick wrote the text to be sung to the stately REGENT SQUARE (usually sung to “Angels from the realms of glory”). Methodist hymnologist and hymnal editor Robert G. McCuthan, however, first paired it with the Welsh tune CWM RHONDDA for the 1935 Methodist Hymnal. It was an immediate success and the new coupling has been almost universally adopted.

Hymnologist William Reynolds says Fosdick disapproved strongly of the new pairing. That discussion notwithstanding, the author of this article objects to the tempo played by many organists who take the hymn much too fast at the beginning, forcing the congregation to race through the prophetic petitions that conclude each stanza. The Welsh tune demands an appropriately stately tempo (think “proceSSIONAL,” not “horse race”) that gives the congregation time to absorb the challenges offered by the poet.

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Psalm 104: 24-35

²⁴ O LORD, how manifold are your works!
**In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.**

²⁵ Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
**creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.**

²⁶ There go the ships,
and Leviathan whom you formed to play in it.

²⁷ **These all look to you,
to give them their food in due season.**

²⁸ When you give to them, they gather it;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

²⁹ When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
**when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.**

³⁰ When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.

³¹ May the glory of the LORD endure forever,
may the LORD rejoice in his works,

³² **who looks on the earth and it trembles,
who touches the mountains and they smoke!**

³³ I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.

³⁴ May my meditation be pleasing to the Lord
in whom I rejoice.

³⁵ **Let sinners be consumed from the earth,
and let the wicked be no more!**

Bless the LORD, O my soul!

Praise the LORD!

Romans 8: 22-27

²² For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. ²³ Not only *that*, but we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. ²⁴ For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for *it* with perseverance.

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

²⁷ Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of* God.

Acts: 2: 1-21

¹ When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. ² And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

⁵ And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. ⁷ Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, “Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? ⁸ And how *is it that* we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.” ¹² So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “Whatever could this mean?”

¹³ Others mocking said, “They are full of new wine.”

¹⁴ But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. ¹⁵ For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is *only* the third hour of the day. ¹⁶ But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ ‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your young men shall see visions,
Your old men shall dream dreams.

¹⁸ And on My menservants and on My maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ I will show wonders in heaven above
And signs in the earth beneath:
Blood and fire and vapor of smoke.

²⁰ The sun shall be turned into darkness,
And the moon into blood,
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.

²¹ And it shall come to pass
That whoever calls on the name of the LORD
Shall be saved.’