

Hymn Study
It Is God Who Holds the Nations
By Hilary Donaldson

Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II: Unexpected Turn of Events

An official commission for the Jubilee celebration in Canterbury had already been ordered from Sir John Betjeman, former student of T.S. Eliot, Commander of the Order of the British Empire, knight, and Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom. However, his piece garnered criticism that it was more of a poem than a hymn, and did not possess the singable qualities of Pratt Green's local offering. (In fairness, Betjeman was, in fact, a poet!)

In his commentary for this text in Pratt Green's *Hymns and Ballads*, Bernard Braley writes: "It came as a complete surprise when [Pratt Green] heard from the Archbishop of Canterbury's senior chaplain that serious consideration was being given to including the hymn in the official Order of Service agreed by representatives of all the Churches. So it came to be sung throughout Britain and in many parts of the Commonwealth."

Braley elaborates, "The fact that it was said in the Press to have ousted Sir John Betjeman's poem for the occasion, and much was made of this on radio and television, caused Fred real distress at the time." As it happens, the honour of Most Excellent Order of the British Empire would later be given to Pratt Green, in recognition of his contributions to hymn writing.

A common thread running through the hymn output of Fred Pratt Green is his lyric reflection on the church's place in the world, and our responsibilities as members of it. Pratt Green tends to use gentler or more decorous language than his contemporaries Brian Wren and Fred Kaan. That being said, he does not shy away from writing texts wherein the singer is called to examine his or her own character as measured against our Biblical and historical role models. He uses simple, straightforward language which gives the illusion of effortlessness, but which is intensely fine in its craftsmanship.