



Reviews

EDITOR: John Nicholls, 17 Upper Trinity Road, Halstead,
Essex, CO9 1EE. Tel. 01787 473089;
e-mail: jgmicholls@classicfm.net

An opportunity missed*

John Nicholls

TO REVIEW a hymn book is always difficult; inevitably it will be assumed that the reviewer has only expressed his own subjective opinions. This reviewer acknowledges this to be the case, and he has tried therefore to be as objective as possible in reviewing the second edition of *Praise the Lord* by considering primarily the words of the hymns and how closely they interpret, or indeed directly use, the words of Scripture. He has therefore largely ignored the music, since musical tastes and fashions vary from age to age and between the generations of contemporaries. This is not to say that he believes the music to be unimportant, but rather that this is such a subjective aspect as to make review almost impossible.

The importance of the words

There can be no doubt that singing, particularly the singing of psalms, was intended by God to help us memorise His Word. After the first breaking of bread, a psalm, probably 118, was sung by Jesus and the disciples. The apostolic ecclesias sang "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), and the latter verse clearly shows that these were a vehicle of instruction and admonition in the words of God and of Christ. The words of hymns are therefore paramount.

The psalmist stresses that our singing of hymns is to be with our understanding: "For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding" (47:7). When King David was making the arrangements for the musicians who would afterwards perform in the temple, he "separated to the service of the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, with psalteries, and with cymbals" (1 Chron. 25:1, cf. vv. 2,3). Prophesying would mean teaching. So our hymns should teach us the Word of God, and the tunes should help us to memorise scriptures. These are the principles that underlie this review of *Praise the Lord*.

Unheeded criticism

The first edition of *Praise the Lord* was published in 1993, and was reviewed in *The Testimony* in December of that year by Brother Reg Carr.¹ Considerable criticism was made, along with some praise. 130 hymns made up the first edition, and in this second edition a further 170 hymns have been added. This reviewer looked in vain to see if the dubious hymns mentioned in Brother Carr's review had been altered at all; for example, the hymns including sentences and phrases suggesting that the Holy Spirit can work directly in the believer. Several of these were cited, but this reviewer could find no deletions or alterations to any of these hymns. Other doctrinal errors mentioned on pages 457 and 458 of the 1993 review also appear not to have been expunged from this second edition. This review is concerned with the additional 170 hymns, and makes no further comment on those reviewed earlier; interested readers are referred to Brother Carr's comprehensive review.

Sadly, the same idea of direct Spirit guidance (as opposed to the Scriptural teaching of guidance from the Word of God, and by the angels supervising events and circumstances in our lives) is to be found in the new hymns as well. There is, for example, Hymn 152: "The evening draws on, the sun disappears, /but Jesus is living, his spirit is near"; or hymn 167: "All pow'r is given in Jesus' name . . . and in Jesus' name I come to you /to share his pow'r as he told me to". Hymn 216, "Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us", twice has the refrain: "into our lives your power breaks through, living Lord".

* *Praise the Lord* song book, second edition, £10 words and music, £3 words only, both plus postage and packing. Available from Sister (Mrs) Alison Tarrant, 24 Barrie Road, Moor-down, Bournemouth, BH9 2XE.

1. "Moody and Sankey revisited", p. 455.

Two further examples are Hymn 220, which has in verse 2: "Lord of all wisdom, I give you my mind,/rich truth that surpasses our knowledge to find,/what eye has not seen and what ear has not heard/is taught by your spirit and shines from your word"; and Hymn 221, which has a chorus that includes the phrases: "fill this land with the Father's glory; blaze, spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire". There are also other examples of dubious, ambiguous teaching on the Spirit which the reviewer found.

Loose reflection of Scripture

Another most disappointing aspect of these 170 hymns is the loose way in which the words of some of the hymns reflect Scripture. Many of the hymns in the 1964 *Christadelphian Hymn Book* faithfully reflect a passage of Scripture, so that when we sing them we are almost singing verbatim the Scripture itself. But time and time again in *Praise the Lord* there is only a cursory or subjective use of Scripture (though this is not always so, see below).

Here are some examples. Hymn 138 has a flowery interpretation of Isaiah 44:1-4 and 55:10, 11, talking about "moonlight and starlight", "sleep that follows fever", "gold instead of grey", but the Scripture in Isaiah speaks about the Word of God being like the rain and snow that bring life. Hymn 142, "Be still my soul", is said to be based on Psalms 37 and 46, but they are hardly recognisable in the hymn, which ends in verse 3 with sentiments suggestive of heaven going: "Be still, my soul: when change and tears are past,/all safe and blessed we shall meet at last". (Hymns 8 and 12 in the 1964 *Hymn Book* are based very closely on these two psalms.)

The chorus of Hymn 169 runs, "God is in the silence,/in the silence of the mind", supposedly based on Habakkuk 2:20, but in fact bearing little resemblance to it. In contrast, Anthem 39 in the *Christadelphian Hymn Book* enables us to sing the actual words of this lovely verse, which is clearly a reference to the Kingdom, when God's glory fills the earth. Hymn 185, "I lift my eyes to the quiet hills", is based on Psalm 121 and other scriptures. In this reviewer's view, it is Hymn 21 in the 1932 *Christadelphian Hymn Book* which expresses most clearly the idea of the first verse of the psalm: "Not to the hills I lift mine eyes,/From whence doth come mine aid?/My safety cometh from the Lord,/Who heav'n and earth hath made". The whole of this hymn (which is slightly different in the 1964 book) faithfully re-

produces this lovely psalm, which sustains us and rests our minds on the protection that comes from the God of Israel.

Hymn 211, "Let there be love", starts with: "Let there be love shared among us, let there be love in our eyes, may now your love sweep this nation"; and later says: "Give us a fresh understanding of brotherly love that is real". It is said to be based on 1 John 4:7, but a cursory examination of the context of this verse shows that the real spirit of love amongst brethren is that they help one another to walk in the doctrines of the Truth, and not in the spirit of error and apostasy. The hymn gives an erroneous impression of what Scripture teaches. Hymn 277, "To be in your presence", is supposedly based on 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 and Luke 10:38-42. The first verse goes: "To be in your presence,/to sit at your feet,/where your love surrounds me,/and makes me complete./This is my desire, O Lord,/this is my desire". But Luke simply says: "Mary . . . sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word".

The reviewer has found more examples of this kind, particularly those hymns taken from *Thank You Music*. The writers of these hymns, and others whose works are used, clearly hold doctrinal errors, and do not highly esteem the Word of God. We need to heed the warnings of God through Moses when Israel was about to enter Canaan. They were to destroy the Canaanites so that they did not learn their ways and ideas. Under Christ we need to shun the apostate ideas of Christendom around us and reject its teachings, which will undermine our faith.

Scriptural hymns

By contrast, there are a few examples of hymns where Scripture is closely adhered to, some outstanding. These, it has to be said, are mostly written by Christadelphian authors. Hymn 162, by Brother Roy Standeven, "Father, we seek your blessing now"; Hymn 199, "Israel, return unto the Lord", containing the words of Hosea 14 set movingly to a melancholy Hebrew melody; Hymn 231, "May the grace of the Lord Jesus"; Hymn 236, "Now unto him who is able to keep"; and Hymn 238, "O God of Abraham we pray to you", are all examples of good hymns that stick closely to, or are the actual words of, the Scriptures, and that all Christadelphians should be happy to sing. The reviewer has found several others in this category, often with lovely music, and it is a pity that so many dubious hymns from apostate publishers have found their way

into *Praise the Lord* when clearly there is the ability to produce from the resources of the Brotherhood hymns that express the distinctive ideas of the Truth and the Word of God.

Doctrinally unbalanced

The other major concern felt by the reviewer is that some key doctrines of the Truth are omitted or have a poor representation in this second edition. For example, one hymn, number 246, is based on the Parable of the Virgins in Matthew 25:1-13, but there is not one mention of the foolish virgins nor their rejection by Christ at his coming. Contrast this with Hymn 203 of the 1964 Hymn Book, which contains several references to the possibility of being found a foolish virgin and being disowned by the heavenly bridegroom. In the subject index of hymns at the beginning of the book there is no mention of death or judgement. The great lie of the serpent, which has found its way into all world religions and philosophies, is not refuted in this book.

But perhaps the most serious lack of balance is the relative paucity of hymns about prophecy, Israel, the Kingdom and the return of Jesus. There are some, but not enough in view of the weight that Jesus and the apostles gave to prophecy and the Kingdom. The reviewer counted about forty out of 170 hymns that made at least a small reference to either prophecy fulfilling, the return

of Christ, the resurrection or some mention of Israel and Jerusalem of the future and of our great hope.

Conclusion

The second edition of *Praise the Lord*, in the reviewer's final analysis, is an opportunity missed. Hymn books need revising from time to time as musical tastes alter, and we need to remember that our young people and interested friends should be able to relate to our worship, which we hope they will join one day. We must not let them think that we are sunk in a Victorian time warp when it comes to hymns.

But it appears that no heed has been taken of critical comments about the first edition. The need to preserve the distinctive ideas of the Truth has been laid aside for too many egocentric hymns. A disproportionate number of hymns dwell on the sacrifice of Christ, with insufficient on the joy of our hope, and of its reality when Christ comes and awakens those asleep in the dust of the earth. And there are hints of false teaching in some hymns, largely due to the use of apostate publications. These matters make the reviewer feel wary and uncomfortable about using this hymn book; for, above all, a hymn book should be an instrument to teach us the Scriptures and give us joy and comfort as we sing from it.



Prophecy, History and Archaeology

EDITOR: Tony Benson, 26 Tiercel Avenue, Norwich, NR7 8JN. Tel./Fax 01603 412978; e-mail: rabenson@globalnet.co.uk

Before the Flood (1)

Tony Benson

IT IS GENERALLY accepted today that the history of mankind is one of gradual evolution over long periods of time. Over many millennia men developed, by a slow process of discovery, skills and technologies that we now take for granted, such as fire, writing and the wheel. Thus, in process of time, there grew up the great civilisations of the ancient world, Egypt, Babylon and so on.

This view of the history of mankind is not in accordance with the account of the creation of

man in Genesis, nor with the chronology given there, which allows for only 6,000 years since Creation. Furthermore, if we take the language of Genesis at its face value, the human race began again about 4,500 years ago with eight members, following a universal flood which wiped out all other human beings.

Man's history in conflict with the Bible

We are used to having to reject, on the basis of our acceptance of Scripture teaching, the idea