

## R E V I E W S

PREACHING ON FAVOURITE HYMNS - Frank Colquhoun.  
Mowbray, £1.38. Paperback £4.75.

The book consists of sermon outlines on 34 hymns. 29 of the hymns are in CH3 and a further 3 in RCH. The two exceptions are Tate and Brady's splendid paraphrase of Psalm 34 - "Through all the changing scenes of life" - which ought to be in (!) - and Montgomery's "Lord, teach us how to pray aright" which, as Canon Colquhoun himself admits "reads rather like the outline of a sermon on prayer". Church of Scotland ministers would find the book relevant and useful.

The hymns selected for comment are arranged meaningfully, opening with Praise, going on to the Cross and Ascension, the Church and the Christian Life, and ending with Death and Heaven. Strangely, no Christmas or Easter Hymn is included, and no Baptismal Hymn. Of the hymns in CH3, I found only one that I can't remember singing, Baxter's  
*"Lord, it belongs not to my care  
Whether I die or live".*

The sermon introduced me to new treasure, and made me feel I ought to have used it!

The general method of the writer is to introduce the hymn by saying what is known about its author and the circumstances of its writing; and (wisely) only if its tune is one that everyone sings, something of the origin of the tune. An exposition of the hymn follows, stanza by stanza, usually under three heads, bringing out the Scripture references and ideas that lie behind the words, and applying them. For instance, on "There is a green hill far away" the sermon introduces us to Fanny Humphreys, later to become Mrs C F Alexander, and stresses the fact that the hymn was written in simple language for children. The opening stanza sets the scene, perhaps inspired by "the view of some grassy slope outside the city walls of Derry". The exposition follows:

1. The mystery of the Cross, st 2.
2. The purpose of the Cross, st 3 and 4.
3. The challenge of the Cross, st 5.

The exposition of stanzas 3 and 4 speaks of "three bold statements" - "forgiveness for the past, holiness in our present life, and heaven... the future tense of salvation."

These sermon outlines show what benefits there are in an intelligent use of a Hymnbook Companion. I wonder how many know that Charles Wesley, impressed by Purcell's elaborate tune to Dryden's "Fairest isle, all isles excelling", wrote "Love Divine, all loves excelling" to be sung to the same tune? Or that "O God, our help in ages past" was written during the troublous times at the end of Queen Anne's reign? Or that "The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended", was originally written, not primarily as an evening, but as a missionary hymn?

Sometimes one gets a shock, as when "All people that on earth do dwell" is described as "the earliest English hymn - that is, hymn written in the English language - still in general use today". Colquhoun puts the record straight by adding later that it was written by "William Kethe, a clergyman of the English Church, but probably a Scotsman by birth".

The sermons abound in felicitous statements. Noting that Herbert's "King of glory, King of peace, I will love thee" was originally entitled "Praise", Canon Colquhoun comments: "One thing we learn is that praise is the expression of our love for God. It is the language of the heart's peace... We are given the power to love in order that we may love God... To put adoration at the centre of worship is to prevent it becoming unduly subjective and sentimental. God must dominate our worship, not we ourselves."

On "My song is love unknown": "Who am I? An unworthy sinner? Yes! But a worthless one? No!... The life of every one of us is invested with a new value because of the love that was not only made flesh for us at Bethlehem, but also made sin for us at Calvary.

On "Time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all it sons away": "The 'sons' referred to are not our sons, but the sons of time: a poetical figure denoting the days and weeks and years of the past. It is these that are so soon forgotten."

The comments on the verses of "O Love, that wilt not let me go" are very helpful, but too extended to quote here.

I have two criticisms on matter of detail:

1. On page 49, commenting on  
*"Humbled for a season, to receive a name  
From the lips of sinners, unto whom he came"*  
Canon Colquhoun says: "Surely it was the lovely name of 'Saviour', the name bestowed on him by 'sinners'." Would it not be more correct to speak of Jesus, the Lord's human name, here, connected as it is with being "humbled for a season"? It is of course true that the reason for the given name was that "he shall save his people from their sins".
2. On page 97 the stanza "Return, O holy Dove, return..." as it stands suggests that the Holy Spirit can be driven away from us by our sins. He can certainly be grieved, but not driven away, even though the backslider may feel his absence. A comment could have clarified this point.

There are a few minor misprints - ones I have noted are on pages 37 athe/the, 54 humn/hymn, 67 close quotation after 'once for all', 74 had/has and 118 a while/awhile. Allusions to Psalm 51: 5 on p 76 and Job 13: 15 on p 78 would have been helpful.

I hope this helpful book will sell well, and that it will soon be reprinted in a smaller format at a lower price.

William G Young

NEW SONGS OF PRAISE 2 - Oxford University Press/BBC  
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Of this collection of ten hymns it is tempting to write,  
"We've seen them all before, better dressed."

"New Songs of Praise 2" does not live up to the standards of its predecessor in quality, range or excitement. If you are looking for a tune to remember, you won't find it here. With the exception of two known chorale melodies, the new music is reminiscent of that style of the sixties' hymn tune where either the novelty of occasional dissonance in the accompaniment or a flattened seventh half-way through the melody was all the rage. John Barnaby's tune Coln St Dennis escapes this, being folk-like in style and suitably marrying itself to a paraphrase of Psalm 42.

As for the words, Brian Wren's "Encounter with Christ" is miles in front with few contenders. His language and images are consistently fresh and challenging:

*"Holy Spirit storm of love,  
Break our self-protective walls"*

Set to "Nicht So Traurig", the hymn would be better suited to "Heathlands" or, surprisingly, "Christ, whose glory fills the skies".

Otherwise, with the possible exception of Brian Foley's "For Call to Faith", there is little of moment. Even James Quinn's bereavement hymn, "Word of God" is but rarely stimulating to the imagination or the spirit.

This book is not intended to be bulk-bought for choirs or congregations. The Preface suggests that congregations may wish to choose some of the hymns for their own use and write, as directed, for permission to reproduce them.

John L Bell