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The Baptist Hymn Book

BAPTISTS now have a new hymnal. What are we to make of the labours of this editorial committee whose degrees roll down like a mighty stream? Inevitably some judgments will be wide of the mark; for the critic who is stranger to the prolonged process of argument and discussion that led the committee to its final conclusion lacks some of the material necessary for accurate assessment. Nevertheless, with that warning given and leaving the experts to fire the measured salvos and initiate the precision shooting, we may venture some initial reactions.

Many will surely regret that the possibility of producing a Free Church Hymnal has once more receded into the distance. A commitee under the chairmanship of Dr. Hugh Martin must have considered the challenge, but decided presumably that "the time was not ripe." I wonder whether it ever will be, if we all go on like this. It is interesting to notice that[1] RBCH, CP, and MH have in common 331 hymns and 293 tunes, while BH, CP, and MH have in common 351 and 342. In terms of the most recent Free Church productions—BH and CP have in common 482 hymns and 477 tunes (as against RBCH and CP in common 420 and 350). Clearly common ground is steadily increasing, and it is evident that the problem of divergent traditions in hymnody is no longer insuperable. If the difficulties lie in other directions, let them be dragged out into the light of day that we may know them and grapple with them. It is increasingly odd to find oneself dealing with hymnals that are catholic in content but denominational in name.

However, we must reckon with what is rather than with what might have been. We are offered 777 hymns as against the 786 of RBCH. A comparison with other hymnals *in the order shown* yields the following information. Of the total of 777 there are found in RBCH 490. Of the remaining 287 there are found in CP 126. Of the remaining 161 there are found in MH 48. Of the

[1] Throughout, BH = Baptist Hymn Book, RBCH = Revised Baptist Church Hymnal, CP = Congregational Praise, MH = Methodist Hymn Book, BBCH = B.B.C. Hymn Book, PH = Pilgrim Hymnal (U.S.A. 1959), ChP = Christian Praise, SSP = Sunday School Praise, SP = Songs of Praise, GB = Golden Bells, EH = English Hymnal. Though the statistics given are dependable, their final accuracy cannot be guaranteed, since the same hymns sometimes appear in different books in various forms, and some tunes have more than one title. So Goss (RBCH) becomes Oxford (MH) and Humility (CP).

remaining 113 there are found in BBCH 31. Reference to SP, GB, PH, ChP, SSP, EH, A & M, will bring the total remainder down from 82 to 49, and the consultation of more esoteric publications would surely reduce it still further. But the significance of the mathematical exercise lies in the content of the residual hymns most difficult to trace. They are concerned mainly with sacraments, social concerns, and special occasions; and this is a fair indication of the places at which it was felt a special effort must be made to strengthen the existing common fund of material. One of them, indeed, is referred to by Dr. Martin, in his article in the *Baptist Times* (10.8.61) as "perhaps the earliest Christian hymn outside the New Testament." It is "Shepherd of eager youth" by Clement of Alexandria, and it is good to see it here. But Psalms and Hymns found a place for it long ago. We are not always wiser than our fathers!

All compilers must discard or omit a good deal of what is available to them, and careful scrutiny at this point is essential. We may usefully test BH by reference to five hymnals which may broadly be classified as non-Anglican—CP, RBCH, MH, BBCH, and PH. These contain 125 hymns in common. BH omits one: "Jerusalem, my happy home"; and for my own part I shed no tears. The deletion of PH raises the common ground; and at this point BH drops 6. I would not go to the stake for any of them, though some may think that "O Love who formedst me to wear" is a marginal case. With the removal of BBCH we are left with CP, RBCH, and MH. These have 331 in common, of which BH includes 300—having dropped another 24. Again the surgery is salutary, though some may query the disappearance of "Hark! the song of jubilee." Finally, the deletion of MH leaves CP and RBCH sharing 420 hymns, of which BH contains 356. This involves the omission of a further 33, and at this point battle must be joined. It is farewell to "One holy church of God appears," "Songs of praise the angels sang," "My soul awake," "Made lowly wise"; and we are much the poorer for their going. Above all, what can have possessed the compilers to axe "And now the wants are told"—one of the few closing hymns that says what ought to be said? This is really unforgivable.

Nine out of ten to the committee then, thus far, with one heavy rap on the knuckles. But this concerns solely the discards from the common pack; and there are also omissions that must be noted. From CP there might fruitfully have been taken: "God is love, by him upholden," "Forth rode the knights of old," "Let all our brethren join in one," "Lord of good life, the hosts of the undying," and "We sing of life"; from BBCH: "Eternal God whose power upholds," "Hark what a sound, and too divine for hearing," "Lo, round the throne, a glorious band," "O crucified redeemer," and

"Ye watchers and ye holy ones"; while PH would have provided: "Father eternal, ruler of creation," "Hail the glorious golden city," "Hope of the world," and "Joyful, joyful, we adore thee." Beyond this, everyone will have his own complaint about the sifting of RBCH. There are 25 omissions that I would myself both question and regret, and 8 among them about which I would be prepared to offer prolonged argument. These are: "We love thee Lord, yet not alone," "Our day of praise is done," "O praise the Lord our God," "And didst thou Lord our sorrows take," "O'er the hills and by the valleys," "Be still my heart, be still my mind," "I said it on the meadow path," "Lord thou hast all my frailty made." Perhaps there will be rumblings from the Missionary Auxiliaries when they fail to find "There's a light upon the mountains." I think I can guess some of the reasons that led the compilers to jettison this. And I think they may well have been wrong.

Thus far I have defended specific additions to the hymnal to the number of 27. I should wish to raise the score slightly, partly by an even more merciless plundering of A. F. Bayly, partly by other choices that will presently appear. But it should now be obvious that the criticism though significant is still marginal, and that the commendation, if back-handed, is nevertheless real. To the immediate objections the committee might tender a threefold defence and reply. They might demand an argued case for the inclusion of each of my 27 or so candidates; this would be fair, but space forbids. They might stand by their total number, and ask for a similar list of 27 hymns now included that should be omitted. I would be prepared to supply it. They might claim that what I have proposed would alter the balance of the whole collection. I would concur and would defend that result also. All of which suggests that a closer look at the progression and divisions of the new hymnal may help us.

What then is the purpose of a denominational hymn book? CP states boldly: "The primary purpose of a hymn-book is for use in public worship." BH apparently agrees: "... the primary purpose has of course been to provide hymns for singing in congregational worship." Yet all hymnals seem to be mesmerised by a traditional division of contents that is singularly unhelpful to this dominating purpose. With slight modifications, the procedure is unvarying. We slice up the Trinity, "compartmentalise" the church, attempt some classification of our feelings and experience, move to our social responsibilities, and end with the specialities that will not fit in. Let it be agreed that a section for special occasions will be necessary. For the rest, should we not be boldly consistent and offer three major divisions?

1. The Approach to Worship—including adoration, confession, assurance of forgiveness.

2. The Gospel in Word and Sacrament—including invocation, scriptures, sacraments, gospel call, credal hymns (among them, those that proclaim the events of biblical and saving history, e.g. many usually classified under "God the Son").
3. The Response of the People to God—including thanksgiving, offering, prayer, presentation of infants, witness, mission, social concern, repentance, trust, commitment, growth....

Such a pattern does not solve all problems, and is not, in any case, intended to be complete in detail or sub-section. But it raises no greater difficulties than the present arrangement with its multitude of cross-references; and it surely has theological strength. What, after all, is the point of having specific sections on the Holy Trinity and the Holy Spirit—unless to encourage the unwary to wallow in them on Whit Sunday and Trinity Sunday and cultivate liturgical unbalance for the rest of the year? Let the reader examine them and judge what real unity of theme or emphasis they possess.

This question of structure is not academic. Biblical and liturgical understanding are in issue. Indeed, I suspect that the confusion here has far-reaching implications. Did the committee really grasp the theological distinction between adoration and thanksgiving, and the theological connection between thanksgiving and offering. Of course hymns are not written to suit our tidy minds. Of course they mix up our neat categories. Of course there are borderline cases. But the omnibus heading of Section I: Worship and Praise, does not help us to keep our sights clear; and several of its hymns belong unquestionably to "thanksgiving." Let us get the liturgical drama right, and not confuse prologue and epilogue and bring the curtain down when it has just risen. Adoration is basically that hymning of God that holds the ineffable vision of Him before our wondering eyes, and it belongs primarily (though not solely) to the opening of worship. Thanksgiving is the basic liturgical form of responsive offering, and belongs essentially to the closing part of worship. This is not pedantry. It is concern for the health of the People of God.

From this perspective a good many committee decisions become suspect. Of the material grouped under Section II: The Holy Trinity, and Section III: God the Father, a considerable proportion belongs to Adoration, some to Confession, and some to Thanksgiving. "Great is Thy faithfulness" should not be under "Trust in God"; it concerns not our faith but His faithfulness. Similarly, in this section, "How firm a foundation," "Not what I am, O Lord," "Thou hidden source of calm repose," and "Through all the changing scenes of life," are all misplaced. The Baptismal section has clearly received special attention, but the result is discouraging. The predominant emphasis remains upon human vow rather than divine action. "Around thy grave, Lord Jesus" (in

RBCH) is lamentably discarded; while William Robinson's magnificent "Praise to God" shines the brighter because of its disappointing surroundings. Much stronger is the material for the Lord's Supper. But where, O where are Turton's "O Thou, who at Thy Eucharist didst pray," and Robinson's "Thee we praise, high priest and victim"? Why could we not have had Elizabeth Charles' "Around a table not a tomb" instead of Montgomery's "According to thy gracious Word," which for all its biblical basis suggests nothing quite so much as a spiritual Armistice Sunday?

So the carping critic will continue. Do we really want "I love to tell the story" as well as "Tell me the old, old story"? (A little of Arabella Hankey goes a mighty long way!). Did we have to endure Hood's insult to children "God who hath made the daisies" and Jemima Luke's effusion "I think, when I read that sweet story of old," when we already have Stopford Brooke's satisfying "It fell upon a summer day" that covers the same ground? Must we still accord a welcome to "O the bitter shame and sorrow" with its bad psychology and worse theology? If Faber's "Souls of men!" was to be altered, could we not have been spared being asked to sing "... There is no place where earth's failings have such kindly judgment given"?[2] But these are blemishes which obtrude because of the very excellence of the total offering. Six per cent of the hymns are pre-Reformation; six per cent are 16th and 17th century; seventeen per cent are 18th century; fifty-four per cent are Victoriana; fifteen per cent are 20th century in composition or in spirit.[3] It is a well balanced collection.

How do the 818 tunes provided measure up to this generally high standard. Not badly. Again, a comparison with other hymnals *in the order shown* gives the following result. Of the total of 818 there are found in RBCH 433. Of the remaining 385 there are found in CP 169. Of the remaining 216 there are found in MH 60. Of the remaining 156 there are found in BBCH 40. Reference to SP, GB, PH, ChP, SSP, EH, A & M will bring the total remainder down to 69. These are by no means all of recent composition, nor all of special merit; and they include what I would judge to be far too high a proportion of tunes of Welsh origin. The happiest choices among this 69 are those that have been set to new hymns. Here A. E. Rusbridge does us well with Horfield, and others maintain the level. It is also good to find two of Beaumont's earlier and more sober productions.

We may usefully proceed to test BH by reference to CP, RBCH, MH, BBCH, and PH. These five have 98 tunes in common, of which BH omits Abbey, York, and Les commandemens de Dieu.

[2] Other hymns I would wish to delete forthwith as sub-standard or unbiblical include 144, 566, 570, 584, 615, 739, 749, 759.

[3] The remaining 2% are unclassifiable.

I will argue for the first two in a moment. The third was presumably omitted because St. Clement holds the field for "The day Thou gavest, Lord, is ended"; but whether there was then much case for providing Michaelmas as an alternative I beg leave to doubt. The deletion of PH raises common ground to 164, and at this point BH drops 2. The one is Manchester (to which I will recur); the other is Love Divine whose departure we would hail with a cheer were it not that Blaenwern is offered as substitute. With the removal of BBCH we are left with CP, RBCH, and MH. These have 293 in common, of which BH presents 266—having shed another 22. The pruning is justified in all but two cases. I would defend the retention of Dublin (of which more anon). And why did the committee throw out Savannah whilst leaving us with the unspeakable St. Bees? Finally, the deletion of MH leaves CP and RBCH sharing 350 tunes, of which BH contains 308. This involves the omission of a further 15. Of these, Treves, St. Marguerite, and St. Brannock might well have been preserved, and Longwood certainly should have been. It is an odd estimate of Joseph Barnby that ejects Longwood but leaves us with The Golden Chain.

I have mentioned St. Marguerite and Treves, and I indicated further comment on Abbey, York, Manchester, and Dublin. These omissions have one thing in common. They are all common metre tunes of some merit. And this raises a curious issue. For it is immediately noticeable that the proportion of such tunes provided by BH is smaller than is usually offered. Was this deliberate policy or was it the unplanned result of hymn selection? It would be interesting to know. But whatever the answer be, it cannot be claimed that there was no room for some at least of these well-known tunes. For with them to hand, what need was there to search for the unfamiliar Storl, or the dubious Abergele, or the facile St. Agnes?

Eight out of ten then in this department so far as discards from the common pool of hymnody are concerned, and a possible bonus mark to come as we turn to consider omissions. So far as RBCH is concerned, the attitude of the compilers is generous and satisfying. I find no tunes that merit inclusion overlooked; and if I linger for a moment over St. Denys, Dona Lucem, and Woodland, it is not with tremendous enthusiasm. The situation is quite different, however, when we turn to CP. I look expectantly but in vain for Beeding, Benedicite, Drake's Boughton, Edmonsham, Hero, Komm Seele, Lyle Road, Mahon, Sawyers, Eastwood, Venice, and Westbury. Why not Thiman's "Beeding" (or even Stanton's "Saintbury") instead of Havergal's "Samos"? Why not Steiner's "Benedicite" instead of that runaway tank "Windermere"? (Thanks be to God that at least we have Thalben-Ball's "Llanherne"). Why

not Elgar's "Drake's Boughton" instead of the incredible "St. Oswald"? Why not Loring's "Edmonsham" instead of "Cherry Tree," Carter's "Hero" instead of "Woodlands" (already properly used elsewhere), Finlay's "Lyle Road" if necessary instead of "Kingdom of God"? Why not Knowles' "Mahon" instead of Thorne's atrocity "St. Andrew"? Why not Shaw's "Sawyer" instead of Maker's "Rest"? Why not "Westbury" in place of one of the two uses of "Pilgrimage"?

Other omissions from various hymnals are to be regretted. Would that a place could have been found for Thalben-Ball's "Sirius," even though we are well served by Walford Davies' "Firmament." Would that we were given Goss' "Arthur's Seat" and Hunt's "Shrewsbury." Winn's "Midhurst" would have provided the welcome substitute for the superficial "Dismissal.' Allen's "Ewhurst" would have been a sensitive replacement for "Greenwell." Most tragic of all—why, having given us the hymn "Come, labour on!", did the compilers completely miss their cue and fail to set to it Tertius Noble's "Ora Labora," a tune which should make any red-blooded Englishman gird up his loins?

This is not just a plea for the inclusion of certain tunes. It is, in part at least, a basic criticism of policy. The inclusion of inferior material may perhaps be justified when alternatives are provided, and we may therefore forgive boring "Rivaulx" for the sake of "Anglorum Apostolus," sentimental "Gottlieb" for the sake of "All Souls," debilitating "St. Margaret" for the sake of "Matheson," trivial "Penlan" for the sake of "Nyland." But the situation is far more serious when the committee all too often leave us with but a single tune of doubtful status. We have already noticed 'Dismissal" and "St. Bees." But there are others; and if we had to have them, alternatives should have been appended. We are asked to sing the hymn "God of the living" to "St. Chrysostom"—as if Barnby was adequate to the glory of the Christian hope! We are (inevitably) given "Evening Hymn" to "Father in high heaven dwelling"—without even being offered the escape of "Alles Is An Gottes Segen." And when we reach the long metres, the crisis of confidence becomes acute. We are shut up with "Arizona" for "What purpose burns within our hearts," with "Rimington" for "Give to our God immortal praise," with "St. Petersburg" for "Lord, in this blest and hallowed hour," and with "Ombersley" for "Send forth the Gospel!"—even though sturdy "Cannock" lay close to hand.

These are regrets. They must be voiced because this book is worth criticism. Unquestionably it will be compared with Congregational Praise, and not necessarily to its disadvantage. In musical approach CP seems to me to betray a certain austerity which, at the time, was surely justified. BH is more generous, more hospit-

able. Such a policy involves risk; but it has my vote. Only in two directions is restriction apparent. There is little of the characteristic idiom associated with SP. (Even exuberant "Northrop" is not selected), and little of the special ethos of A & M (Revised). The gulf between the Church of England and the Free Churches remains to be bridged.

BH offers 69 canticles and psalms to be chanted with reference to pointing on the basis of speech-rhythm and to tunes that are in general traditional. It provides 38 short passages of Scripture that may be used by minister and congregation for alternate reading. It attempts to set hymn tunes at the appropriate pitch for congregational singing, and is on the whole successful. Two and a half cheers then for the compilers, who have at long last given to the denomination a worthy hymnal for the 20th century.

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