

# *Praise!*

A review by J.P. Thackway

This is the title of the new, much-awaited hymn book. No new collection of this size for UK evangelical/reformed churches has appeared since *Grace Hymns* and *Christian Hymns* in the 1970s. [1] It is, therefore, a significant event for the worship of God in our assemblies. The book's subtitle is "Psalms, Hymns and Songs for Christian Worship." The music edition has chords with its tunes, "so that accompaniment is not limited to keyboards" [2] About 20% of its tunes are new.[3]

## **Well-trailed**

It has been a well-trailed publication. A "Praise Preview" appeared in 1998, comprising a preface, and a sample of the hymns to be included in the final collection. Comparing this with the finished item shows that the preface has been re-written (now called *About Praise!*) and some hymns have been altered. This has been in response to initial comments about the book's contents.

## **Evolution**

The hymnal's evolution is interesting. In *About Praise!* Brian Edwards, for the editorial board, tells us how it happened. A few associated with the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches began revising some traditional hymns for continued use in their churches, fearing such hymns (with their "unintelligible" or "amusing" expressions) would eventually drop out of use. An increasing number of people expressed the same interest. *Grace Publications Trust* [4], who were considering a replacement for *Grace Hymns*, knew about the project and found themselves in complete agreement. This led to the formation of Praise Editorial Board. More than five years later — with the help of six working groups, an Advisory Council, [5] and Praise Trust — the hymn book has now appeared.

## **Distinctive**

Physically, *Praise!* is like no other hymn book. It has a distinctive narrow shape, sturdy covers in a striking shade of blue, and attractive silver-grey lettering. This makes for a beautiful-looking volume. It has to be said, though, that its format may be a problem. Measuring (when closed) 8½ inches tall by 4 inches wide and nearly 1½ inches thick, when opened it feels heavy and difficult to hold. That said, the typeface is modern and easy on the eye, and the page layout is clear and pleasing. As a hymn book, its design has all the hallmarks of belonging to the 21st century.

## **Contents**

Like any book, however, its contents are what matters. As I have carefully gone through these, I have tried to be objective and fair. Where anything is commendable I have noted it, and where there is cause for criticism I have been forthright. The following points are the result of a prayerful assessment of this hymn book and its significance for our day.

### **1. *Praise!* represents a major shift towards new worship material**

A quick count reveals that out of its 976 items, 502 are by living authors, or by those who have recently died. This means that more than half the book is contemporary

material, leaving much less room for well-established hymns. Although a number of favourites are included, many more are omitted. Comparing the book with *Christian Hymns*, for example, reveals that only 379 of its hymns are in *Praise!*<sup>[6]</sup> Put another way, it means that 522, or nearly two-thirds, of the good hymns we have sung for more than twenty years are dumped in favour of a huge amount of modern material. Doctrinal and experimental hymns like Newton's "I asked the Lord that I might grow," Toplady's "Fountain of never ceasing grace," and Watts' "How vast the treasure we possess," along with a host of other well-loved hymns, are no more. The loss to churches will be enormous if *Praise!* is allowed to dictate our worship from now on.

When *Christian Hymns* first appeared in 1977, the editors wrote: "...it must be admitted that the general quality of hymn-writing in the present century has not been of a high order. It is therefore still necessary for the church to turn back to these hymns which at their best have something of a timeless quality about them." We must ask, have things improved that much in 23 years, demanding that we now include a higher quantity of newly-written material? We think not. Looking at the newer material in this book, what *does* seem to have changed is the criteria for judging a composition worthy of inclusion in the church's praise.

Back in 1977, Paul Cook and Graham Harrison were echoing the high view of worship that generally prevailed in the evangelical/reformed world. By that standard, most of what is found in *Praise!* would not have been deemed suitable then. Indeed, a hymn book like *Praise!* would not even have been viable for that constituency. The passing of time has seen a shift in thinking, heavily influenced by charismatic publishers and by the apparent need to be intelligible to the outsider who visits our services. These now tend to be the considerations governing what goes into a hymn book.

As an example of the changed climate, here are two hymns by the same author, Graham Kendrick. More than 30 items of his hymns are in *Praise!* These will serve to illustrate the extent to which standards have plunged.

- 1      LORD, YOU ARE SO PRECIOUS TO ME,  
      Lord, you are so precious to me  
      and I love you,  
      yes, I love you  
      because you first loved me.
  
- 2      Lord, you are so gracious to me,  
      Lord, you are so gracious to me  
      and I love you,  
      yes, I love you  
      because you first loved me. (Number 744).

These words are inane and sentimental, probably relying on the tune for their appeal. The other song comprises 5 verses with a refrain. It is from the "Those in Need" section of the book and could comfortably be sung at a Christian Aid function or by a Churches Together ecumenical service. Here is the refrain:

*God of the poor, friend of the weak  
give us compassion we pray,  
melt our cold hearts,  
let tears fall like rain,*

*come change our love  
from a spark to a flame.* (Number 944).

In addition, the West Indian carol “The Virgin Mary had a baby boy” finds a place (number 385), with its swinging refrain,

*He come from the glory,  
he come from the glorious kingdom;  
Yes! he come from the glory,  
he come from the glorious kingdom:  
O yes, believer!  
O yes, believer!  
He come from the glory,  
he come from the glorious kingdom.  
O yes ...*

Hymn 253 consists of just 4 lines or 12 words, and is described as “a round,”

TRULY GOD IS GOOD,  
truly God is good;  
his loving-kindness  
is everlasting.

This is what sections of congregations will sing successively and repetitively — round and round and round. The words themselves, of course, are sound, albeit very limited. However, the way people will sing them is the rub. Number 739 contains the line “So I’m lifting up my hands...” and we can imagine this being the cue for the singers to physically do just that. If this is not charismatic-style “worship” by stealth, then what is? A congregation that acquires a taste for this has already gone half over to the ways of that movement.

Excessive deference is paid to modern song writers in *Praise!* The compilers clearly want evangelical churches to take seriously “a stream of newly written material in the form of hymns and songs ... much of this modern material was excellent.”<sup>[7]</sup> Not only so, the book also gives new writers an opportunity to launch their material: “Many of the authors and composers are publishing here for the first time.”<sup>[8]</sup> The publishers are not only foisting new material upon us, they are also asking our consent to act as guinea pigs for budding song writers. Do we really want to be experimented with in this way? Churches holding convictions about the quality of praise they offer to God will surely not want to go with the direction of this book.

## **2. *Praise!* does despite to the Psalter**

It opens with a section entitled “Psalms,” and contains 150 psalm versions. This is similar to Spurgeon’s *Our Own Hymn Book*, and its modern successor at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, *Psalms and Hymns of Reformed Worship*. Sometimes alternative versions are given. Restoring the whole Psalter to a worthy place in Christian worship is a necessary and excellent thing. What, then, is objectionable here?

It is that the Psalter suffers grievously at the hands of the compilers. The best way to sing the Psalms is by using the Scottish metrical psalter of 1650 or the later Irish revision. This is because metrical psalms are very close to the original words of these

inspired praises. They are fresh translations from the Hebrew, and often give a more accurate rendering than the Authorised Version.<sup>[9]</sup> However, the psalm versions in *Praise!* are all, with the exception of a handful, modern renderings quite loosely paraphrased. Apart from 9, all are by modern authors, and most of these by Christopher Idle and David Preston (34 and 43 psalm versions respectively). This is an inordinate amount of material from just two men. The result, it is claimed, is “the best psalm *renderings* available so that we could experience singing psalms in a more contemporary idiom” (italics mine).<sup>[10]</sup>

To give an example. Psalm 9 is a new rendering by Veronica Medd and is among the better ones. However, its 20 verses in the Psalter have been reproduced in just 5 double ones. Take the precious words of verses 9,10 in the Authorised Version:

“For the Lord will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.  
And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.”

I would want to sing those words in praise to God as near to that as possible. In the Irish metrical psalter I can, for they appear like this:

So shall the Lord a refuge be  
For those that are oppressed;  
A refuge will he be for them,  
What time they are oppressed.  
And they that know thy name in thee  
Their confidence will place:  
For thou has not forsaken them  
That truly seek thy face.

In *Praise!* the two verses come out like this:

The weak find refuge in the Lord,  
protection he will give,  
and those who know his sacred name  
will trust in him and live.  
Then sing the praises of the Lord,  
his noble acts proclaim,  
for he remembers those in want  
who call upon his name.

Medd changes the word “oppressed” (faithfully retained in the metrical version) to “weak” in her version. Yet the Hebrew means “one who is crushed, to ... break in pieces, to pulverise, therefore one who is overwhelmed to the extreme.”<sup>[11]</sup> “Weak” is very inadequate to express what David meant here (and with what many believers will identify in their experience). “Weak” here is *very* weak.

Space forbids further analysis, but compressing 20 verses into 5 double ones means a lot of this psalm is lost or merged into other verses. This results in the words “For thou hast not forsaken them that truly seek thy face” being lost. This happens so frequently <sup>[12]</sup> that the book’s claim to contain “*Psalms, Hymns and Songs for Christian Worship*” is seriously open to question.

Psalm 33 suffers from the declared policy on page vii of the preface, where inclusive language will be employed where appropriate. David Preston's rendering of this psalm has changed verse 13 ("the Lord looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men") to,

From heaven the Lord sees humankind  
all live within his view.

It changes the Bible's generic term for us all ("sons of men") into the more neutral "humankind." This is unwarranted by the Hebrew and is surely an impudent way to treat the words of the Holy Spirit! It is a concession to feminists and the politically correct, with their shrill criticisms of "offensive" gender references. Are we now, then, to offer to God in worship lines that correct His gender-specific terms?![\[13\]](#)

Psalm 22, another modern and truncated rendering, has just 7 verses to serve the 31 of the original. So much of Christ is lost in this version. In particular, verse 18 "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture," cited in John 19:24, is missing. In addition, the detail in verse 16 "they pierced my hands and my feet" emerges as the bland "My hands and feet they bind to wound."

In addition, a number of these psalm versions have renderings so questionable and mysterious as to make the claim of "greater intelligibility" seem preposterous. What, for instance, does "your shafts of fire" mean in Psalm 45, second verse, when the original, "Thine arrows" is perfectly clear? Similarly, Psalm 91B, third verse, "phantoms of the night" (for the original "the terror by night") — are we now in the realm of the paranormal? The wonderful words of Psalm 110:3 "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power" has become in the *Praise!* version,

And when the day of battle comes,  
your troops will fight.

Whatever does this mean? It only serves to remove a reference to the efficacious grace of Christ and replace it with words that border on the ridiculous.

Another area of great concern is the "Imprecatory Psalms." These are psalms in which the psalmist, acting as a prophet, calls down divine judgment upon his, and more particularly God's, enemies. Examples of these are Psalms 35, 59, 69, 109, 137. A note in *About Praise!* tells us that "Those psalms ... that include prayers against enemies (imprecatory) have been dealt with as statements of how God acts toward evil in general."[\[14\]](#) This is a weak definition of the imprecatory psalms — these men did more than just pray against their enemies, they were under divine inspiration. Like Elisha with the bears (2 Kings 2:24) they cursed the wicked in God's name and formally delivered judgment upon them.

This weakness and dumbing down of solemn things is reflected in the abysmal way the imprecatory psalms are interpreted. For example, Psalm 109:9,10 has these words in the AV: "Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg: let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places." This is the judgment of God called for upon certain enemies, one of whom looks prophetically to Judas Iscariot (v.8 cp Acts 1:20). However, Christopher Idle has rendered verses 9 and 10 like this:

How fearfully we hear the doom  
on all their kith and kin!  
Their work, their wealth, their name, their home  
all suffer for their sin.

These lines bear no resemblance to the original, they even alter the intention of the Holy Spirit, which was to set forth words of specific judgment from God, not simply a doom about which people have heard. The original has words which proclaim God as the source of the judgment: “Set *thou...*” (v.6); “*Let his children...*” (v.9, down to verse 15); “so *let it come* unto him” (v.17), etc. Idle’s version is so general that natural justice could easily be the source of these calamities. This presumptuous interference waters down God’s Word reminding us that “verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth” (Psalm 58:11).

Again, in Psalm 137, this ends on a note of the most fearful judgment upon the Babylonians: “O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones” (verses 8 and 9). Michael Perry’s version enfeebles them into this:

You daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction,  
you people of Edom who throw down our walls,  
be warned of the judgment on you and your children  
when blasphemy fails and when tyranny falls.

Now, the Babylonians are simply *warned* of judgment, whereas in the biblical psalm they are *condemned* to judgment, the fulfilment of which was graphically portrayed by Jeremiah in chapters 50 and 51 of his book (see especially 50:15,29). In addition, the psalm is given a final verse all about harp strings and music, and the strong, unquenchable love of the Lord — all of which is not there in the original! What a strange remaking of the Holy Spirit’s words! We could cite more examples, but enough has been quoted to indicate the extent to which the Psalms have been almost massacred by the compilers of *Praise!*

Those who value the Psalter and have convictions about its place in Christian worship (to whom, presumably, this section is designed to appeal), will be appalled by what they find here. The unique value of psalm-singing is that we offer to God in worship the very words He has inspired and authorised (Psalm 105:2; Ephesians 5:18,19; James 5:13). We want those very words, not human rewording and interpretation, leaving them barely recognisable as the Psalms. This turns divine words into nothing more than man-made hymns and modern songs. In this sense, it is a misnomer to call this opening section of the book “Psalms.”

### **3. *Praise!* is filled with obsession for modern wording**

“Why did we dare to revise?” is one paragraph heading in *About Praise!* Brian Edwards anticipates objections to the modernising policy of the book, and seeks to justify it. He appeals to the precedent of John Wesley revising the hymns of Isaac Watts, and the succession of acknowledged and unacknowledged changes that have altered our well-known hymns over the centuries. According to the *Praise!* team, their work is simply a continuation of this process, to “offer some of our historic hymns in a language that is accessible to the modern worshipper.”[\[15\]](#)

However, to represent matters like this is misleading. The revisions of Watts by Wesley did not result in a whole bookful to cater for modern tastes. Rather, they were of only some hymns, one of which is given in the Preface to *Christian Hymns*.<sup>[16]</sup> Watts' paraphrase of Psalm 100 originally was:

Sing to the Lord with joyful voice,  
Let every land His name adore;  
The British Isles shall send the noise  
Across the ocean to the shore.

Wesley altered it to:

Before Jehovah's awful throne,  
Ye nations, bow with sacred joy:  
Know that the Lord is God alone,  
He can create and He destroy.

No one would deny that this was a valuable improvement. Neither would anyone quibble at the altering of some expressions that make sacred poetry sound ridiculous today. As for instance, Toplady's word in "Rock of Ages," from:

When I draw this fleeting breath,  
When mine eyestrings break in death

to,

When I draw this fleeting breath,  
When my eyelids close in death.

Or that of John Fawcett's "Blest be the tie that binds," from:

When we asunder part,  
It gives us inward pain

to,

When for a while we part,  
This thought will soothe our pain.

These are justifiable modifications. *Praise!* has done something far more fundamental and far-reaching than this. It has removed all the biblically-familiar personal pronouns ("Thou" and "Thee,") together with the major surgery needed to cut out the verb endings "eth," "est," etc. This has resulted in many hymns needing new words, and often new lines, to rhyme and still make sense. The effect of this is in a number of directions and needs pointing out. Take, for example, Toplady's hymn "From whence this fear and unbelief?" The original version as it appears in *Christian Hymns* is put next to the altered *Praise!* version.

From whence this fear and unbelief?  
Hath not the Father put to grief  
His spotless Son for me?  
And will the righteous Judge of men

**Why all my** fear and unbelief?  
**has** not the Father put to grief  
his spotless Son for me?  
And will the righteous Judge of men,

Condemn for me that debt of sin  
Which, Lord, was charged on Thee?

Complete atonement thou hast made,  
And to the utmost thou hast paid  
Whate'er Thy people owed;  
How then can wrath on me take place,  
If sheltered in Thy righteousness,  
And sprinkled with Thy blood.

If Thou hast my discharge procured  
And freely in my room endured  
The whole of wrath divine;  
Payment God cannot twice demand  
Once at my bleeding Surety's hand,  
And then again at mine.

Turn then, my soul, unto thy rest!  
The merits of thy great High Priest  
Have bought thy liberty;  
Trust in His efficacious blood,  
Nor fear thy banishment from God  
Since Jesus died for thee.

condemn me for **the** debt of sin  
**discharged at Calvary?**

Complete atonement **you have** made  
and to the utmost **limit** paid  
**all that your** people owed;  
how **can God's wrath my soul distress**  
if sheltered in **your** righteousness  
and **covered by your** blood?

**Since Christ has** my **release** procured  
and freely in my **place** endured  
the whole of wrath divine—  
payment God **will not** twice demand,  
**first** at my **dying Saviour's** hand and then  
again at mine.

Turn then, my soul, **to joy and rest**;  
the merits of **my** great high priest  
have bought **my** liberty:  
trust in his **all-sufficient** blood,  
nor fear **my** banishment from God,  
for Jesus died for **me!**

Comparing the two versions, we notice over 20 alterations in these 4 verses, indicated in bold typeface. Put another way, the original hymn has 139 words, of which 43 have been altered. Consider some of these changes.

The last line of verse 1 has changed from “(that debt of sin) Which Lord, was charged on Thee?” to “(the debt of sin) discharged at Calvary?” This is obviously to eliminate the pronoun ending “on Thee” in the original version. The effect, however, is to change the theology of the hymn. The debt of sin “charged on” our Substitute is the doctrine of imputation (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24). Our sins became His, and His righteousness became ours. If my sins are *charged on*, imputed to, Christ then God does not impute them to us (Psalm 32:2). The debt of sin “discharged at Calvary” simply means we are relieved or free of the charge of sin. This is a feeble alternative and emasculates the truth of imputation. It also robs Christ of the glory due to Him for such a glorious work. And all for the sake of getting rid of “Thee.”

In verse 2 the last line is changed from “sprinkled with Thy blood” to “covered by your blood.” This is serious. “The blood of sprinkling” is a phrase steeped in the Old Testament. It denotes the *application* of the atonement to the believing sinner (Exodus 12:22,23; Hebrews 11:28; cf Exodus 24:8). This is New Testament terminology as well (1 Peter 1:2). “Covered by your blood” divests this of its meaning and moves us away from important biblical language.

Another enfeebling effect occurs in verse 2 and line 3. Here, we ask: “How then can wrath on me take place (if sheltered in Thy righteousness?).” This is altered to “How can God's wrath my soul distress ...?” It is now no more than the thought of God's wrath *grieving or frightening us*, whereas Toplady declared that that dreadful wrath could never *come down on us*, since Jesus has borne it in our place. The worst is that

here there seems no reason to make this change. It is as if the compilers of *Praise!* presume to improve on the work of Augustus Toplady. As one reviewer of this book has rightly said:

“The (hymn) writers did not produce their work only to be second guessed by lesser men. If you do not like the hymns of John Newton and Augustus Toplady write your own and submit them to the Christian public. Do not tinker with what is not yours.”[\[17\]](#)

The last lines of verse 3 suffer terribly, too. Quite arbitrarily, “Payment God *cannot twice demand* once at my *bleeding Surety’s* hand, and then again at mine” have ended up as “will not twice demand” and “dying Saviour’s hand.” Here again is a weakening effect. There is all the difference between “cannot” and “will not.” “Cannot” means impossibility, “will not” still allows for the possibility. In addition, “Saviour” is not the same as “Surety” — this is the title given to our Lord as the one who accepts all our liabilities and pays all our debts (Hebrews 7:22).[\[18\]](#)

The last verse is also very weak. Why change “Trust in His *efficacious* blood” to “trust in his all-sufficient blood”? Is “efficacious” thought to be unintelligible to worshippers these days? Again, there is a world of difference between the two. “All-sufficient” means “more than enough,” but “efficacious” means “the power to produce the result intended.”[\[19\]](#) The blood of Christ goes much further than being *more than enough*; it is *powerfully successful* in reconciling us to God. This is what Toplady wanted to convey. If his strong criticism of Wesley for Arminianism was anything to go by, we wonder what words he would reserve for those tampering with his hymns like this.

A recent reviewer of a small collection of hymns observed,

“It can reasonably be argued that the Church needs a constant stream of new hymns, so that its worship may not be related to bygone ages only; it is certainly true that the Church needs to preserve its precious heritage of hymnody. One way of attempting to achieve both these ends has been to update the language of some of the greatest of the old hymns by getting rid of every Thee and Thou, with all the juggling with rhyme involved, and dumbing down conceptions which are considered beyond the mental compass of the average ten-year-old. The result is disastrous.”[\[20\]](#)

This reviewer may well have had *Praise!* in mind. He is certainly correct in his conclusion: “disastrous” is not too strong a word for it.

Another casualty is the favourite doxology “Praise God from whom all blessings flow.” Christians are used to singing,

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Him, all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!

As hymn 191 in *Praise!* it is hardly recognisable and loses most of its majesty,

PRAISE GOD FROM WHOM ALL BLESSINGS FLOW  
in heaven above and earth below;  
one God, three Persons, we adore—  
to him be praise for evermore!

But then, words like “creatures here below,” “ye heavenly host” and “Father, Son and Holy Ghost” are considered too much for worshippers today. Yet, a strange inconsistency appears, in that other expressions that might be considered “outdated” are allowed to stand. For instance, in the rendering of Psalm 37, verse 4 we have,

I’ve seen a boasting thief  
grow like a week apace.

The adverb “apace” (“at a quick pace”), while not technically archaic, certainly sounds it and has been in English usage since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Why is this allowed to creep into a modern rendering of Psalm 37 by Christopher Idle when other like expressions are meticulously excised?

Not all the attempts to modernise have been followed through. Brian Edwards admits that a few hymns could not successfully be divested of their Thou’s and Thee’s and had to be dropped.<sup>[21]</sup> Some that made the grade, however, have been spared the modern surgery. One is the 23rd Psalm, where revision was not thought necessary. It is strange that *its* “archaisms” are thought to pose no problems, whereas those of every other hymn and psalm are. Other hymns are not modernised because of copyright restrictions. Among these, we assume, are some by W. Vernon Higham, none of whose “dated” language has been changed.

Mr. Higham is an example of a contemporary and gifted hymn writer who bucks the contemporary trend. The minister of Heath Evangelical Church, Cardiff, is known for his commitment to reverent worship, the use of the Authorised Version, and the centrality of preaching. With a large congregation and the evident blessing of God upon his ministry, he is a reminder to us that “the old paths” do not lead to a dead end these days. Some words of his are relevant here:

“We live in times where there has been a terrible change in the worship of God. Instead of our worship, and particularly our hymns, being God-centred they have become man-centred. This change has led us on a downward path, deceiving many into thinking that it is necessary to compromise in order to attract. Are we forgetting the sovereignty of God, and that His arm is not shortened that it cannot save? It is necessary in every aspect of our Christian faith and our living to have God and His glory in view.”<sup>[22]</sup>

If this is also the conviction of those who have compiled *Praise!* it is difficult to see the evidence for it.

#### **4 *Praise!* is terribly compromised**

A glance at some of the book’s sources will not just raise eyebrows but will prove an eye-opener. To be fair, some familiar material is happily omitted or changed. The Romanist Faber’s hymn “My God how wonderful Thou art” is not included, nor is the apostate Newman’s “Praise to the holiest in the height.” Wesley’s questionable “emptied Himself of all but love” becomes “humbled himself in all his love” (number 776), which is better. In addition, it is reassuring to see the retention of references to the blood of Christ, the wrath of God, etc., which are often omitted in liberal hymn books.<sup>[23]</sup>

That said, what we find here still disappoints and alarms. In the preface, gratitude is expressed to *Jubilate Hymns*, who produced the book *Hymns for Today's Church*. When published in 1982, the then bishop of Chester, Michael Baughen, was the Consulting Editor. Among the Words Committee of that hymn book was, significantly, Christopher Idle — 75 of whose hymns appear in *Praise!* Other members of that committee have their hymns in *Praise!* too: Michael Seward, Richard Bewes, Michael Perry, and James Seddon. All told, a great proportion of hymns in *Praise!* are from this source, indicated by © author/jubilate hymns or © in this version jubilate hymns. This is acknowledged in the preface:

“In our task of revision we have been greatly indebted to the directors and members of *Jubilate Hymns* whose spirit of cooperation in allowing us to use and even alter some of their work, saved us many hours and many mistakes.”[\[24\]](#)

The degree of dependence upon *Hymns for Today's Church* is such that *Praise!* seems almost like a new edition of this book.[\[25\]](#) Yet, *Hymns for Today's Church* is hardly what consistent evangelical and Reformed worshippers would want to use. As well as being modern, it is Anglican — a denomination that ordains women, tolerates sodomite clergy, disbelieves in hell, condones couples cohabiting together, is shot through with theological liberalism, and is moving nearer to antichrist Rome all the time. I am not suggesting that those named earlier are guilty of such wickedness. However, the denomination in which they remain is. And this is partly the stable from which the book we are reviewing comes. Before any commit themselves to *Praise!* they must look first at this other hymn book that lurks behind it — and the high-apostate denomination it represents.

Another deplorable feature of *Praise!* is the inclusion of material from authors whose work would never appear if standards were different. We have already mentioned Graham Kendrick's more than 30 hymns. A look at his official web site ([www.grahamkendrick.co.uk](http://www.grahamkendrick.co.uk)) will prove revealing. It shows, that he is a co-founder of *March for Jesus* [\[26\]](#) along with Gerald Coates (*Pioneer* — a charismatic organisation), Roger Forster (*Ichthus Christian Fellowship*) and Lynn Green (*Youth With A Mission*). Kendrick serves on the leadership team of *Ichthus Christian Fellowship*, which belongs to the Evangelical Alliance and the ecumenical Churches Together (the replacement for British Council of Churches). Moreover, his famous song “Shine, Jesus Shine,” so the site tells us, “has been sung at numerous high profile occasions such as: The Dunblane Memorial Service, Tasmania massacre memorial service — broadcast live nationwide, Prom Praise, Billy Graham crusades, and the largest ever open air mass in Manila where the Pope ‘swung his cane in time to the music!’” **Yet, this song is included in “Praise!” (number 533).** Is *this* the kind of thing we want in a hymn book for protestant evangelicals? Let those who contemplate using this hymn book think long and hard about this.

Further appalling items are a hymn by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), the German theological liberal and ecumenist (number 236); one sourced from the United Reformed Church (number 521); and some from the Iona Community (numbers 910, 948). This last will cause all lovers of truth immense concern. Here is what it says about itself on its official web site:

“In their work, corporately and individually, members pursue concerns of the Community relating to discovering new and relevant approaches to worship, the promotion of peace and social justice, through, for example, opposing nuclear weapons and seeking reductions in the arms trade, supporting the cause of the poor and the exploited in Britain and abroad, political activity in combating racism, pursuing questions on work and unemployment and engagement with environmental and constitutional issues; commitment to strengthening interdenominational understanding and the sharing of communion; the exploration of human sexuality; the rediscovery of an integrated approach to spirituality, the promotion of inter-faith dialogue, and the development of the ministry of healing.”

The inclusion of material from this source takes our breath away. Again, I ask, is *this* the kind of thing we want in a hymn book for protestant evangelicals? Here is a specimen of the hymn writing of this “Community.” Number 948 connects the sufferings of Christ with the sufferings of the world in a typically mystical and maudlin way. The first line of each of the 5 verses runs “As if you were not there...” and mentions natural disasters (“famine and flood together usher death, disease and terror”) and the dying shown on the News (“we televise the dying, watch the helpless victims crying”). However, the worst comes in the lines of verse 4:

As if you were not there,  
Your Son, when faith defied him,  
faced a crowd which crucified him ...

What *do* those words mean: “Your Son, when faith defied him”? Is this saying that Christ had no faith when on the cross? Or, that He tried to have faith, but somehow it defied His efforts? If so, it is contrary to Scripture, where we read that on the cross He prayed for His enemies (Luke 23:34), committed His cause to the righteous Judge (1 Peter 2:23), offered Himself to God (Hebrews 9:14), and commended His spirit to His Father (Luke 23:46). If this strange expression refers to the cry of dereliction, then it is still wrong because our Lord’s faith was there in the words of that cry: “My God, My God ....” In doing such dishonour to our Lord Jesus Christ, this is worse than puzzling: it is near-blasphemous. Again I ask, is *this* the kind of thing we want in a hymn book for protestant evangelicals?

It could be argued that similar strictures apply to *Christian Hymns* and *Grace Hymns*, both of which contain material from heretical sources. This is sadly true, and I do not defend them from the charge. Despite Spurgeon’s oft-quoted disclaimer (“a good hymn has not been rejected because of the character of the author, or the heresies of the church in whose hymnal it first occurred”) there can be no excuse for the indirect sanction of hymn writers whose beliefs were an abomination to God. In citing these two books throughout this review, I do not hold them up as perfect hymn books, simply the best (particularly *Christian Hymns*) that is available today and a useful benchmark.

However, the offensive material in both these books put together amounts to much less than that found in *Praise!* And it has this important difference: most in *Praise!* is by living authors, some who represent liberal Christendom, and others who represent the errors and delusions of the Charismatic Movement. To sing material from this stable (at its best, of the flesh; at its worst, of the devil) is simply to perpetuate the terrible damage this movement has done in the UK and throughout the world. No lover of biblical truth

will want to associate with this, particularly in the area that it has corrupted most: divine worship.

### **5. *Praise!* is a historic move away from biblical and godly worship**

“As culture and language change, the way in which Christians express their adoration and love for God also changes.”<sup>[27]</sup> This opening sentence of *About Praise!* sums up the thinking that lies behind this book. It has influenced the compilers in the changes they have made, the material they have included and what they have left out. It is a statement teeming with innuendos and must be challenged. We need to ask the following questions:

a) Is our worship *really* to be governed by the culture and language of the time?

If so, what would Israel’s worship in the Old Testament have been like? Or the worship of the early church? The golden calf in Exodus 32 answers the first, and Colossians 2:23 “a shew of wisdom in will worship” (i.e. worship that is the product of what *we* think and want) answers the second. When we start taking our cue from prevailing culture and language we have cut ourselves adrift and anything becomes possible.

b) If this *is* to be our approach, how can we then speak of *biblical* worship?

Has God not told us in His word how He wants us to worship and glorify Him throughout the ages? Where is the “Regulative Principle” that believers of Reformed persuasion rightly count so important?<sup>[28]</sup> As should be clear by now, there is no evidence of commitment to this principle throughout the whole of *Praise!*

c) If worship must adapt itself to surrounding changes, why did it remain the same for so long in the past?

Believers who took their Bibles seriously did not change the way they “express their adoration and love for God” during the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, 1960s. Hymn books published during those decades, even into the 70s, as noted above, are all very similar in philosophy and contents.<sup>[29]</sup> Is it not the case that such changes have less to do with necessity or biblical reasons, and more to do with the impact of the Charismatic Movement, with its songs and its dumbing down of doctrine over the last two decades?

d) Is it not surprising, in the preface, that there is not one mention of the term Reformed?

*Grace Hymns*, which *Praise!* is designed to replace, opened its Preface with these words:

“In meeting the request for a collection of hymns for congregational worship of churches holding to the Reformed Faith and to a Baptist church order (reflecting the confessions of 1689 and 1966), the editors have recognised that truth is essential to worship. Special attention has been given to the great doctrines of sovereign grace...”

This is well said, but what a world away from the sentiments in *Praise!* Granted, those involved here are not all of Baptist persuasion. However, this is not the issue. The term “Reformed” expresses a concern to bring worship more into conformity with God’s

revealed will, not less so, and this is something that transcends other differences among brethren.

If it is agreed that our *preaching* should be thus reformed (and presumably some compilers of *Praise!* do agree) why not our *worship* also? Yet *Praise!* highlights the hiatus that blights churches today: reformed preaching from the pulpit, and decidedly unreformed worship-styles in the pew at the same time. As if Almighty God has the right to say what comes from the pulpit, but not what is offered to Him in the pew. Presumably, those who favour this hymn book would not have Graham Kendrick or men from the Iona Community to preach in their churches — why then tolerate their awful material in the worship of their churches? However, maybe they *would* have these men to preach to them. If so, then this just shows how far things have moved and how ominously revealing this hymn book is.

Be that as it may, *About Praise!* (which is like an apology for the book) does not read as even robustly evangelical, let alone reformed. It is so *broadly* evangelical that it could be endorsed by almost any group coming under that umbrella today, including Arminians, charismatics, Anglicans and even ecumenists. Avoidance of terms like “Reformed,” of course, helps this inclusive outlook.

The *Praise!* web site says: “Many of those involved in the production of *Praise!* come from FIEC churches.” This inclusive stance is consistent with FIEC, whose member churches include near-charismatics and some who are not known for their separatist stance. The FIEC’s own web site has “great links” to “sites which we believe seek to honour God and have similar beliefs to our own” and one of these is to the “Apostolic Church!”<sup>[30]</sup> All this confirms the move away from the reformed conviction that “truth is essential to worship.”

e] Is this hymn book not a standard bearer for modern worship?

We have sought to identify this movement in previous articles in the *Quarterly*.<sup>[31]</sup> *Praise!* is the fruit of this, and will become an important advocate for it. In the preface, the word “contemporary” appears six times, and the word “modern” five times, almost like a litany. The impatience with traditional hymns and the insistence upon turning to new compositions is part of this downgrade. Here now is a book that conveniently brings between its covers the new compositions that have been confined to overhead projectors or songbooks, and mixes them with some traditional hymns (heavily modernised). We are left in no doubt what the agenda is: “We aimed at a hymnbook for the 21st century”<sup>[32]</sup> ... “Reference to the fact that a hymn is in a *Jubilate* or *Praise!* version should encourage our minds to leave a previous century and enter the third millennium.”<sup>[33]</sup> With this book, the movement gives us what it says worship should now be, and those who use it will join the spiritual free-fall of this movement.

Brian Edwards and the other editors are obviously sensitive to the effect this might have upon evangelicalism: “...we recognise the potential for conflict in introducing a new hymnbook ... We have prayed that this book would not be a cause of division.”<sup>[34]</sup> Yet, how can this book *not* be a cause of division, when it will inevitably polarise believers and whole churches over its highly controversial contents? Any concern for unity, however, sounds rather hollow when we read the patronising way detractors are referred to: “We respect these views, but they are not ours, nor are they the views of a growing number of biblically based Christians today.”<sup>[35]</sup> Are *we* then, who deplore this book, *not* biblically based? This is almost offensive. Here, to us, is the supreme

irony: a hymn book that cavalierly promotes charismaticism and ecumenism claims for itself the position of being “biblically based”!

*Praise!* is more than a new hymn book — it is a new direction in professing evangelicalism in the UK. It catches the new mood exactly and will establish it in the churches that go over to it. Blurred doctrinal distinctions and broad sympathy with others who are *not* distinctively evangelical are the twin evils of this book. *Praise!* is a treacherous betrayal of our biblical heritage, and history will judge it as a significant landmark in the break-up of sound churches in our land. The UK distributors, Evangelical Press, should hang their heads in shame for promoting this book and failing to give the clear leadership that we desperately need today.

Let Christians who seek to worship in spirit and truth know this: all who use *Praise!* will lose incalculably more than they gain in their churches. They will identify with the shifting sands of a movement tied to the spirit of the age more than to true Christianity. They will let in charismatic choruses by the back door. They will drift into an unholy mix of composers and authors whose ethos is foreign to what should be held dear. They will part company with the godly who expressed their reverent worship in the Psalms of inspired David and the hymns of non-inspired spiritual giants whose productions lifted the soul to God and glorified Him in ways that the largely puerile contents of *Praise!* will never do.

We call upon all believers who are concerned for worship that pleases God to reject this hymn book. May God give us grace to discern the issues, contend for the faith once delivered, and to strive for better things in the Church where He inhabits the praises of His Israel (Psalm 22:3).

[1] Unless we include *Hymns for Today's Church*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1982. However, this was clearly an evangelical Anglican production, and has not gain wide acceptance.

[2] *About Praise!*, page x.

[3] *Wholehearted Praise!* — a review of the book by Errol Hulse, *Evangelicals Now*, October 2000, page 20.

[4] This is the publishing arm of Grace Baptist Churches in the UK. Historically, these would hold to the London 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. They are otherwise known as Particular Baptist Churches, owing to their Calvinistic view of the atonement known as “Particular Redemption.”

[5] The names of those sitting on this council were given in the Preview, but are not included in the hymn book itself. However the preface gives the names of the Editorial Board: John Appleby, Phil Arthur, David Cowen, Tim Grass, Christopher Idle, David Preston, John Rubens, Paul Sayer, Jim Sayers, Jonathan Stephen, Richard Underwood.

[6] See the Appendix for the first lines of all these missing hymns.

[7] *Ibid.*, page iv.

[8] *Ibid.*, page vii.

[9] An example is Psalm 32:8 “I will guide thee with mine eye.” In the margin it is: “I will counsel thee, mine eye shall be upon thee.” The metrical psalm renders it as does the margin:

And, with mine eye upon thee set,

I will direction show.

Thus, with metrical psalms we are getting even closer to the original.

[10] *About Praise!*, page iv.

[11] Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament, on Psalm 9:9.

[12] Psalm 119 seems to have suffered the most. Its 22 sections are reduced to a mere 8.

[13] If we compare Psalms 1,12,32,34,40,65,76,85 and 127 with our Bible we can see more of this interference with divine inspiration. For example, a phrase like “the man” becomes “the people,” “the poor,” “those,” “human,” and suchlike. It seems that every opportunity is taken to avoid gender-specific, masculine terms. This is utterly deplorable, and betrays a low view of the divine inspiration of Scripture. Furthermore, this use of the plural or general seriously undermines the Messianic interpretation of a number of psalms.

[14] Pages vi, vii.

[15] *Ibid.*, page v.

[16] Preface, 7<sup>th</sup> page.

[17] P.L. Meney, review of *Praise!* in *New Focus*, April/May 2000, page 17.

[18] Another of Toplady’s hymns has suffered the same fate. Number 711 “How vast the benefits divine” has “Thou wast Thyself our Surety” in verse 2, line 5. In *Praise!* it has become “you were yourself our guarantor.” This is dreadful, and shows a strange aversion to the biblical term Surety.

[19] “Efficacious suggests possession of a special quality or virtue that gives effective power (a detergent that is efficacious in removing grease)” Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1994.

[20] Douglas Legge reviewing *Hymns for a Tabernacle* by Gordon Booth in *Congregational Concern* magazine, Spring 2000, page 10.

[21] *About Praise!* page viii.

[22] Preface to a selection of Isaac Watts’ *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, Mayflower Christian Books, 1998.

[23] However, why has the second line of hymn 704 (“Just as I am”) been changed from “But that Thy blood was shed for me,” to “but that you died to set me free”? As we saw with Toplady’s hymn, this is evidence that, in places, rugged references to evangelical truth are smoothed out for more than poetical reasons, we fear.

[24] *Ibid.*, page xi.

[25] I am informed that *Hymns for Today’s Church* is going out of print.

[26] See number 891 for a repetitious marching song that suits this mentality.

[27] *About Praise!*, page iii.

[28] The Regulative Principle, recovered at the Reformation and championed by the Puritans, is simply a concern to ensure that Scripture sanctions all worship offered to God for His glory. It is well expressed by Calvin: “Moreover, the rule which distinguishes between pure and vitiated worship is of universal application ... we may not adopt any device which seems fit to ourselves, but look to the injunction of

Him who alone is entitled to prescribe ... I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word.”

[29] I have a *Baptist Church Hymnal* from 1933 and a *Hymns of Faith* from 1964. Apart from the physical format of these books, the spiritual tone and contents of these hymn books are remarkably similar.

[30] In the *Sword and Trowel* 2000, No.2, Peter Masters and David Fountain highlight alarming evidence that FIEC (and the British Evangelical Council) have turned away from their founding principles. Quoting from the recently published FIEC booklet by Jonathan Stephen (*Bible Churches Together — a Plea for True Ecumenism*) they clearly show that this is indeed the case. In the booklet, Jonathan Stephen calls for unity with evangelicals in compromised and apostate denominations under the umbrella of *Essentially Evangelical*. This is clearly a changed stance for the FIEC, who at one time believed that churches should leave their corrupt denominations *before* joining the Fellowship. Jonathan Stephen then impudently asserts that this would have met with the approval of C.H. Spurgeon, E.J. Poole-Connor (the founder of FIEC) and Dr. Lloyd-Jones! Dr. Masters and Mr. Fountain show that this claim is fallacious, and amounts to an attempt at re-writing recent history. Every Christian should read these articles in the *Sword and Trowel*. It will then be clearer why *Praise!* is so inclusive and compromised in the offensive worship material it contains.

[31] “Modernise or Perish!”, “Contemporary Worship Music,” and “Why Good Men Change,” now appear (slightly revised) as a separate booklet.

[32] *About Praise!*, page iv.

[33] *Ibid.*, page vi.

[34] *Ibid.*, page xii

[35] *Ibid.*, page xii.