

Editorial Matters

I thank God for many aspects of my upbringing and one is that I was brought up in an evangelical hymn-singing church. It was in the Church of Scotland and in the mornings we used The Church Hymnary and in the evening we sang from Christian Hymns from the Evangelical Movement in Wales. I don't know how many hymns I must have sung as I grew up but we usually sang two each Sunday morning before we left for Sunday School or Bible Class and in the evening there would normally be four hymns. Going to church twice on a Sunday almost every week from about aged ten I must have been singing about 300 hymns each year. When I think now about how many hymns my twelve-year-old and fourteen-year-old children have sung and would really know I realise how much times have changed. At their age I would have known dozens of hymns off by heart. Twenty-five years later these still feed me spiritually even though I rarely get a chance to sing them as part of a congregation. But it's not just today's teenagers who are unlikely to know the classic hymns. Probably most Christians under forty, including most evangelical Anglicans, especially those who have become Christians in the last twenty years or so, have a rather limited repertoire.

An illuminating survey?

At the Wycliffe Hall Quiet Day at the start of term, the leader wanted us to sing 'Beneath the Cross of Jesus'. He asked how many of us knew it and – although it was there in our Songs of Fellowship in chapel – I think less than a half a dozen (mainly staff) raised their hands. So, as I was preparing this issue of *Anvil* focussed on worship and hymnody, I decided to do a survey. I asked staff and contributors to this issue to suggest a few hymns which they hoped evangelical Anglican ordinands would know but which they suspected may not be as well known as they should be. I then selected 28 out of those suggested and posted a questionnaire online which asked respondents to choose one of five options: never heard of it, vaguely familiar/sung once or twice, could hum the tune, know at least one verse off by heart, could sing it without words as know it by heart. I was pleasantly surprised at the take-up – 38 students (30 of them CofE ordinands, a response rate of over 40% of such ordinands in college) and 10 staff filled in the questionnaire in the course of a week. The results were also most interesting.

There were 6 instances where over half the students hadn't even heard of the hymn (Teach me my God and King; Ye Holy Angels Bright; Fill Thou My Life, O Lord My God; Facing A Task Unfinished; I Bind Unto Myself Today; A Safe Stronghold Our God Is Still). There were a further 6 hymns which most students only knew so vaguely that they couldn't even hum the tune (Through All the Changing Scenes of Life; May the Mind of Christ My Saviour; Christ is Made the Sure Foundation; O Sacred Head surrounded; O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go; The Old Rugged Cross).

As the real spiritual food in hymns is in their words taken into our hearts and lives, it was illuminating to discover for which hymns a majority of students felt they knew at least one verse off by heart. There were in fact only 11 of the 28

where the majority of student respondents fell in this category. In order of popularity the ranking was:

- 1 When I survey the wondrous cross
- 2 And can it be
- 3 Thine be the glory
- 4 Crown him with many crowns
- 5 In Christ alone
- 6 O for a thousand tongues to sing
- 7 Tell out my soul
- 8 What a friend we have in Jesus
- 9 Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided
- 10 Blessed Assurance
- 11 All people that on earth do dwell

Combining these 11 with the 12 listed above where even the tune was unknown means that there remain five others where few if any of the words were on the tips of most of these ordinands' tongues: Just As I Am, Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken, Now Thank We All Our God, How Sweet The Name of Jesus Sounds, Christ Triumphant.

Anvil readers who love these hymns will be reassured to know that there were some more encouraging results. A number of students had clearly been exposed to and learned a large number of the hymns. For example, a dozen students claimed they knew at least one verse off by heart for more than half of the 28 hymns. A similar number of students could sing more than 7 of them through without the words while two had been so immersed in them that they knew more than half of the hymns totally by heart. The smaller number of staff who answered (a mixture of both the teaching and the administrative staff) generally fared better than the students, perhaps reflecting in part the fact they were older and had been Christians for longer. Most of these respondents knew at least one verse by heart for almost all the hymns and many knew a large number all the way through from beginning to end. Interestingly, though, several of the hymns least well known by students were also the ones which some staff either hadn't heard of or at best only knew the tune.

The survey may of course be highly unrepresentative and the sample of hymns chosen was not exactly scientifically selected. Nevertheless, we do need to ask what follows if those in the process of training for ordination in an evangelical theological college have such major gaps in their knowledge of our hymns. One likely result is that there is surely less chance of evangelical Anglican congregations in the future being able to draw on this wonderful tradition of hymnody for their theology, spirituality and corporate worship.

Does it matter?

Some will argue that this doesn't really matter. After all, many of the students will still be being nourished by the worship songs which they do regularly sing or listen to on CDs and iPods. They know many of these by heart and regularly find themselves humming, whistling or singing them as they go about their work. Indeed I suspect one reason why 'When I Survey' came out as Number One is that we'd sung a modern version of it a few times in chapel already this term. In another interesting and

disturbing development I noticed the Powerpoint slide gave the copyright of it to Chris Tomlin as we were strictly singing his 'The Wonderful Cross'. This appears on his 2001 album 'The Noise We Make' and adds a chorus to three of Isaac Watts' verses. A Google search on the web will quickly confirm he is now widely credited as the writer of the lyrics so it is perhaps only a matter of time before Watts (and the omitted verses) are forgotten by most who know this great hymn.

There is the danger of simply getting older and regretting that things are not as they used to be. However, if our church leaders and churches do not know many of the great hymns there is the danger that the Church is going to lose much of its Christian memory and break loose from its anchorage in tradition. If that does happen then we will be much more easily prey to the passing fads and trends of contemporary society especially as very little of what we now sing has the theological and spiritual depths to be found in classic hymns.

What can be done?

The challenge is that hymns are made to be sung and if our congregations are not singing them then they will not be entering our corporate and personal bloodstream. Few people are now likely to own many hymnbooks let alone read them as part of their spiritual devotion. Indeed they are increasingly disappearing from many of our churches as we rely instead on Powerpoint projections. I have to confess that one of my first introductions to hymnody was when as a child I did a comparative study of different hymn books which led to the choice of Christian Hymns as the hymnbook for the church. The reality now is that many evangelical Anglicans probably don't even know one hymnbook well.

It would be an interesting exercise for churches – particularly the 'flagship' evangelical churches that produce many ordinands – to audit their own pattern of congregational singing. Most will now keep a record of what they have been singing but do the clergy – does anyone in the church? – look back and critically ask what has been sung most often and particularly which classic hymns are being incorporated into our sung worship? The 'hit list' among the ordinands confirmed my suspicion that a certain number of classic hymns (many of them of a certain type I've heard referred to as 'rugby songs') are still often sung and so are well known. But perhaps greater variety is needed. In his article in this issue Michael Saward bemoans how few of the many good recent hymns are being sung but it seems the problem is much deeper and applies to even older hymns.

It may be that, even if they are not often sung, hymns could be quoted more often in sermons. In particular in our age the stories behind some of the hymns will often be immensely powerful. Many, for example, know of the tragic history of Joseph Scriven the author of 'What A Friend' who twice got engaged only for his fiancée to die before they married. It was, however, only very recently that another hymn I've loved became even more powerful. I read a sermon reprinted in the marvellous recent collection of sermons brought together by Michael D. Bush, *This Incomplete One: Words Occasioned by the Death of a Young Person* (Eerdmans, 2006). At the end of his sermon at the funeral of his 22 year old son, Howard Edington recalled how the four daughters of this hymn's author (Horatio Spafford) were all killed in 1873 when their ship, the *S.S. Ville de Havre*, collided with another ship. Spafford received the news of the tragedy from his wife in a telegram which simply read 'saved alone'. A few weeks later he crossed the Atlantic to be with her

and as his ship reached the place where his daughters died he was inspired to write those powerful and moving words now usually sung to Philip Bliss' tune named after the ship on which Spafford's children died –

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
 When sorrows like sea billows roll;
 Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
 It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Refrain

It is well, with my soul,
 It is well, with my soul,
 It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
 Let this blest assurance control,
 That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
 And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
 My sin, not in part but the whole,
 Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
 Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:
 If Jordan above me shall roll,
 No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life
 Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.

But, Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,
 The sky, not the grave, is our goal;
 Oh trump of the angel! Oh voice of the Lord!
 Blessèd hope, blessèd rest of my soul!

And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
 The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
 The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
 Even so, it is well with my soul.

Resources

For those wishing to find out more or discover some of the great hymns, the Web contains a number of resources. Among the most useful are

www.cyberhymnal.org which contains lyrics, scores, MIDI files and history for over 6,000 hymns.

www.hymnal.oremus.org has indexed texts and MIDI files for over 7,000 hymns from 52 Anglican hymnals. Many of these are online and there are suggestions for hymns related to Lectionary readings.

www.hymnsite.com also enables searching of various sites and databases.

www.jubilate.co.uk has more than 1500 hymn and song texts with many modern hymns from writers such as Christopher Idle and Michael Seward (though many require you to be a subscriber to gain full access).

www.hymnsocietygbi.org.uk is the page for the Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland (which this year celebrates its 70th anniversary) and contains much useful material.

Another excellent resource is the HymnQuest software and information about this can be found online at www.hymnquest.com

In this issue

About a year ago I discovered, quite by accident when searching for something else, that Bishop Timothy Dudley-Smith had a website (www.timothydudley-smith.com) where I found that, on 26th December 2006, he would be celebrating his 80th birthday. That was the inspiration for this issue with its theme of worship and hymnody and with a particular focus on Timothy Dudley-Smith himself in order to recognise and pay tribute to him and his contribution to this aspect of the church's life.

The first article by Ian Randall introduces the work of John Stott (whose two-volume biography was written by Timothy Dudley-Smith) on worship. He shows the depth and importance of this rather neglected aspect of his writing and gives insight into a classical evangelical Anglican understanding of worship. Rachel Atkinson explores the phenomenon of alternative worship and offers an accessible overview and critique of its development and characteristics with a particular focus on its relationship to mission. A more wide-ranging perspective on recent trends in congregational song is provided by Anne Harrison in her article. The last two articles focus particularly on Bishop Timothy's own work with an appreciation and introduction to his life and hymn-writing from Michael Saward and a reflection on one of his best-known hymns (as confirmed by the survey described above !) by Alan Luff.

There are two other distinctive features of this issue. One is related to the focus of this issue – Timothy Dudley-Smith kindly gave his permission and suggested a number of his hymns which could be reprinted. These appear before and after each article. They show – as Michael Saward demonstrates – how wide a range he has written and how many more great Dudley-Smith hymns we could all sing in addition to the classics of Tell Out My Soul and Lord, For the Years. Perhaps *Anvil* readers can enable these and other of his hymns to become more widely known. The other new feature is our style of referencing where we have reduced the detail in footnotes and added a bibliography at the end of each chapter. We hope this will make the articles more readable and also that the bibliographies will provide a valuable resource.

Finally, this is sadly the last issue for which Peter Ballantine serves as Review Editor. Peter's first issue as Review Editor was eight years ago (Vol. 15 No. 4 1998). When Peter took over he had a hard act to follow. Steve Walton had, in the words of the then editor, 'made the Reviews section of *Anvil* the most valued and respected part of the journal'. Peter has maintained that high quality of our book reviews during his term, acting as editor for all four issues each year and being a vital member of the Management Team. It is fitting he ends his term by providing us in this issue with a review article of Robert Fisk's important recent study of the Middle East. We wish Peter well as he steps down from this role and we welcome Adrian Chatfield, Tutor in Worship and Spiritual Formation at Wycliffe Hall and currently on the Editorial Board, as the new Review Editor starting with the next issue of the journal.

Andrew Goddard