

Anthem Notes for February 5, 2017

My Jesus, I Love Thee A.J. Gordon, arr. P. Sjolund (b.1935)

*My Jesus, I love thee, I know thou art mine;
For thee all the follies of sin I resign;
My gracious Redeemer, my Savior art thou;
If ever I loved thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.*

*I love thee because thou hast first loved me,
And purchased my pardon on Calvary's tree.
I love thee for wearing the thorns on thy brow;
If ever I loved thee, my Jesus 'tis now.*

*In mansions of glory and endless delight
I'll ever adore thee in heaven so bright;
I'll sing with the glittering crown on my brow;
If ever I loved thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.*

*My gracious redeemer My Savior art thou;
If ever I loved thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.*

I John 4:19

We love him because he first loved us.

“My Jesus I Love Thee” is a touching expression of love for the Savior that flows directly from the author’s experience of the Savior’s love for him. A remarkable thing about “My Jesus I Love Thee” is that it was not penned by an experienced hymn-writer like many of our favorite hymns. Rather, it was originally written as a devotional poem by teenager who had recently come to faith.

William Featherstone (1846-1873) wrote the words of this favorite gospel hymn when he was just sixteen, at the time of his conversion. It is believed that after writing the poem, he sent a copy to his aunt, who liked it and encouraged its publishing. It was published in an English hymnal called *The London Hymn Book* as an anonymous hymn in 1864 although it was later known to have been written by the young Featherstone.

The text eventually came to the attention of Adoniram Judson Gordon (1836-1895), a Baptist minister and close friend of Dwight L. Moody, who wrote a new tune that he described thus: “in a moment of inspiration, a beautiful new air sang itself to me.” Today the text and tuned are joined as a much loved hymn of assurance and confession of faith, with words of comfort and peace.

Apparently, the Featherstone family still has the original copy of the poem, written in William’s boyish handwriting. He died very young—before his twenty-seventh birthday—and this is apparently

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the only hymn he wrote. Not much more is known about him except that he was a member of the St. James Methodist Church in Montreal, Canada, and it is clear that in spite of his youth, he was wonderfully inspired to express his deep love of Jesus, his Savior.

Adoniram Judson Gordon, composer, took the poem from *The London Hymn Book* and added it to a hymnbook he was assembling, but as mentioned, he wrote a new tune because he did not like the tune to which it was set. His 'new tune' became inextricably associated with the text after he included it in his new hymnal, *The Service of Song for Baptist Churches*, published in 1876. The hymn became widespread and is still included in most hymn books (p. 468 in our green hymnal).

Gordon was born in New Hampshire in 1836. He was educated at Brown University and Newton Theological Seminary. He was ordained in the Baptist church in 1863. He was pastor at churches in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, and at Clarendon Street Baptist Church in Boston, where he served for 26 years.

He was named after the pioneer Baptist missionary to Burma, Adoniram Judson (1750-1850), thought to be the first missionary from the United States. Gordon's father was John Calvin Gordon, named after the reformed theologian, John Calvin. From his name we know that his parents had a heart for reaching others with the gospel, and so raised their son to love God and the sharing of God's Word. Gordon had a remarkable preaching and music ministry in New England, but perhaps putting music to the hymn written by a teenage boy may be the accomplishment in his life that has touched the most lives of all.

Not a lot is known about Paul Sjolund, the choral arranger, which is surprising in this age of instant information. He is an American composer with many published works (perhaps several hundred) and an alumni of Westmont College, graduating in the 1950s. His settings of Swedish hymns are particularly effective and several are in our choir library. Following is a quote from Sjolund in a Westmont College 75th anniversary publication: "Hubbard (a music professor) started me down a road that has become a lifelong career. He gave us an assignment in class to write an original anthem, and he submitted mine to a publisher who accepted it for publication. I am a published composer today because Hubbard took the time to invest in one student."



Adoniram Gordon

Thanks to Jennifer Brobeck, violinist, for accompanying the anthem.