

Hymns

28. Doxology (Old Hundredth)

Louis Bourgeois

(1510-1561)

arr. William Melton

Bourgeois, Louis

(born c. 1510 in Paris; died c. 1561 in Paris)

Little is known of Bourgeois' life before he moved to Geneva as a follower of John Calvin. The Geneva Psalter of 1542 had been a landmark of Calvinist psalmody, with texts in metrical French translations by Clément Marot. Three years later Louis Bourgeois arrived in Geneva to take up posts as a singer and teacher. Beginning in 1551 and over the next decade, he published settings of one hundred Psalms as translated by Marot and Théodore de Bèze. Bourgeois arranged a number of these in four part versions for voices and instruments, though the bulk of them were later harmonised by Claude Goudimel. Bourgeois' efforts in establishing a Calvinist musical canon led to a grant of Genevan citizenship in 1547. He also married in that year and lived with his new bride in a dwelling attached to the municipal choir school. John Calvin himself paid for the publication of Bourgeois' treatise *Le droict chemin de musique* in 1550. Still, a number of disagreements with the city council (in one instance Bourgeois argued in favour of instrumental music, which the city fathers shunned as immoral), a growing family and declining income led to his relocation to Lyons, and by 1560 he was again in Paris.

Bourgeois' melodic setting of Théodore de Bèze's translation of Psalm 134 was first published in the Genevan Psalter of 1551. Here the composer suppressed what his biographer Paul-André Gaillard called his talents as a 'skilful contrapuntist' to deliver a spare, plain setting along Calvin's guidelines. The music appeared in English in tandem with William Kethe's paraphrase of Psalm 100 in William Sternhold and John Hopkins' *The Whole Book of Psalms Collected into English Metre* (1561). Eventually known as 'Old Hundredth' (as opposed to a 'New Hundredth' that was published in 1696), the tune was famously used in 1673 for the closing verses of three hymn

texts written by Anglican priest Thomas Ken (1637-1711) in *A Manual of Prayers*:

Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye Heavenly Host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Ken's words and Bourgeois' music proved a durable combination, and the resultant 'Doxology' — since arranged in varying metre and given treatments by the likes of Dowland, Sweelinck and Vaughan Williams — has remained the most widely-sung English-language Protestant hymn for over three centuries.

Text by William Melton