

SINGING OUR SONG OF GOD

In common with most, if not all Ministers, I was unhappy about a great deal of the material in the Revised Church Hymnary and was therefore anxious for there to be a new book, and hopeful that that new book would constitute a significant improvement in all areas, liturgical, theological, musical and poetic.

My organist in Kirn and our Kirk Session were keen to 'go on' to the new hymnary as soon as it was published: accordingly we ordered and obtained the required number of Music editions, and 250 Words Only copies on the day of publication, 21 June 1973: on Sunday, 24th, the book was introduced to the congregation and we have since used it to the exclusion of all else. We resolved to use the basic edition, preferring not to use the Psalter at all but to make use of the Psalm selections included in the CH 3. It is, of course, entirely possible to employ the new book in worship for a long time without ever risking any of the new material: in this way the edge of change can be blunted for congregations and all they experience is a measure of irritation at having to learn new numbers: somehow the 23rd Psalm lacks something when proclaimed as Hymn 387 (and it lacks a great deal more for the rash who attempt to sing it to Searching for Lambs). However, we resolved to introduce new material, both words and music, right away. This is not difficult: tunes such as Rhuddlan, Westminster Abbey, Repton, Miniver, Sursum Corda, Blessing and Honour and Glory and Power (why not call it Bonnie George Campbell?), O Waly Waly, Montrose and many others are either easily learnt or familiar from 'Songs of Praise'. Likewise the use of tunes such as the Old 124th to new sets of words enabled a speedy introduction of new verbal material. Other tunes we attempted from the outset were: Christ Whose Glory Fills the Sky, Pleading Saviour, Rustington, Durrow, Eisenach, Royal Oak and Michael.

We learnt a number of things: the principal one being that congregations are far better able to learn tunes than we are inclined to suppose: we found that only a complete playover was necessary and enough people picked it up to make the first verse sound reasonable and by the end it was being sung as if it had always been known. I feel, as do the choir, that too much of the material is in unison and lies too high: it is much more sensible to give a harmony version and leave it up to the Organist to decide whether to have it sung in unison or in harmony: generally in this book the option is foreclosed. To the question of music I shall return, but one benefit of unison settings is that in learning new material a unified lead is given by the whole

choir to the congregation. Possibly because we introduced CH 3 in this complete way and the congregation were deprived of all alternative (not to say consultation!) there have been singularly few complaints. Although it goes without saying that in planning the praise I always choose a balance between the familiar and the strange.

The most significant change wrought by the adoption of CH 3 lay in the construction of the Order of Public Worship: for various reasons the order in force at the time was one which placed four items of praise before the sermon, with one after: the Offering and Prayer of Consecration were after the sermon, but the prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession preceded the Preaching. It was clear to me that the lay-out of CH 3 required that we look again at this, and its publication presented us, or rather me, with an opportune moment to introduce an order that is both Catholic and essentially Sacramental in structure: when one considers that almost half the book is entitled Response to the Word, it seemed sensible to make alteration: the Order we adopted is thus:

Choral Introit
Praise
Prayers
Proclamations and Intimations
Scripture Lesson (OT)
Praise
Scripture Lesson (Epistle and Gospel)
Praise
Sermon
Praise
Offering
Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession
The Lord's Prayer
Praise
The Blessing and Choral Amen (Dresden)

This order allows for a number of possibilities: it employs, or at any rate makes possible, a full use of all sections of the book. The evening order is the same, except that the second item of Praise is an anthem: on Sacramental Sundays the last item of Praise leads into the Sacrament (when the Lord's Prayer is placed in the Sacramental liturgy): it brings closer together the reading of the Word and the exposition thereof: it can also be abbreviated for shorter services, such as an early morning summer service, or an additional early Communion, to preserve the essential character of the order. Now that I have been using this order for over a year it seems the most natural way of conducting worship and is much appreciated by the congregation. We have also on the main Communion Sundays replaced the third item of Praise with an Anthem (such as the Kenneth Leighton

'Gloria in Excelsis' No. 62) followed by the saying of the Nicene Creed. The Apostles' Creed is said in Baptisms, the other praise remaining unaltered. I am bound to say that it would be my view that full advantage simply cannot be taken of the lay-out and content of the book unless some similar order is used, stressing as it does the movement of the service.

I want now to offer some more specific reactions to the book under various headings: presentation, words, music, and children's praise.

First, presentation: the book is quite atrociously laid out in my view: an immense amount of space has been wasted: e.g. at Hymns 9, 17, 18, 41, 43, 52, 111, 117, 128/9, 194, 213, 219, 234, 243, 329/330, 335, 384, 466, 467 and 544: this space could easily have been used to give second tunes instead of cross references, or simply to make the book smaller. There are some quite awful page turns, e.g. 318: there are too many instances of the first lines of tunes appearing at the bottom of a page, e.g. 266, 277, 349 (particularly bad for a chant), 50, 145 and 311, and there are some irritating examples of unnecessarily small print, e.g., 64, 470, 392 and 583. There seems to be no excuse for a firm of Oxford University Press's standing permitting such sloppy presentation: the Words Only editions are quite unbelievably badly presented: on page after page single lines appear, odd verses appear, and page turns have to be effected at very awkward moments (e.g. a quite appalling page turn in the Nicene Creed): one really hoped for a great deal better than this in terms of pure publishing standards.

Secondly, Words: I am disappointed that there are so few modern sets of words, and hymns dealing with essentially twentieth-century problems: not nearly enough are couched in contemporary language, or employ imagery that is fresh or unexpected. It may be that there is a paucity of good modern hymn writing: it may be that there are no Scottish or other English language poets who could have been commissioned to write some material for submission: but far too much of the material is cautious and conservative. I was particularly disappointed not to find a modern language version of the Lord's Prayer or the Communion Sentences (559-562) included. This is a lamentable failure in my view: it's all very well for the Committee on Public Worship and Aids to Devotion to send out a card in modern English – surely this could have been in the book: apart from which there is an agreed ICET version of the Lord's Prayer printed as long ago as the 1970 General Assembly Blue Book (p. 185) followed in 1971 (p. 203) by an exhortation to Ministers to note this 'significant publication'.

Obviously individual criticism is a highly personal matter, but I am sorry to see retained in the book or introduced a number of hymns without which the book in my view would have been better: if we have to have 78, 81 and 82 they ought to be in the 'slush' section at the end:

hymns such as 132, 147, 303, 410, 411, 412, 444, 604, 608 and 633 are of extremely doubtful merit and could have been omitted without loss: some sets of words are placed in curious sections, e.g. 58 in the Evening Section (how many children do you get to your evening service?); 88 might well have been in the Response half of the book: and 263 seems oddly placed in the Easter section. The mind of the Committee is also discernible when basically unwanted words are given unusable or badly laid out tunes, clearly in the hope that they will drop out of fashion and not require to be retained in CH 4: e.g. 410, 411 and 445: the familiar 'Ye Gates' is a good illustration of this principle at work: it is not indexed on the dubious ground that it is only part of a Psalm, and the dreadful way the tune is laid out indicates that the Committee would have preferred to omit it altogether; the layout in the 1929 Scottish Psalter was much better. A number of hymns are too long and heavy for the average congregation, and too often the tunes accompanying these long hymns are ponderous. Of the allegedly contemporary words one or two examples are pretty grim: 141, for instance, attempts to deal with creation in modern thought forms but commits the terrible contradiction of using Thou, Thy, mad'st, lov'st, etc: this is not a modern hymn at all: and when allied to such a perfectly ghastly tune containing no obvious musical merit whatever then it can safely be assumed that this hymn will never be used, not even as an anthem. One other point in the words: why could we not have had an italicised 'him' in 552 replacing the sexless 'it' in a fine Baptismal hymn?

Thirdly, Music: On the whole the music is similar to the words: not very exciting or imaginative: mind you, when I look at some of the modern material I am not ungrateful for such a large amount of old, and familiar, music. I have, of course, a welcome for the new Christmas and Easter music, for the additional sacramental music, for the Gelineau (pity we couldn't have had the Gelineau Psalm 24), for the Kenneth Leighton Communion Service, and for the undoubtedly fine tunes introduced: and equally I am sorry about saying farewell to some tunes which seemed to me to be perfectly all right, and certainly no worse than what has replaced them. I would have liked more Chorales, I would have liked to see some of the Psalm tunes employ the older rhythms as found for instance in the 1635 Scottish Psalter, and I would have liked one or two more 'risks' to have been taken with tunes which the Committee presumably considered transitory but which are of sufficient merit for them to have been taken up and preserved. Too many of the tunes are rather dull, e.g. 59, 114, 230, 278, 393, 499, 531 and 624: these tunes are just not very interesting, or in some cases particularly appropriate to the flow of words. It might have been worth putting in Camberwell at 300, George Parkhill's tune for 236, and if we have to have 'All my

Hope on God is founded' it scarcely merits three tunes and four pages. I feel too that there are many instances of change for change's sake: e.g. at 172 Village could perfectly well have been used with a cross reference to Forest Green: the layout of 201 leaves sufficient room for a second tune to 'Brightest and Best'. One real problem is 'The Lord Bless You'; I am grateful for the 'you' both singular and plural, and readily concede that the familiar RCH tune lent itself to a measure of sentimentality, but it could have been retained along with one or more of the alternative versions: it is very difficult for some Churches to learn the new tune when they may not have a sufficient frequency of occasions to use it, and the use of Lille at weddings (let alone the others offered) is just not on, even with a Choir in attendance – not that is, if you want the congregation to share in the Blessing. Some tunes are used too often, it seems to me, e.g. Solemnis Haec Festivitas is used five times and cross referred once (and its title is misprinted at 56), Montrose four times, Southwell four times, Winchester Old, Martyrs, etc. This frequency could have been reduced to allow for the retention or introduction of other material. I would like to have seen Westminster Abbey set lower at Hymn 10, the Harmony version of Repton used instead of the very thick unison setting, Effingham given at 167, Sheffield used at 285, and if we have to endure 374 there is nothing wrong with the Billy Graham tune. Could Wachet Auf not have been put up even half a tone and could not Martyrdom (in its $3/4$ rhythm) have been placed in the main part of the book: could we not have had sung versions for the Lord's Prayer and the Creeds? The less said about Orb the better, and perhaps an honest researcher deserves something for Anglicising the Psalm tune nomenclature at 390 and 394!

And lastly, Children's Praise: I must give a warm welcome to many of the items suitable for children. I think the scattering of the children's material throughout the book is a reasonable enough exercise, even if in most Churches the Children's Hymn occupies a regular slot in the service. One feels that again some slightly more adventurous hymns might have been risked. I have already referred to the curious placing of 58 and the Parkhill tune for 236: in addition 152 seems pretty weak to me, and 280 leaves me a little unhappy. I am pleased to see that we are spared two verses at 384, we could have done without them all; it's a good tune though, if a better set of words had been found for it: and 449 is not an easy tune for children, but well worth working at because of its rhythm.

In conclusion: I cannot give the book an unqualified welcome: I didn't expect to: but it has too many blemishes and I am therefore to some degree disappointed in it. I recognize that personal taste comes into this of course, and I do like a lot of the material and the liturgical layout. I am glad too that the introduction is printed in the Words

Only editions and hope that members will read it, even if, like me, they are somewhat baffled by the first three sentences of the second paragraph on p. viii: I really don't know what these words mean, they seem to me to be high-sounding waffle. The book has obvious ecumenical possibilities and I hope will be of service in united occasions of worship. The book is an improvement on RCH: this is not a lot to say because this one is not as good as it might have been and RCH not as bad as too many said.

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* Mr. Keddie has announced his departure (in Sept. 1975) for Grace Presbyterian Church, Calgary. We send him our congratulations and good wishes but regret that we shall be unable to retain his services as Associate Editor.

I.A.M.