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# A Resource for Worship

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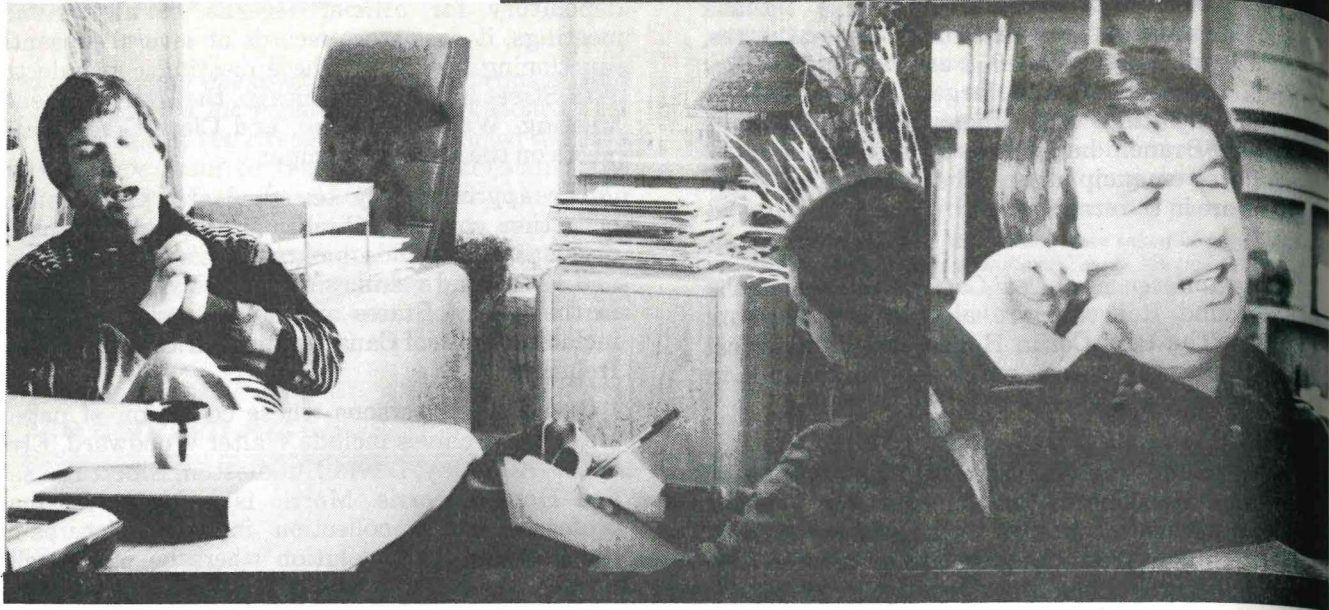
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## A Resource for Worship

by Paul Anderson

In the last couple of years I have had several encounters with pastors and lay-leaders of Friends meetings who have been overwhelmingly impressed with a particular new hymnal. My interest was further sparked when I discovered that the committee in search of a hymnal replacement for the meeting at which I serve had adopted this same hymnal as its first choice.

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*Gayle Boss works for Radio Station WIUC in Winchester, Indiana, and takes classes at the Earlham School of Religion.*

Last month we accepted the committee's proposal and adopted *Hymns for the Family of God* as the new hymnal for our small, rural Indiana meeting.

After looking through the hymnal I was so impressed by the variety of the selection, the quality of the type and layout, the innovative format, and the great potential for use that I sought out one of the key members of the editorial board, Bill Gaither, of Alexandria, Indiana, who is so well known in the field of Gospel Music. Having written some 300 songs within the last twenty years, Bill Gaither is likely to be considered the greatest hymn-writer of the '70's. He is an authority on Christian music, and it was an honor to interview him concerning the hymnal that he and others worked so hard to produce. The interview went like this:

**Paul** — Bill, what prompted you and other members of the editorial board to begin the development of such a hymnal?

**Bill** — Any creation arises out of a sense of need or vacuum. One factor has been the development of contemporary songs which provide new, worshipful ways of communicating old truths. A second motivation has been the desire to include the writings of great persons of God who in the last few years have had some very meaningful things to say.

**Paul** — You mean readings as well as hymns?

**Bill** — Right; and thirdly, we saw the need for a different look. As opposed to hiding the readings in the back of the book we have brought them out and interspersed them throughout the hymnal alongside the appro-





Bill Gaither warms to his subject.

Photos by Gayle Boss

prate songs. The choice of type and the over all lay-out have been designed to make the book a usable tool.

Oh, and one more factor is that we saw the need to explore the rich background of old, old hymns and to include some of those hymns which may have been left out of denominational hymnals within the last hundred years or so.

These are at least some of the needs that we saw.

**Paul** — What role did you play in the development of the hymnal?

**Bill** — That of a consultant. Fred Bock was the general editor, and he did a good deal of the work as he was concentrating on it full time. Bryan Leech was the assistant editor, while Bob MacKenzie and I served as consultants along with three or four others who were on the board.

**Paul** — Why did you choose a title such as *Hymns for the Family of God*?

**Bill** — Because I think that's what it is. We believe very much in the concept of the "Body of

Christ" and that we are all part of that body.

At first we didn't even want to call it a hymnal because of the strong denominational overtones involved. We would like to think of it more as sort of a worship resource.

**Paul** — The "family of God" theme certainly comes out in your music.

**Bill** — Yes it does. Gloria and I have had a real concern that Christians need not be ostracized from each other because of differences in the way they worship. We are all part of the same family, and the hymnal tries in an eclectic way to preserve the best from various traditions. Therefore, the broad name seems to cover exactly what we are trying to do.

**Paul** — I found the lay-out to be most helpful. Who came up with the idea of the four divisions of "God's Love for Us", "Our Love for God", "Our Love for the Family of God", and "Our Love for Others"?

**Bill** — That was pretty much done by the four of us who were mentioned earlier. Fred may have

had a stronger influence than the rest, but it really did seem to make quite a bit of sense.

**Paul** — The concern is evident that people ought to know *why* they are singing, *to whom* they are singing, and that "love" is to be central no matter what the occasion. Bill, I was especially impressed with thoughtfulness which made for the inclusion of such writers as C.S. Lewis, Peter Marshall, Corrie ten Boom, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and . . .

**Bill** — Mother Teresa.

**Paul** — Yes, Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

**Bill** — Frankly, Paul, one of the key goals of the entire endeavor has been to demonstrate that sound theology and good music are not antithetical; they *do* go hand in hand.

**Paul** — Tell us what you mean.

**Bill** — "Heavy" theologians have had a hard time taking musicians seriously, and probably for a good reason. Some gospel music has been amazingly shallow, dwelling more on the mansions and streets



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of gold we'll see in heaven than providing ways as to how we can realistically meet the crises at hand to which we are called to minister.

Paul — I see.

Bill — We hope to show that music is not just a preliminary sidelight to be gotten out of the way so that the real message can be delivered. We are concerned with music *because* we are in the "message business."

Paul — Is it possible for the serious message to be combined with "feel good" music, as your music has been referred to by some?

Bill — Definitely. Our message is one of hope, not hype. Part of gospel music is to comfort the disturbed; to say that because of God there is peace. But we also have the responsibility after we get people's attention to disturb the comfortable as well.

Paul — Christ is both the Great Comforter as well as the Great Disturber.

Bill — Right. And at that point then, we write songs like "I Will Praise Him" (knowing that my praise may cost me everything). Praise is more than sitting around with one's legs crossed and one's hand raised; it is a way of life, and it can be very costly. Only then can we rightly ask, "Are you willing to sign up knowing the possible cost?"

Paul — It seems to me that good music and sound thinking can and must be complementary to each other. I was quite impressed with the way this combination is demonstrated by what I would call the selection of "classics" in contemporary sacred music.

Bill — Yes, take for instance "The Lord's Prayer" (Malotte's setting). This is the *first time* it has ever been printed in a hymnal.

Paul — Well, congregations certainly deserve access to such a fine piece. Tell me, Bill, what makes a song a classic?

Bill — When it is all said and done, the people determine what is a classic and what isn't.

It is rather interesting to note that Longfellow was highly criticized because his poems sold and were popular during his day. The critics said, "They won't last!" and yet they have. So at that point, when a song is repeated and used over and over and over again, it becomes a classic — because it lasts in the lives of people.

Paul — As one of the major contributors to the hymnal what type of criteria were each of the selections subjected to?

Bill — Very tough scrutiny in each case. We repeatedly asked ourselves two questions: "Is this song one which can meaningfully express something that needs to be expressed?" and "Is it singable for use by a congregation?"

One of our songs, for instance, "I Could Never Outlove the Lord," which is not one of our most popular songs, was included because the committee saw its meaning as significant. The words go:

I'm going to live the way He  
wants me to live,  
I'm going to give until there's  
just no more to give;  
I'm going to love, love 'til there's  
just no more to love —  
I could never, never outlove the  
Lord.

Paul — Bill, as a Christian layman, what excites you personally the most about the hymnal?

Bill — I guess the most exciting thing to me personally is to see it in use. The Church we attend in Anderson (Indiana) is the college church and to see those people "raise the rafters" with their singing is quite thrilling to me. It's joy to see some of the professors and others (who would

tend to be more serious and a bit more limited in their expression) singing "and we lift our hearts before you as a token of our love . . ."

I have written Jimmy Owens several times saying "I want you to know that you made the worship service this morning with your song. God bless you; write more like that, we need more of that kind."

From a layman's standpoint, the most exciting thing is to see it at work. To see people come alive spiritually through finding a new avenue of expression in worship is most thrilling — and I might say rewarding as well.

Paul — If I may, allow me to ask one last question: how will the Church be "triumphant" in the future? (As an illustration of the Gaithers' commitment to the "gathered community," they schedule concerts only on Friday and Saturday nights, and are always sure to return home in time to take their family to church on Sunday morning — even if they must fly across the country to do so.)

Bill — Francis Schaeffer put the question rightly, saying "How then, shall we live?" The Church will be triumphant as it continues to make a difference in people's lives. If we get too caught up in the nice coziness of our gatherings we won't have anything to give to the people out there who need it so badly.

Paul — Elton Trueblood would say "we gather to worship and we scatter to serve."

Bill — Yes, we must be able to take the healing message of love out into the world. And this will only happen as this love is embodied in the clear minds and warm hearts of ordinary men and women whose lives have been changed by the costly grace of Jesus Christ.

Paul — Maybe your "resource for worship" will further this work.

Bill — I hope so.