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# *The Spirituality of Renewal Music : A Preliminary Exploration*

JEREMY BEGBIE

There must be few Anglicans in Britain who have not encountered the music of the renewal movement in some shape or form. Many of us were initiated through *Sound of Living Waters* and *Fresh Sounds*; some perhaps more recently through *Songs of Fellowship*. But even if we have never opened these books for ourselves, to pretend that this music can be quietly ignored is impossible. It has taken root in hundreds of churches of very different persuasions. The 'music group', with orchestral instruments supplementing guitars and piano, has become increasingly common. Alongside war-horses like *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, many congregations have purchased *Mission Praise* — a hymn book with many renewal songs — and some have produced their own home-made books, gathering items from the ever-increasing flood of published collections.

It is, of course, a field where conflict rages. We need only think of the furore over the music chosen for the recent enthronement of the Archbishop of Canterbury. A year or so ago, an organist at a church I know announced he would resign if *Mission Praise* was purchased as a supplement to their hymn book. Blistering anathemas condemning renewal music as 'trivial', 'theologically trite', 'individualistic', 'full of mindless repetition', 'introspective', 'manipulative', 'full of unsavoury connotations' are often backed up by contrasts between the latest four-line 'ditty' from Thankyou Music and the 'great' and 'unsurpassable' hymns of Watts and Wesley. Within the renewal world too, criticism is not hard to find. Graham Cray, Vicar of St Michael-le-Belfry in York, laments that 'there is a fundamental deficiency in the spirituality from which Western Christians compose and use music in worship', and he specifically cites renewal songs as primary evidence.<sup>1</sup>

With the growing use of renewal music and such heated controversy in the air, it is surprising that virtually no serious theological study of this music has been undertaken (let alone a musicological, liturgical, or sociological treatment). Such a study is important for a number of reasons. First, the immense and increasing popularity of this music calls for some explanation. Alan Luff, Secretary of the Hymn Society, comments: 'It has long been a concern of mine that we in the Hymn Society would come to grips with what is happening in the Pentecostal movements. We tend to look at their songs and to judge them purely in the way we would judge a traditional hymn, and whereas surely some of the criteria apply there must be reasons why a huge number of our fellow Christians take up a kind of song that we

<sup>1</sup> 'Justice, Rock and the Renewal of Worship,' in R. Sheldon, *In Spirit and in Truth: Exploring Directions in Music in Worship Today*, Hodder & Stoughton, London 1989, p 3 et passim.

normally would not touch.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, sung music can play a significant role in educating congregations and shaping theological awareness. Ian Bradley observed recently in *The Times* that 'the mainstream churches hardly seem to take hymnody seriously as a way of spreading and nurturing the Christian faith.'<sup>3</sup> The importance of hymns and songs in this regard can be overstated, but it is worth remembering that in most main Anglican services at least a third of the service will be taken up by singing of some sort and that striking music can imprint words on the memory very firmly: a good song is usually easier to recall than a good sermon. Composers in the renewal stream know this well. Chris Bowater, for example, writes that 'These things that we declare with the mouth, that we begin to sing, begin to speak, become part of our lives.... How many Scripture verses do we know simply because of the songs that are based on Scripture?'<sup>4</sup> Thirdly, hymns and songs can be very powerful indicators of the concerns, character and health of a community. Much can be learned from renewal music about the spirituality of the congregations which use it. As A. P. Merriam comments in *The Anthropology of Music*, 'Music is a human phenomenon produced by people and existing and functioning in a social situation.... Songs provide the student of human behaviour with some of the richest material he has for analysis, but their full potential remains to be exploited.'<sup>5</sup>

This article is a preliminary attempt to exploit some of that potential. I want to try to discern some of the features of the spirituality evident in the songs of the contemporary renewal movement — to ask what is implied and reflected about the quality and character of our relationship with God. I also want to ask what positive contribution such music can make to the wider church and suggest some areas where theological criticism is needed. I should say that I write as one who has had what could broadly be called a 'classical' training, who was deeply suspicious of anything from the renewal stables for many years, but who has gained much from being thrown into using a wide range of renewal music in many churches.

### The material examined

We are tackling an area where exact boundaries are hard to fix. But some territory markers are needed to keep the discussion within manageable limits. By 'renewal music' I am speaking of that music which has its recent roots in the charismatic movement of the 1960s and has influenced, at least to some extent, virtually all the mainline denominations in Britain. In the 1970s, a distinct branch of the charismatic movement emerged, usually referred to as 'Restorationism' (sometimes the 'house church movement'), by now a well-established feature of the British church scene. It is distinguished, among other things, by its independence from mainline denominations and a keenness to model church life along strictly biblical lines.<sup>6</sup> We

<sup>2</sup> As quoted by Walter Hollenweger in 'Music in the Service of Reconciliation,' *Theology*, vol XCII (1989), pp 276f.

<sup>3</sup> Monday, May 29 (1989), p 16. For the same point, cf. B. Castle, 'Hymns - More than Songs of Praise,' *Theology*, vol XCIV (1991), pp 101-106.

<sup>4</sup> *Creative Worship - A Guide to Spirit-filled Worship*, Basingstoke, Marshall Pickering 1986, p 75.

<sup>5</sup> *The Anthropology of Music*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1964, pp 185, 13.

need to keep in mind that hundreds of Restorationist songs have been exported to mainstream churches and that a very large proportion of renewal music used among Anglicans is Restorationist in origin.

I have decided to limit myself to music written to be sung by adults in corporate worship (which includes small gatherings such as housegroups). Concentrating on material sung in Anglican churches in Britain in the last ten years, I have chosen to focus on three overlapping groups of songs: the *Songs of Fellowship* collections, the latest book from 'Spring Harvest' and the output of Graham Kendrick. This is not, of course, the only material available, as a brief visit to any well-stocked Christian bookshop will confirm. But most renewal music currently in use by Anglican congregations comes from at least one of these sources.

*Songs and Hymns of Fellowship* (SHF)<sup>7</sup> consists of all the material previously published under the title *Songs of Fellowship* (645 items) together with 114 well-established traditional hymns. (Because of their age, in this study we can set aside these hymns.<sup>8</sup>) In 1989, *Songs of Fellowship Book Four* (SOF4)<sup>9</sup> appeared, containing 200 further contemporary songs. *Songs and Hymns of Fellowship* has sold remarkably well on both sides of the Atlantic — over a million copies. It provides us with the most concentrated and most continuously updated supply of renewal songs. Most are from the 1980s, yet the 1960s and 1970s are not ignored — 'Freely, Freely' (SHF126) and 'I am the Bread of Life' (SHF182) both find a place. Among British song writers, Graham Kendrick (Ichthus Fellowship, London), David Fellingham (Clarendon Church, Hove), Chris Bowater (New Life Christian Fellowship, Lincoln) are prominent. Songs from the United States — notably from John Wimber's Vineyard Fellowships — are also included.

*Shaken but not Stirred* (SS)<sup>10</sup> is the title given to the 1991 song book used at Spring Harvest, a mammoth and ever-growing celebration held at various venues in England and enjoyed by Christians from a wide variety of traditions. Usually about a third of the participants are Anglican. This loose-leaf volume of 139 items includes a small number of traditional and well-known hymns; the rest are mostly songs from the Restorationist movement.

A familiar worship leader at Spring Harvest is Graham Kendrick, without doubt the best-known Christian song writer today. Many of his songs

<sup>6</sup> For further discussion, see J. Steven, *Worship in the Restoration Movement*, Grove, Bramcote 1989; A. Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom* (Second edn), Hodder & Stoughton, London 1988.

<sup>7</sup> Kingsway, Eastbourne 1987.

<sup>8</sup> 'Hymn' and 'song' have been distinguished in various ways in recent years, but here no such distinction is necessary. The word 'song' will cover items some would prefer to call a 'hymn', i.e. a piece of three or more verses in which a theme is developed.

<sup>9</sup> Kingsway, Eastbourne 1989. The only comparable collection peculiar to Britain is *Mission Praise*, Marshall Pickering, London 1990, another best-seller and (in its various editions) widely used in the Church of England. It contains a much larger number of standard hymns than *Songs and Hymns of Fellowship* and is used by many churches which are openly hostile to charismatic renewal. There is little renewal material which is not also in SHF and SOF4. For these reasons I have not included it in this study.

<sup>10</sup> Spring Harvest, Uckfield 1991.

have found their way into standard collections such as *Songs and Hymns of Fellowship*. Even the most ardent traditionalist finds some good in Kendrick: the quality of items like 'From Heaven He Came' (SHF120) and 'Meekness and Majesty' (SS76) seems beyond dispute. Some even hail him as a second Charles Wesley. One of Kendrick's most distinctive contributions has been the promotion of open-air musical processions — 'Make Way' marches — material for which has been gathered in the volume *Make Way: Public Praise* (MW).<sup>11</sup> These street marches are designed to declare the truths of the gospel publicly and joyfully, to promote prayer for the nation and to provide a demonstration of Christian unity. Important also is the idea of spiritual warfare: singing God's praise scatters the powers of darkness. Our songs, claims Kendrick, can 'become the spiritual equivalents of rockets exploding with joy in heaven and wreaking havoc in hell!'<sup>12</sup>

In examining collections such as these, we need to avoid the common trap of focusing attention solely on the words and treating the music as incidental. Of course, theological appraisal is a good deal easier in the case of words than music. But to ignore the theological impact of music is surely a mistake. The melodic, harmonic and rhythmic dimensions of music are all value-laden. Music imprints its own meaning, however hard this is to articulate.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, in a song, words and music bear upon each other. They interact in subtle and profound ways. Thus, though there may be limited use in turning the spotlight on the words alone, we must also be prepared to ask how the music affects the way in which a song as a whole is received. (It would seem strange, after all, to evaluate a Schubert song without attending to the music!)

We also need to be aware of some of the pitfalls and limitations of choosing to deal exclusively with published collections. For instance, we can easily lose sight of the setting of the songs. As anthropologists of music insist, to study music outside its specific environment is invariably distorting. I shall do what I can to take the context of these songs into account, but a fuller treatment would need to consider more carefully the way in which they are actually sung by congregations. When leading music workshops in parishes, I often find myself encouraging people to sing songs as they have heard them, not as they are written: the two are rarely identical. Also, factors such as the type of accompaniment used, speed, how a song is introduced, how many items are sung in a service and so on can vary greatly from church to church, and thus radically affect the way in which this music functions within worship. Further, in considering only published song books we should not forget that many churches have compiled their own looseleaf collections, that some use overhead projector slides, that some songs are regularly used which are never even written down. Further still, even where a published book is used, usually only a relatively small proportion of the material is actually sung. (It is disingenuous to single out for attack the cruder songs of *Songs and Hymns of Fellowship* — as many enjoy doing —

<sup>11</sup> Kingsway, Eastbourne 1991.

<sup>12</sup> MW, p 12.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. W. Edgar, *Taking Note of Music*, SPCK, London 1986, ch 3; J. Begbie, *Music in God's Purposes*, Handsel Press, Edinburgh 1989, pp 5ff.

when the ones usually castigated are so rarely used. We are not, after all, dealing with a theological compendium to be read from cover to cover, but a resource book.)

Nevertheless, while recognising the hazards and drawbacks of our approach, it is hoped that what follows will provide resources on which others can usefully draw in more extensive studies.

### Song types

To set the scene, it is useful to outline the main distinctive types of song encountered in renewal music. (There are, of course, exceptions — songs which do not fit these categories and songs which straddle more than one.)

a) *Songs of Exuberant Praise to God* These songs are typically up-tempo, addressed directly to God or Jesus in thanksgiving and praise (e.g. 'Father God I wonder' SHF92; 'O Lord our God' SHF409).

b) *Songs of Jubilant Testimony and Exhortation* Addressed to one another and usually fast, these unashamedly celebrate the joy of new life in Christ. Some are in the form of testimony ('I'm a New Creation' SHF179; 'God is Good' SHF131); some are vigorous exhortations ('Come on and Celebrate' SHF69; 'Be bold, be strong' SHF4/9); some are sung with increasing speed as the song progresses ('When the Spirit of the Lord' SHF604; 'Jesus Put this Song into my Heart' SF4/81).

c) *Songs of Intimacy* These are typically low-volume and low-tempo, in the major mode,<sup>14</sup> short, and sung at least twice. They speak of God's nearness, of an intense encounter between God and the worshipper. Some are simple love songs ('I Love You Lord' SHF203; 'When I Look into your Holiness' SHF601; 'Within the Veil' SHF616); others are directed to each other ('Draw Near to God' SHF78; 'Be Still' SF4/10). Instruments sometimes play these songs quietly as musical interludes between renditions by the congregation.<sup>15</sup>

d) *Songs of Majesty* A glance at any of the renewal collections will reveal a high percentage of songs extolling the Kingship of Christ and/or God. Typical are the songs 'Majesty' (SHF358) and 'Jesus is King' (SHF277). The royal language of the psalms is commonly taken up ('At your Feet We Fall' SHF25) as is the theme of the Lamb on the throne from Revelation ('All Heaven Declares' SHF4/2). The music is normally regal and sturdy with a strong, regular bass line.

e) *Songs of Hushed Reverence* These have very few parallels in traditional hymnody. The words convey a sense of awe at being in the presence of God, the music is generally tender and very slow. Many are short ('Worthy is the Lamb' SHF621; 'He is Lord' SHF159; 'Be Still and Know' SHF37) and some are sung repeatedly, somewhat like Taizé chants. They are often used as communion music and to preface periods of open prayer.

<sup>14</sup> Music in the 'major mode' employs a particular series or 'scale' of notes and is often said to sound 'cheerful' and 'joyful'; in contrast, the 'minor mode' employs a different series of notes and is sometimes said to possess a 'sadder' quality. Controversy rages around the question of whether this is intrinsic to the physical nature of sound or merely conventional.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Steven, op. cit., p 15.

f) *Songs of Battle* Here the theme of God's Kingship is allied to the theme of the church militant: the army of God advances forth into battle. The music is made to measure, with striding bass lines and catchy melodies. Not surprisingly, much of Kendrick's 'Make Way' material falls into this class (e.g. 'The Lord is Marching Out' MW96), but such songs are very prevalent elsewhere (e.g. 'And the Warriors' SHF13; 'I Hear the Sound of the Army of the Lord' SHF198).

### Challenges to face

Many have serious misgivings about these songs — theological, musical and liturgical — and we shall consider some of these in a moment. But whatever our final assessment may be, they do, I believe, present a number of crucial challenges to church musicians which cannot be lightly swept aside. Here I mention four.

First, in many of these songs there is the conviction that *God himself is the primary agent in worship*, and that he draws us into a *profoundly personal relationship with himself*. There is a world of difference between worship as a burdensome duty, directed optimistically to a distant and essentially unknown God, and worship as a gift of God, who through the Spirit of his Son in us enables us to call him 'Father' (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15).<sup>16</sup> The latest report from the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England notes that when they interviewed those currently involved in the renewal movement, many spoke of God 'energising [prayer] from within, and no less responding in it, alluring one again, inviting one into a continuing adventure.'<sup>17</sup> Many who have experienced the best of renewal music would speak in the same way. True, in some songs, and in some charismatic worship, we find a tendency to slip back into a 'worship by works' mentality, where we seem to have to engineer decent worship before God can be known at all. But arguably much commoner has been the discovery by thousands of a sense of being caught up by God's own dynamic life and pulled into a deeper knowledge of his love, not only in a private context but also in public worship, and not only through words but also through music.

It is in this light that the simple love songs so characteristic of the renewal tradition are to be seen. To compare pieces like 'I Love You Lord' (SHF203) with the classic hymns of Wesley is to miss the point. In churches which are often cerebral and over-verbal, these songs provide an opportunity for a direct and heartfelt adoration of God, in the confident conviction of his immediate engagement with the worshipper. Certainly, too much intimacy with God can threaten a proper respect for his otherness and majesty. But this is only true if intimacy predominates over all else. As we have seen, the sovereignty and independence of God are in fact very prevalent subjects in renewal music.

Secondly, renewal music has opened up for countless Christians new possibilities of *praise*. Praise is one of the scarcest features of our society, yet it is by far the commonest and most distinctive theme of renewal songs. The

<sup>16</sup> Cf. T. Smail, *The Giving Gift*, Hodder & Stoughton, London 1988, ch. 9.

<sup>17</sup> *We Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Church House Publishing, London 1991, p. 21.

praise of our Creator has always been fundamental to Anglican worship and church life and we would be foolish to ignore the lessons which renewal music can teach us in this respect. I have seen Christians of many ages find in these songs vehicles of authentic praise which other music has simply not provided. And whatever hesitations we may have about vast corporate gatherings such as Spring Harvest, even the hard-nosed sceptic cannot deny that there can be a vibrancy of praise at such events which is not often encountered elsewhere, praise which takes up the whole person and yet is directed firmly towards the triune God.

Thirdly, there is the *accessibility* of renewal music. Indisputably, a great deal of traditional church music leaves the vast majority of the population very cold. Music in worship must come to terms with the particularities of local culture if it is to have any impact at all. The style of renewal music is largely of the Radio 2 'easy listening' variety, with occasional forays into Radio 1. It has tapped into the widespread popularity of these idioms. While granting the importance of musical education, the need to stretch a congregation's horizons, the danger of unhelpful associations which certain music brings, we cannot ignore the musical vocabulary of a congregation if we take with any seriousness the truth that God in worship engages with us as we are. Renewal musicians have seen this very clearly.

Fourthly, there is its *flexibility*. Essentially a form of folk-music, music of the renewal movement has a pliability not common in other church music. Most of the songs can be accompanied by a variety of instruments (including the organ!) and in a variety of ways, and these are matters which can even be decided spontaneously during a service if need be. The music is rarely complex. Those who cannot read music are not necessarily excluded from playing a part in leading it. Children can sing most of the songs from an early age. The melodies are simple enough to be picked up by inexperienced instrumentalists: I have led parish weekends where children who have been learning an instrument for a year or two can even begin to improvise. Arrangements can thus be worked out together (rather than simply dictated) and fitted to the needs of particular congregations and services. In this way, those who are normally simply told what to sing or play find they have something to contribute, using gifts which may have no other outlet inside (or outside) the church. Needless to say, in the process, much is learned about learning from one another in Christ's Body, especially from people whom highly trained musicians tend to underrate. In short, this music affords numerous opportunities which we would be unwise to overlook.

### Some key theological issues

Theology and the renewal movement have not always been happy partners. No doubt part of the reason lies in a deep strain in Western Christianity which has tended to divide spiritual experience and reflective tradition. Yet, in Tom Smail's words, 'Where there is healthy charismatic renewal, there is always present a theologian — not a professional academic, but someone of whatever intellectual capacity, whom God is using to correct present experience by scriptural norm and relate what is happening to the whole truth of Christ.'<sup>18</sup> The danger with some renewal musicians is that in rediscovering

so dramatically dimensions of Christian truth and spirituality which have been stifled by others, they fail to *relate* adequately what they have found to the whole truth of Christ as known in Scripture and tradition. This can lead not only to theological narrow-mindedness but also to superficiality. To illustrate this, let me highlight some critical theological questions which need to be asked of the spirituality of renewal music.

### Christ, power and weakness

Let us begin with Christ himself as depicted in these songs. We have already noted the prevalence of the theme of Christ the King enthroned in glory, with robust, authoritative music to match. A large number of songs are addressed to Christ as *God* and we ought to be abidingly thankful that this cardinal truth has been so prominent in renewal worship. However, what is much less common, but equally important, is the notion of Christ in his risen humanity, Christ as the High Priest who has known weakness, been tempted and now intercedes for us (Heb. 4:14-16; 7:25). (The song 'Jesus is King' (SHF277) and Kendrick's 'Meekness and Majesty' (SS76) are two notable exceptions.) As T. F. Torrance and others have commented, there is a chronic tendency in the West so to thrust Christ into the majesty of God that his continuing ministry in our humanity is forgotten.<sup>19</sup> Attention in renewal songs is focused on Christ as the glorious object of our worship, but rarely as the one who in our humanity leads us to the Father. In Tom Smail's words: 'The King who reigns is also a priest who prays; he reigns, so to speak, from his knees.'<sup>20</sup>

Closely connected with this is the concept of *divine power* operating in renewal songs. Too often in Western theology the self-giving love of Christ on the cross — the very acme of God's power — has not been allowed to shape our theology of power sufficiently. To evade the cross in this way is not only suspect but highly dangerous — the implication of Paul's argument in 1 Cor. 2 (especially vv 2-5).<sup>21</sup> In the songs we are examining, is the power of Christ (and God) the power of Calvary love or of supernatural brute force? There can be little doubt that the accent falls strongly on the latter. The careless use of militaristic language does little to help. Granted that spiritual warfare is an important biblical theme (and all too rare in standard hymn books), we are surely far from the New Testament if we sing: 'We come with vengeance to possess our land' (SHF25). The appropriation of Old Testament texts about the capture of the promised land is a hazardous business, as many embarrassing episodes in church history have shown. Phrases such as 'The promised land God gave us is right here at our feet' (SHF529), 'Let us march on to take our promised land!' (SF4 25), 'Now is the time to march upon the land' (SS97) are too suggestive of naked self-assertion and a thirst for the wrong kind of power to be acceptable, however much other words in these songs might qualify them.

<sup>18</sup> *Theological Renewal*, I (1975), pp 3f.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. e.g. T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, Chapman, London 1975, ch. 4.

<sup>20</sup> *The Giving Gift*, p 206. It is interesting that the song 'God has exalted Him' (SHF 129), based on the servant-hymn of Philippians 2, makes no mention of Jesus' humiliation.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. T. Smail, 'The Love of Power and the Power of Love,' *Anvil*, vol. 6 (1989), pp 223-233.

In the same circle of ideas is a strong element of 'do-it-yourself' religion, imbued with considerable optimism at the prospect of 'success' and victory. The Restorationist influence is strong here. To quote Andrew Walker, 'For [the Restorationists], the only Church worth belonging to is the Church militant. They often like to see themselves as a battleship ready for war... the Church leads and the Kingdom follows.... The essential thrust of their adventism... is the establishment of a mighty kingdom of God *prior to the return of Christ.*'<sup>22</sup> Many songs reflect just this conviction. Even Kendrick (though he would not call himself a Restorationist) is capable of serious lapses, such as when he pens lines like 'I want to be a hist'ry maker' (SS37), a declaration light years away from anything recommended in the New Testament. In a similar vein are these words:

'We've been called to change the world,  
Jesus we have heard your great command.  
Motivated by love,  
We will change the world.'<sup>23</sup>

Against this, we can only insist that our mission is not a programme or a cause or a project through which we set about making our mark upon history, but a sharing in the mission of the triune God in and to the world, a mission in which God's own vulnerable love shown supremely at Golgotha is outpoured into the world.

The upshot of this tendency towards a particular understanding of divine (and human) power is that many aspects of Christian life receive scant attention. Human weakness is an obvious example. In *Songs and Hymns of Fellowship*, out of the songs listed under 'Spiritual Warfare', two thirds are strongly success-oriented, with little awareness of our inherent frailty and limitations, still less that such weakness can itself be a medium of the grace of God. Some (e.g. 264 and 538) actually adopt a polemic against weakness. And what of sin? It is certainly present — despite common criticisms to the contrary — but the weight is put very firmly on defeated sin rather than its seriousness and persistence (e.g. SHF126, 89, 639). To speak of our sins melting away 'at the whisper of [God's] word' is surely simplistic (SHF613). Many of my sins are not in the habit of melting away so easily. Corporate confession and repentance are themes rarely tackled, though there are signs of changes here: Chris Rolinson's setting of the General Confession (SOF4/4) and Kendrick's songs 'Come now Let us Reason Together' (SHF68) and 'Who can Sound the Depths of Sorrow?' (SHF182) are worthy exceptions to the tendency.

The cost of discipleship is another area almost entirely missing. Frustration, endurance, perseverance, patience in the midst of opposition — these are hardly mentioned, though central to the life and ministry of Jesus and his followers in every age. Speaking of the preponderance of positive and joyful music in the renewal tradition, Graham Cray comments, 'Too many have had to pretend that they felt as 'victorious' as the melodies and rhythms of

[these] songs implied.<sup>24</sup> There seems little recognition of the possibility, as von Balthasar has suggested, that the Spirit may sometimes lead us into a sharing of Christ's suffering and at the same time be that in God which spans the gulf between desolation and triumph. Growth in the Spirit, after all, may be at its most intense when God seems strangely indifferent to us. It is a shame that the large number of psalm settings in these songs did not extend to, say, Psalm 13 ('How long, O Lord?'). (A glance at the two recent collections of psalm arrangements from Hodder and Stoughton — *Psalms for Today* and *Songs from the Psalms*<sup>25</sup> — reveals a striking contrast.) As Lawrence Hoyle of Anglican Renewal Ministries reminds us, 'The cross is at the heart of renewal. *Agape* (love) means a vulnerability to suffering. *There is a black hole in the middle of cloud nine*'.<sup>26</sup>

If human weakness is downplayed, something similar could be said of God, of the divine power 'made perfect' in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). Though the cross is a frequent topic, there are relatively few songs which focus on the suffering and death of Christ. Much commoner is the bracketing together of cross, resurrection and ascension as displaying the victory of God over sin. Of course, this has some biblical precedent, but in renewal music we find a tendency to gloss over the awfulness of the cross as the place where God himself bears the full reality of evil. And there is hardly a hint that the cross might give us a glimpse into God's participation in human suffering. Once again, Kendrick stands out as a noble exception. His justly celebrated song 'From Heaven You Came' (SHF120) must rank as one of the finest modern songs in print, with words which invite us to re-think our view of God in the light of the agony of Jesus at Gethemane and Calvary ('This is our God...'), and with music which is quietly confident yet never triumphalistic. 'Come and See' (SS14) likewise faces us with the horror of the cross but carries us through to the assurance of resurrection.

Doctrinally, the key weakness, I would suggest, concerns the relation between the Holy Spirit and the crucified Christ. Life in the Spirit and in the body of Christ is shaped by conformity, through obedience and suffering, to the image and likeness of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). To be sealed by the Spirit is to be marked by the shame of Christ as well as the glory of Easter: the Spirit was given to the disciples, after all, with nail-marked hands (John 20:22). To be renewed in the Spirit will bring the pain of purification as well as the joy of triumph. For renewal song writers to grasp this more fully would open up much wider and promising horizons for their music than we have seen so far.

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<sup>24</sup> Loc. cit., p 12.

<sup>25</sup> Respectively: Michael Perry and David Iliff, eds, Hodder & Stoughton, London 1990; Michael Perry, David Peacock, Christopher Norton, and Chris Rolinson, eds, Hodder & Stoughton, London 1990. It is encouraging that the song in SOF4 which includes the dreadful line: 'And in [Jesus'] presence our problems disappear' (85) was almost rejected. Cf. P. Billson, 'Modern Worship Songs and their Biblical Hermeneutic', essay presented as part of the Cambridge Diploma in Religious Studies, 1990, p 26, n 28.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in J. Bax, *The Good Wine: Spiritual Renewal in the Church of England*, Church House Publishing, London 1987, p 170, my italics.

### Church and world

Considering the Restorationists' influence on renewal music today, it is not surprising to find a large quantity of material on the church. The old charge that the majority of charismatic songs are individualistic is hard to sustain today. 'God with us' is a far commoner sentiment than 'God with me'. We have already noted the frequency of the 'Church as a mighty army' theme. Unity and fellowship within the body of Christ are also common topics (e.g. SHF39, 187, 102), the accompanying music often being slow, warm and intimate — some would say sentimental. This marked stress on the gathered congregation, however, for all its strengths, has a number of drawbacks as presented in these songs.

First, as far as church fellowship is concerned, what again we find missing is the dimension of hardship: a sense that authentic *koinonia* involves pain and hard work as well as ecstasy.

Secondly, there is virtually nothing about the activity of God beyond the boundaries of the Church gathered for worship, something which will fuel the arguments of those who accuse the renewal movement of being sectarian in ethos. The large number of rather self-conscious 'churchy' songs would suggest that the Bride of Christ spends rather too long looking in the mirror. The world of daily work is untouched (except indirectly, insofar as it can become the stronghold of evil and the object of spiritual warfare). The purposes of God for the non-human world are only obliquely implied in the affirmation of God's universal Kingship.

Thirdly, allied to the last point, the Church's awareness of social injustice and its responsibility to alleviate it is an area conspicuous by its absence. (Much the same could be said of many established hymn books.) Of course, the Church's mission receives a prominent place, but protest against gross unfairness, costly acts of compassion, and suffering in solidarity with the victims of human hurt do not seem to be part of the mission package. Kendrick goes part of the way to redress the imbalance in songs such as 'O Lord, the Clouds are Gathering' (SS87) with its beseeching phrases: 'Have mercy Lord', 'Let justice flow'. Here too we also find a rare reference in renewal music to suffering as part of the Church's vocation: 'Through the fire your suffering church display the glories of her Christ'. In 'Who can Sound the Depths of Sorrow?' (SS131), Kendrick again picks up the theme of corporate confession: we have ignored the hapless victims of cruelty, we call on God to shake us into action but acknowledge that only the crucified Saviour has the power to heal the wounds of the nations.

It is ironic that the musical roots of pentecostalism (and hence of charismatic renewal) lie in the black slave religion of the United States, which generated so many songs of faith in the midst of unspeakable hardship. If renewal musicians were less suspicious of past tradition and prepared to investigate more fully the origins of their music, they would find resources there which might well give their work a much profounder depth. Writing of the black congregations in Britain, Walter Hollenweger writes: 'In spite of slavery and repression they are not silenced.... They fill some of the abandoned Anglican churches with their resounding song, their inspiring dances,

their electrifying rhythms. *I believe that if there is ever to be a revival in our churches — both musical and spiritual — we have to learn from these black churches.*<sup>27</sup>

### The place of music and the creativity of the Spirit

Two other more general points of a critical nature are worth making before we close. First, in some renewal churches, worship and singing seem to be almost synonymous. After half an hour of a service, we are told that the 'worship group' are going 'to move us into a time of worship.' Those of a more Reformed persuasion are understandably anxious that such a heavy stress on immediate encounter with God through song will mean that hearing God's Word through Scripture and preaching will be minimised. Their disquiet is increased when songs which are not settings of biblical texts are deemed to have an authority if not equal to, at least close to, that of Scripture. Some Restorationists give a very high place to what they call a 'prophetic song' — that is, a song of direct revelation from God to a contemporary situation. (See e.g. 'I Hear the Sound of Rustling' SHF197.) Here some will naturally want to question whether the relation between contemporary 'prophecy' and the prophetic nature of Scripture is being handled correctly.

Secondly, it is somewhat disappointing to find a marked lack of subtlety and inventiveness in much renewal music. Granted that simple songs have their place and that accessibility is one of the key merits of this music, one would have hoped that a movement which lay such weight on the Spirit's creativity could generate more adventurous material. To concentrate on the music for the moment, most songs are in standard four- and eight-bar phrases, with predictable melodies, using only a few chords of a basic and very well-worn folk-tradition. At base, the matter is theological, not simply musical. We need to ask: what does it say about our faith if little is demanded of us, if we are consistently given what is instantly easy and palatable? Could it be that what some theologians have often spotted in renewal circles — a craving for immediate gratification, a loss of the 'not yet' dimension of Christian life — finds its counterpart in music in which cadences (the ends of musical sentences) are often reached in the most obvious and predictable way, in which what musicologists have called 'delayed gratification' seems so absent?<sup>28</sup> (The best of the Kendrick songs do often break the mould. For example, in 'Meekness and Majesty' (SS76) the climax is repeatedly delayed; in 'From Heaven He Came' (SHF120) the chorus begins two beats earlier than expected.) While allowing that a congregation needs a measure of security and familiarity in what it sings, it would be encouraging in the future if song writers would allow the Spirit to move them beyond clichés into new and more imaginative territory, to develop innovative musical vocabularies and styles which ask more of the worshipper and thus make us ponder more deeply the words we sing.

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<sup>27</sup> Loc. cit., p 281. Cf. also Cray, *op. cit.*, pp 14-27.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. C. M. Johansson, *Music and Ministry*, Hendrickson, Peabody 1988, pp 72ff.

### **Conclusion**

I have made some critical comments of renewal music, but out of a conviction that it has a unique and invaluable contribution to make to church music today — not as an alternative to other traditions but as complementary to them — and that much of what it seeks to do needs to be taken further and deeper rather than be suppressed. My main contention has been that the spirituality of renewal music is weaker in what it lacks than what it has grasped. Vital dimensions of the Spirit's work are simply omitted or drastically underplayed. What is required more than anything else today, I would propose, is church leaders who will encourage musicians to explore fully (and use discriminatingly) what is available in renewal music but also to compose what is not.

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