

“Love Divine”

Yesterday morning (25/10) I settled down in front of the computer screen to share in the ‘streamed’ service from Holtwood.

Pauline introduced the first hymn, “Love divine”, with a comment about our currently being deprived of the long established Methodist tradition of ‘singing the faith’.

To enable hymns to be used in worship, Holtwood along with many other fellowships, are using videos produced by WLTV (Worship, Lyric, Videos).

I have one small, repeated ‘grouse’ when I see their videos – they only acknowledge the writer of ‘modern’ songs. Hymns written by Charles Wesley, Isaac Watts etc. are shown as ‘traditional’ – are their authors not known?

Back to yesterday morning - How many of you realised that the soloist led us through four verses of “Love divine”? Every Methodist Hymn Book from Wesley’s Hymns forward has omitted one verse – did you think the words were unusual as you ‘sang’ or ‘hummed’ along to the early twentieth century Welsh tune, Blaenwern?

Charles Wesley did write four verses but one has never been included in our hymn books:

*Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit
Into every troubled breast,
Let us all in thee inherit,
Let us find that second rest;
Take away our power of sinning,
Alpha and Omega be,
End of faith, as its beginning,
Set our hearts at liberty.*

There is a suggestion that this verse was omitted as John Wesley objected to the fifth line – “*Take away our power of sinning*”.

I noticed one or two changed words or phrases, yesterday, in the projected words.

“*Let us find that second rest*” became ‘*Let us find the promised rest*’ and the ‘offending’ fifth line, “*Take away our power of sinning*” became ‘*Take away the love of sinning*’.

It would be possible to get into a deep theological argument over the use of “*power of sinning*” or the use of ‘*love of sinning*’!

John Telford in ‘The Methodist Hymn Book Illustrated in History and Experience’ (MHB-1933) quotes John Fletcher touching on the theology of the omitted verse:

‘Mr Wesley says *second rest*, because an imperfect believer enjoys a first inferior rest; if he did not, he would be no believer.’ ‘Take away the power of sinning?’ he asks. ‘Is not this expression too strong? Would it not be better to soften it by saying, “Take away the love of sinning?” [or the bent of the mind towards sin].

Can God take away from us our *power of sinning* without taking away our power of free obedience?’

The equivalent book for Hymns and Psalms (Companion to Hymns and Psalms); to that of John Telford, mentions that it may have been John Wesley who objected to the verse but concludes:

Whatever the reason, the three remaining verses now make a fine and natural structure for the hymn’s ideas.

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