

'SONGS OF GOD'S PEOPLE'

The degree of interest, not to say speculation, surrounding the production of the forthcoming supplement to the Church Hymnal is a welcome sign. It indicates that there is both a need for new songs in the worship of the Church and it indicates the dread which some experience regarding the presumed nature of these songs.

A brief historical note is required to context the publication.

The General Assembly of 1986 asked the Panel on Worship to produce not a new hymnbook, but a supplement to the existing hymnbook which would incorporate hymns and songs which were currently being used in churches. As well as making available to all material which had proven its worth, the supplement was to cut down the amount of illegal duplicating and photocopying of popular contemporary songs and choruses. It would also allow a little new material to be shared with a wider group of users.

The Assembly wanted the project to be undertaken as quickly as possible, and that expectation was honoured. A sub committee was appointed under the chairmanship of Rev John L Bell and from September to December the members worked assiduously to collect and select material.

A request was inserted both in the Ministers' Mailing and in 'Life and Work' asking that members of the church should submit to the committee the titles of songs and hymns, not available in CH3 which might be considered for inclusion in the supplement. Before the end of 1986, over 850 hymns and songs had been requested.

The sub committee took note of such requests as well as recognising recent developments in hymnody within Scotland and elsewhere. In this context, the increasing popularity of Taize chants and responses was noted as well as a recovery of interest in hymns and songs from overseas.

In the end of the day, a selection of 120 items was made and, since in recognition of the Assembly's request they had been selected because they had already proven their

worth in different parts of the church, the supplement was given the title 'SONGS OF GOD'S PEOPLE'.

Editing, re-harmonising and arranging the material took until the end of January at which time the manuscript was submitted to Oxford University Press. It is envisaged that the book will be published at the beginning of 1988. The time taken over its production is both an indication of the care which the O U P takes in running several proof copies of the text before printing, and it reflects the length of time required to gain copyright permissions from authors and publishers all over the world.

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When compiling the book, the sub committee had to take cognisance of two potential stumbling blocks - the variety of their own musical and liturgical tastes and their ignorance of what material was being used throughout Scotland. Before the first meeting had passed, we realised that some members had never heard of a Taize Chant, others knew nothing of 'Mission Praise' and others yet were not cogniscent of the beauties of the Revised Church Hymnal. From such a heterogeneous group could not possibly emerge a homogeneous selection. While there was not unanimity on every admission, there was on two major omissions.

There are, in the book, no children's hymns, though undoubtedly several items are suitable for children and the vast majority are well suited to teenagers. It was felt that there were enough collections of children's songs already available and, in any case, the book was meant to be used by the whole church. To have a section for children only would reduce the number of items for comprehensive usage.

The second omission regards what may be called 'performance' songs. Just as there is a kind of 'pop' hymn which in reality requires a solo vocalist with instrumental backing, there is also a kind of 'classical' hymn which, for its singing, requires a skilled choir. While not despising either pop or classical musicianship, we felt that the selection we were making should primarily be aimed at the

musical abilities of non professionals. There are some items which lend themselves to solo singing and there are some which be effectively sung by a choir, but all of these can be equally well employed by a congregation, guild, fellowship or house group.

To describe what has been included, it is easiest to speak generically, and list the different types of songs selected:

A. CONTEMPORARY HYMNS AND SONGS

By far the most widely used alternative praise comes from books such as 'Sounds of Living Waters', 'Jesus Praise', and 'Mission Praise'. These volumes incorporate material from both sides of the Atlantic and the most commonly requested items are included in the supplement.

e.g. Make me a channel of your peace
Alleluia, Alleluia, sing praise to the risen
Lord
Seek ye first the Kingdom of God
Jubilate everybody
Majesty

In all, over thirty such songs were selected.

There are, of course, other sources of contemporary hymns and songs of the genre ranging from the Church Light Music Group, popular in the seventies, to the Roman Catholic charismatic praise. Items from such 'stables' are also included.

e.g. Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us
Like a sea without a shore
The Love of My Lord is the essence

B. THE 'ENGLISH REFORMED' HYMNODY

In the past twenty years, Methodist and U R C writers in England have worked hard and well at producing hymns which married Gospel truths to contemporary society or spoke of the work of Christ in fresh and incisive images. Fred Pratt Green, Fred Kaan and Brian Wrenn are among the best known writers, often working in tandem with tune writers. There are over a dozen such hymns included.

e.g. Here hangs a man discarded
Christ is alive! Let Christians sing
The voice of God goes out to all the world

C. THE SCOTTISH WRITERS

We hesitate to say the 'Scottish School' for they really are a very disparate bunch, but nevertheless the writers in this category represent a healthy reawakening of creativity within our own church. Some, such as Ian Cowie, John Bell and Graham Maule take as their lead the 'incarnational' theology of the celtic tradition of spirituality; Ian White is primarily concerned with rediscovering the importance of the Psalms; other writers such as Andrew Scobie and Ian Cunningham draw on their own experience of working in parish contexts. Material from this source includes:

e.g. Look forward in faith
Will you come and follow me?
Lifted high on the cross
Let us go to the house of the Lord

D. SONGS FROM OVERSEAS

Perhaps the first major awakening in Scotland to the fact that our 'daughter churches' had good hymns of their own, was brought about by Tom Colvin's publications 'Leap my Soul' and 'Free to Serve' which gathered material principally from Malawi. Since then the Vancouver Assembly of the World Council of Churches and the Swedish Church Mission Department has published songs from abroad which grow in popularity coming, as they do, from Third World nations as well as from South Africa and other European Countries. The great advantage of singing such songs is that it underlines our membership of the Church universal and binds us in intercessory praise with Christians in other countries.

e.g. We are marching in the light of God (South Africa)
Jesus the Lord said 'I am the bread' (India)
It's no life (Brazil)
Kneels at the Feet of his friends (Ghana)

E. MEDITATIVE CHANTS AND RESPONSES

Like choruses, of which a few are included in the supplement,

meditative chants have the virtue of being short and easy to learn. Emanating initially from the Taize Community, their numbers have been swelled by similar verses coming from the Iona Community and from other denominations via the W C C. These songs may be used at the beginning or end of worship, while movement or slides are being shown, during the dispensing of the sacrament and at other times;

- e.g. Ubi caritas et amor (Taize)
- Behold the Lamb of God (Iona)
- Kyrie Eleison (Russian Orthodox)

As songs from overseas bind us to the world Church, the use of texts in Latin, Spanish, Greek or English which have over the ages been used liturgically binds us to the historical Church.

F. FORGOTTEN FAVOURITES

Both when CH3 was published and since, disquiet has been voiced regarding hymns which were not included which many people felt should be. These complaints related not only to material 'dropped' from RCH but also to certain popular songs of the 1960's and 70's which had not been selected by the editors of CH3. It would have been impossible to include even a fraction of the forgotten favourites requested, but the most popular were included.

- e.g. By Cool Siloam's shady rill
- What a friend we have in Jesus
- Lord of the Dance
- How great Thou art

.....

What about the music?

While it is hoped that congregations and groups using the supplement will be adventurous to do what the psalmist encourages - 'Sing a new song to the Lord', we realised that not every church is advantaged by a musician able to teach new material. At the same time we did not want merely to insert in Songs of God's People, tunes which were already included in CH3.

What we have therefore done, in many, excepting the 'Mission

Praise' type songs, is both to provide a tune not in CH3 and to refer to a popular tune in the same metre included in CH3.

e.g. Christ is alive! Let Christians sing
... is set to a very fine English tune called
Old Clarendonian and given as a cross reference
Truro CH3 no 446, RCH no 369

When our confidence is shaken
... is set to New Malden and cross referenced
to Regent Square CH3 no 289, RCH no 7

The overseas songs do not have an alternative tune and several of the words from C of S writers are set to traditional Scottish or Gaelic melodies.

e.g. A Touching Place ...to 'Dream Angus'
Lifted High on the Cross to 'Pulling Bracken'
In a byre near Bethlehem to 'Wild Mountain Thyme'

In doing this we may have corrected a balance - Scotland, almost uniquely among European countries, has been very reticent to allow its folk melodies to be set to its songs of praise.

As indicated above, the music has been chosen for its accessibility not to choirs, but to ordinary members of the church. This does not mean that it lacks adventure. Several of the African hymns have easy two part arrangements which have already been used both in cathedrals and in poor church extension charges. Some of the new English tunes do not have a four-square Victorian feel to them and make for interesting singing.

Where appropriate, guitar chords have been offered and also, where appropriate (i.e. where the tune is very evidently an unaccompanied melody) the tune is given alone.

The use of the book will be largely determined by two factors.

The lesser, though in some ways the key, is whether ministers and church musicians will agree to use a selection which may not have as many hymns of their favourite genre as

as they would wish. If an individual is piqued because there are not as many 'Mission Praise' songs or Taize chants as he or she would have liked, we have to plead that the book comes from and to the whole church in its glorious diversity, and not from and to one sectional interest.

We also have to state that this is, to some extent a temporary expedient. We envisage that the life of the supplement may be between 5 and 10 years, whereafter, taking account of reactions to Songs of God's People and prevalent movements in church music at that time, another supplement may be compiled. The 'good and trusty' hymns of the church only gained their lasting significance because initially they proved their worth as temporary expedients. Who would today think that such a treasured hymn as 'Come down O love divine' began its life as a temporary alternative to the then standard hymns of the Church.

The more important factor regarding the use of the book, however, is whether or not churches can rouse themselves to be imaginative and adventurous.

The state of church music in many (though not all) places is lamentable. There are fewer and fewer trained organists, ageing and diminishing choirs, clapped out instruments and an inertia on the part of congregations to 'make a joyful noise to the Lord'.

If we read the situation from the comparative security of a well endowed city or suburban charge the picture will look quite different. But if we take into account the rural situation with a dearth of proficient keyboard players, and the church extension charges where 'lounge bar' organs fail to attract enterprising musicians, the picture is more bleak.

We hope that the emergence of Songs of God's People will provide a focal point from which in congregations and the courts of the church we can look anew at our music making, discern strategies by which to make it more adventurous, and also widen our repertoire of songs for use in worship.

To this end, the Panel on Worship will be inviting interested churches, singularly or in districts or presbyteries to consider launching Songs of God's People in their area at sizeable gatherings. The Panel will then make every endeavour to have representatives available to help arrange such events and to promote the material.

John L Bell,
Glasgow.

A DIP IN THE ARCHIVES

Speaking at the Annual Meeting on 30th May, 1878, Dr Boyd (St Andrews) reflected on the difficulties facing new and inexperienced licentiates conducting their first services.

"Two courses are open to him. He may fall back on the floating traditional liturgy of the Scotch Church and use the stock phrases he has heard from his minister; in which case he may be found confessing in the name of the congregation that their 'father is an Amorite and their mother a Hittite,' and that they 'have yielded the grapes of Sodom and the clusters of Gomorrah'; or he may avail himself of such a volume as 'Euchologion', where he will find a store of devout expression gathered from the Universal Church's rich experience and given in the words of the best of mankind."