

Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation, #342, unknown Latin hymn, 7th c author, later translated by John Mason Neale, 1851.

This hymn was written about 650 AD. The story is that this hymn was written for the dedication of a church building. This makes sense from the opening words, “Christ is made the sure foundation, Christ the head and cornerstone...” The hymn has a sturdy feel to it. Surprisingly, after the building was dedicated, the hymn was lost for about one thousand, two hundred years! Have you ever wondered how a hymn that old, and lost that long, could get re-introduced to modern hymnbooks, so that we have it before us in our Trinity Hymnals tonight?

The answer is an Anglican pastor named John Neale. The Rev. John Mason Neale did not like the newer hymns written by Isaac Watts and others. He wanted to revive the ancient Latin hymns. He was the one to do it, since he was very good at languages. People say that he knew 20 languages.

He would take Latin hymns, translate them, and compile hymnals that way. Does that sound boring to you?

Ha, listen to how differently Mr. Neale saw it, for he wrote this, “Some of the happiest and most instructive hours of my life were spent in the sub-committee of the Ecclesiological Society appointed for the purpose of bringing out the (hymnal). It was my job to lay before them the translations that I had prepared and their job to correct any mistakes. The study which this required drew out the beauties of the original in a way which nothing else could have done; and the friendly collisions of various minds elicited ideas which a single translator would in all probability have missed.”

In the front of one of the hymnals that Mr. Neale contributed to publishing, the 1914 edition said, “Mr. Neale seems to me to have always needed some previous [glowing] fire [from a previous age] with which to kindle his torch. When that could be found, his success was very great.”

The topical outline of the hymn shows its progression. Stanza 1 reminds us that Christ has the highest position in the church, continued by Stanza 2, which adds that the church directs praise to Christ. In stanza 3, we progress to praying to Christ to come to the church building to meet the worshippers, followed by stanza 4, which asks Christ to answer our prayers. The last stanza is a final pronouncement of praise and honor to the Triune God throughout the unending ages future.