

TIMOTHY DUDLEY-SMITH OBE

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Brian Hoare pays tribute to the great hymn-writer

It is perhaps odd that the hymns of someone who once confessed 'I can't read music and I'm totally unmusical' should today be sung all over the Christian world and in many different languages. What Timothy Dudley-Smith did have in abundance, however, was a keen sense of poetry, a strong understanding of metre and rhythm and a deep knowledge of scripture, all of which combined to make him one of the greatest hymn writers of the twentieth century. Indeed, he has been described as one of the sparks that ignited the late-20th-century 'hymn explosion'.

Timothy Dudley-Smith was born in Manchester, educated at Tonbridge public school and trained for the ministry at Ridley Hall, Cambridge. Ordained in 1950, he served his curacy in Kent before spending seven years at the Cambridge University Mission in south-east London, from where he took many groups of boys to hear Billy Graham at Harringey. This was followed by service at the Evangelical Alliance where he edited the Crusade magazine and then with the Church Pastoral Aid Society, before becoming Archdeacon of Norwich and, for the final ten years of his active ministry, Bishop of Thetford. In retirement his hymn writing continued unabated, and he was awarded an OBE in 2003 for his services to hymnody.

The first hymn Bishop Timothy wrote in 1962 is arguably his best-known: 'Tell out my soul the greatness of the Lord' which he was inspired to write when reading the Magnificat (Luke 1:46ff) in the then recently published

New English Bible. The Poet Laureate John Betjeman described it as 'one of the few modern hymns that will truly last'. The fact that it now appears in no less than two hundred and twenty hymnbooks across the world is testimony to that assertion. Since then a total of more than four hundred hymn texts have flowed from his pen – for he still wrote by hand or at best on a typewriter and never ventured into the world of computers.

Timothy was often asked to write a new hymn for some special place or event, as notably for the centenary of Scripture Union in 1967 for which he wrote 'Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided' – a hymn helped to become widely popular by the tune by Timothy's friend and fellow bishop, Michael Baughen. Such commissions can be so specific that they can't then be used more widely, but he had the knack of writing words which, whilst applicable to the occasion, were always equally usable more widely.

For me it was a privilege to have known Timothy personally, to meet him on a number of different occasions and to contribute tunes to four of his hymns. Along with countless others, I rejoice that he remained a firmly committed evangelical to the end and thank God for the way his hymns have enriched the worship life of the worldwide church for so many people.

REV. BRIAN HOARE

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Tell Out, My Soul, The Greatness Of The Lord

TIMOTHY DUDLEY-SMITH (1926-2024)

*Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his word;
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.*

*Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;
his mercy sure, from age to age to same;
his holy Name – the Lord, the Mighty One.*

*Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by;
proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.*

*Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and for evermore!*