

“Only by grace can we enter, only by grace can we stand, not by our human endeavour, but by the blood of the Lamb”

Over the past few weeks the Blandford Link has featured background to well known hymns and their authors.

On 17th May the chosen hymn was “Amazing grace” and its author John Newton.

I am sure you are all familiar with the story of John Newton. He was brought up by a very pious mother and the complete opposite in a sea-going father. John’s mother died when he was seven and at age eleven he was taken off to sea where he learned to live a riotous life. Press ganged into the Royal Navy; then a deserter – recaptured and punished; naval service over he worked on slave ships; became the prisoner of a slave trader; eventually made master of a slave ship. In 1748 the slave ship *Greyhound* was caught in a tremendous Atlantic storm and liable to sink. This event made Newton start to evaluate his life, a process which eventually led to his conversion and offering for service in the Church and to his active support with William Wilberforce in seeking the abolition of the slave trade.

When first ordained into the Anglican Church John was appointed (1764) to the parish of Olney in Buckinghamshire, where he remained for 16 years. Three years after he arrived, William Cowper - a skilled poet, also moved to Olney and became a lay helper in the parish. In 1769 John started Thursday evening prayer services and for most weeks over the next four years he wrote a new hymn – to be sung to a familiar tune. Later (1779) he and William published “*Olney Hymns*”, containing 68 hymns by William Cowper and 280 by John Newton.

“*Olney Hymns*” became very popular – particularly among the settlers in America. American hymn books still carry some of John Newton’s hymns which are not familiar, today, in the UK.

[An internet search showed that several publishers have a modern American reprinting of “Olney Hymns” - available on Amazon and eBay! For under £15 I look forward to reading more of John Newton’s hymns!]

That featured hymn - “**Amazing grace**” - started me thinking. Most of the hymns of John Newton that I know contain the word “grace”. Is that true for all of his hymns? Asking the question led to an examination of a number of hymn books!

We start with our own Hymns and Psalms where there are 8 hymns penned by John Newton.

Seven of these include the word grace at least once in the hymn:

Number	First Line	Verse[s] in which the word “grace” is found
149	One there is above all others	4
215	Amazing grace	1, 2
257	How sweet the name of Jesus sounds	3
490	Great shepherd of thy people, hear	4
546	Come, my soul thy suit prepare	2
762	May the grace of Christ our Saviour	1
817	Glorious things of thee are spoken	2

What about the remaining hymn? 667 – Begone unbelief

Begone unbelief; My Saviour is near, And for my relief Will surely appear: By prayer let me wrestle, And he will perform; With Christ in the vessel, I smile at the storm.	Why should I complain Of want or distress, Temptation or pain? He told me no less; The heirs of salvation, I know from his word, Through much tribulation Must follow their Lord.
Though dark be my way, Since he is my guide, 'Tis mine to obey, 'Tis his to provide; Though cisterns be broken And creatures all fail, The word he has spoken Shall surely prevail.	Since all that I meet Shall work for my good, The bitter is sweet, The med'cine is food; Though painful at present, 'Twill cease before long; And then, O how pleasant The conquerors's song!
His love in time past Forbids me to think He'll leave me at last In trouble to sink; While each Ebenezer I have in review Confirms his good pleasure To help me quite through.	

Grace, as such, has not been mentioned but the whole hymn is about the assurance brought through grace. Verse 1 reminds us of that 1748 storm while Newton was on the slave ship *Greyhound*, the near fatal which began the transformation of his life from slaver to evangelist.

Turning to the 1933 Methodist Hymn Book I was surprised. I expected to find more John Newton hymns than in Hymns and Psalms – but only five were included and **Amazing grace was not among them!**

99	How sweet the name of Jesus sounds	6 verses as in H&P
100	One there is above all others	4 verses as in H&P
511	Begone unbelief	5 verses as in H&P
540	Come my soul, thy suit prepare	5 verses as in H&P
706	Glorious things of thee are spoken	3 verses as in H&P

Moving forward to “Singing the Faith”. Expectation was met as fewer John Newton Hymns were included but surprise, surprise, there was one hymn which had not found a place in either the MHB or H&P!

322	How sweet the name of Jesus sounds	6 verses as in H&P (his changed to our in verse 1)
440	Amazing grace	6 verses – verses 2 and 6 are not in H&P. Grace now in three verses
748	Glorious things of thee are spoken	3 verses as in H&P (language modernisation in v3 - lines 5&6)

The “new” hymn is 732 (in the Death, Judgement and Eternal Life section of the hymn book). The text has been adapted by Norman Wallwork . When compared to a version in “The Voice of Praise” - an 1873 collection of hymns for the use of the American Methodist Church the adaptation seems considerable.

STF 732

Day of judgement! Day of wonder!
Listen to the trumpet’s sound,
louder than the voice of thunder,
echoes all creation round:
God of mercy, God of glory,
may we then in Christ be found.

See the Judge, our nature wearing,
with the angel he outsoars,
Those who wait for Christ’s appearing
Then shall sing, ‘This God is ours!’
Gracious Saviour, Lord of glory,
own us in that day as yours.

At God’s call we shall awaken,
to the bidding of the Lord;
every nation will be shaken
by God’s own eternal word;
friend of sinners, Christ in glory,
intercede for us with God.

And to those who have confessed him,
loved and served the Lord below,
Christ will say, ‘Come now, you blessèd,
see the kingdom I bestow’.
God of mercy, friend of sinners,
we shall then your glory know.

“Voice of Praise” (*Found in Hymnary.org*)

Day of judgement! Day of wonders!
Hark! The trumpet’s awful sound,
louder than a thousand thunders,
shakes the vast creation round.
How the summons
will the sinner’s heart confound!

See the Judge, our nature wearing,
clothed in majesty divine!
you who long for his appearing
then shall say, ‘This God is mine’
Gracious Saviour!
Own me in that day for thine.

At his call the dead awaken,
rise to life from earth and sea;
all the powers of nature, shaken
by his looks, prepare to flee.
Careless sinner!
what then will become of thee?

But to those who have confessed,
loved and served the Lord below,
he will say, Come near, ye blessèd!
See the kingdom I bestow;
you for ever
shall my love and glory know.

This is another hymn that does not directly mention “grace” but offers the assurance of salvation to those who have received it and turned to the Lord, a warning to those who have not.

I have looked at the contents of several other hymn books.

The Wesleyan Conference Book (1904) includes “Begone unbelief”, “Come my soul, thy suit prepare”, “How sweet the name of Jesus sounds” and “May the grace of Christ our Saviour”.

The Primitive Methodist hymn book of 1885 has “How sweet the name....”, “Come my soul....”, “Glorious things of thee are spoken” and one hymn not seen so far – “How tedious and tasteless”. John Newton uses the seasons to convey joy when Jesus is known, the tedium and tastelessness of life without Jesus.

Hymns for Today’s Church have included six Newton hymns including another which is “new” to our list - a hymn which is full of the grace of God!

Let us love and sing and wonder;
let us praise the Saviour’s name!
He has hushed the law’s loud thunder;
He has quenched Mount Sinai’s flame:
He has freed us by His blood;
He has brought us near to God.

Let us sing, though fierce temptation
threatens hard to drag us down;
for the Lord, our strong salvation,
holds in view the conqueror’s crown;
He who freed us by His blood,
soon will bring us home to God.

Let us love the Lord who bought us,
dying for our rebel race;
called us by his word and taught us
by the Spirit of His **grace**;
He has freed us by His blood;
He presents our souls to God.

Let us praise, and join the chorus
of the saints enthroned on high:
here they trusted Him before us -
now their praises fill the sky:
'You have freed us by Your blood,
You are worthy, Lamb of God!'

“Dying for our rebel race”, “You have freed us by Your blood” - GRACE!

Our final book is the (© 1932, 1935, 1939) hymnal, prepared together by three sections of the Methodist Church in America.

As has already been mentioned, *“Olney Hymns”* became very popular in the USA. It is not surprising to find, therefore, seven hymns by John Newton in this collection, two of which are not included in any of the UK books mentioned. “How tedious and tasteless” (Primitive book) is another included.

These “new” hymns are:

“Joy is a fruit that will not grow”

Verse 2 includes the line “But where the Lord has planted **grace**”

“Safely through another week”

A hymn for the Lord’s Day – verse 2 – “While we pray for pardoning **grace**”
verse 4 – “Make the fruits of **grace** abound”

This hymn book also includes a “Response for closing a service”

Now may He who from the dead
brought the Shepherd of the sheep,
Jesus Christ, our King and Head,
all our souls in safety keep. Amen

John Newton, the reformed slaver, experienced firsthand and lived his daily life with - “the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit”. In his hymns he could not stop offering this “grace” to anyone who would listen, for he knew what we can also experience and sing about today:

**Only by grace can we enter,
Only by grace can we stand;
Not by our human endeavour,
But by the blood of the Lamb.
Into Your presence You call us,
You call us to come.
Into Your presence You draw us,
And now by Your grace we come,
Now by Your grace we come.**

**Lord, if you mark our transgressions,
Who would stand?
Thanks to Your grace we are cleansed
By the blood of the Lamb.
Lord, if you mark our transgressions,
Who would stand?
Thanks to Your grace we are cleansed
By the blood of the Lamb.**

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