

# A Review of Two New Hymnals

D. J. Bulls<sup>1</sup>

In a period in which digital technology seems to rule the day, the hey-day of the hymnal seems to have long passed. However, two bold groups—one from Master’s Seminary, headed by Dr. John MacArthur and Philip Webb, and one from Grace Immanuel Bible Church of Jupiter, Florida, led by Dan Krieder, have recently published two new hymnals.

***Hymns of Grace*, ed. Philip Webb. Los Angeles: Master’s Seminary Press, 2015.**

*Hymns of Grace*, published by Master’s Seminary, is a well-constructed book. It is printed on fine, thick, high-grade paper with superior binding and printing quality. The book is also printed with larger type at 6.75 x 9.75 inches. The typography of Reid Lancaster, a hymnal veteran, and his Dallas-based Micro Music is easy to read and clean. Those offering this hymnal made a wise decision in availing themselves of the services of R. R. Donnelly and Sons to print their hymnal. It is built to withstand great use and the test of time. Unfortunately, however, one could assert that this is the only characteristic of this hymnal that is built to endure.

*Hymns of Grace* includes 435 selections in total; “selections” is a most appropriate designation since they are not all hymns. These selections include 91 Scripture readings (from the *English Standard Version*) and 344 “hymns.” Of the included 344 “hymns,” there is what seems to be an overwhelming number of newer hymns. Some 98 of these 344 hymns are songs that have been composed after the year 2000. This makes up more than a fourth of the hymnal (approximately 28%). Over 40 of those 98 new “hymns” are associated with some combination of the Getty-Townend collaboration. Few would deny the impact of these song writers on our current hymnological state, however, to include such a large number of these particular titles is a statement in itself by the editors and publishers of the hymnal. The authors most represented in the hymnal are (alphabetically): Chris Anderson (9), Matt Boswell (7), Fanny Crosby (6), Keith Getty (40), John Newton (7), Stuart Townend (34), Isaac Watts (18), and Charles Wesley (16).

Eight main sections organize *Hymns of Grace*, each with a host of subcategories printed on the upper right corner of the hymn page. Those macro-categories are (in the order in which they appear in the hymnal): God the Father (94), Jesus the Son (221), The Holy Spirit

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<sup>1</sup> D. J. Bulls is pursuing the PhD in Worship at Southwestern Seminary while serving as the Worship & Communications minister for the Riverside Church of Christ in Coppell, TX. He is a frequent arranger, clinician, and consultant and is also a composer/associate editor for the Timeless Psalter Project as well as the Artistic Director & Conductor of the MidCities Chamber Singers.

(6), The Trinity (8), The Church (39), Living in Christ (56), Special Service Times-Thanksgiving (9), and Benediction and Doxology (8).<sup>2</sup>

Indices make up the closing pages of the hymnal, the first of which is an index of Scripture readings in biblical order. For the hymn selections, there is a topical index consisting of some 37 topics. This is followed by an index of arrangers and composers and what is labeled as “an index of song resources.” The editors of this hymnal have partnered with LifeWayWorship.com to provide orchestration and arrangement resources both now and an even larger group in a forthcoming release at a date that is yet to be determined at the writing of this review. (According to the publisher’s website, 186 titles will match with orchestra and instrumental parts available at [www.lifewayworship.com](http://www.lifewayworship.com).)<sup>3</sup> This particular index provides suggested medleys of 2–3 songs along with their keys, their page numbers, and notes regarding which verses are to be included. Also denoted in this particular sub-index is a list of those selections with choral endings and lists of those songs with last stanza or refrain key changes or alternative arrangements. Noticeably absent from the indices, as well as from each hymn individually, is the presence of tune names or hymnic meters. That is not altogether surprising, however, given the preponderance of newer compositions that are missing or have yet to receive tune names. Still, the lack of tune names or meters for those time-honored hymns that have found their way into this collection is contrary to the historical practice found in many great hymnals that have preceded this one.

While this hymnal includes what many would consider to be the “top 100” of classic hymnody, something had to be sacrificed for the inclusion of so many newer titles. What was sacrificed seems to have been a wide variety of beloved hymns and gospel songs that the church has sung for decades, even hundreds of years in some cases. By eliminating such hymns and songs, this book has guaranteed itself as but a blip on the radar of hymnal and hymnological history.

***Sing the Wonders: Hymns and Psalms for the Church*, ed. Dan Kreider. Jupiter, FL: Grace Immanuel Bible Church, 2016. 255pp. \$7.00.**

*Sing the Wonders* is a hymnal published by Grace Immanuel Bible Church of Jupiter, Florida. The hymnal’s editing and oversight came under the leadership of the elders of the church and was chaired by head editor and typesetter, Dan Kreider. A committee of ten co-editors worked alongside Kreider for this project. Kreider serves as the Minister of Music for Grace Immanuel Bible Church, a position he has held since 2013. Kreider studied music through the doctoral level, where he received his doctorate in music from the University of South Carolina. He has served as a music educator and teacher on both the secondary and the collegiate levels in addition to his years of experience in full-time music ministry. Kreider is clear in the preface to this hymnal that while a hymnal can be a large undertaking, it is something that is done primarily to serve the needs of the local church.<sup>4</sup> With this fundamental principle clearly stated, Kreider then offers his work to the Church at large. It is the ability

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<sup>2</sup> Some of this information are available from the hymnal’s website at <http://www.hymnsograce.com/features/>

<sup>3</sup> Accessed March 31, 2017, <http://www.hymnsograce.com/features>.

<sup>4</sup> Kreider, Preface and notes.

of this hymnal to be used by a broad spectrum of churches, along with the hymnal's construction, contents, organization, and potential for universality, that will be reviewed herein.

Kreider's *Sing the Wonders* is clean, easy to read, and printed well, even though it is slightly smaller in size than standard hymnals.<sup>5</sup> As has been a trend with other recent publications, there are additional resources available through the publisher to all who adopt this hymnal. This hymnal consists of 255 numbered, musical selections including: thirteen psalm settings and a mixture of hymns, both old and new. Each hymn includes a Scripture passage below its title to assist to the user. Selections are organized topically by the following subjects: Adoration and Praise, Confession, Confidence and Comfort, Christ's Incarnation, Gospel Grace, Christ's Resurrection, Christ's Ascension, Christ's Second Coming, Eternity, Commitment and Consecration, The Church, God's Word, The Holy Spirit, Thanksgiving, and Children. In the back of the hymnal, one can find the following indices: Tune Names; Authors, Composers, and Sources; Scripture Passages; Psalm Settings; and Titles/First lines.

At first glance, the hymns themselves might appear like they would in any other hymnal. But upon more careful observation, musically there are two critical items that are missing. First, there are no time signatures for any of the hymns. This seems to be a substantive omission. The book's introductory material does not mention why this choice was made. It makes one wonder if it could have even been an editorial oversight, but that seems unlikely. Another item missing from each hymn, or at least from those hymns that have been published popularly in other hymnals, are hymnic meter designations and indices. Finally, the typesetting has also chosen to leave out slurs of multiple notes that span one syllable. To the casual user, such an omission will not be of great concern. But to one who relies on the printed notation to guide the way a hymn is to be sung and articulated, leaving out the slurs might pose an issue.

As to the choices of hymns themselves, one must be reminded that Kreider's first purpose was to provide a hymnal for his local congregation. In the preface, he says, "while we pray it is edifying to the broader body of Christ, this hymnal is meant to represent the songs we sing, in the way we sing them. While many songs in it are widely known, some are specific to our church family" (Preface and Notes, 2). Any groups seeking to adopt Kreider's hymnal are superimposing the vision and musical choices of another group onto their own. It is assumed that those who do not believe as Kreider and Grace Immanuel Bible Church do, and as much as those beliefs are reflected in *Sing the Wonders*, will not be choosing to use or adopt this hymnal. These salient points help to inform the lack of balance present in the choices included in the hymnal. For example, there are over 85 titles written after the year 2000. Of those 85 titles, 35 are composed by some combination of the Getty-Townend collaboration. There are also ten selections by Kauflin, ten by other Sovereign Grace authors, and ten by the editor. Alongside this plethora of new hymns by new composers are 19 titles by the Wesleys, ten by Watts, seven Winkworth selections, and seven titles by Newton, thus confirming a slant toward new material. Leaving out almost an entire genre of folk and gospel songs is a key omission as well. Any church looking to keep a balance of old and new will not find this particular hymnal to be of great use. One will, however, find a fair amount of old texts set to new tunes. Interspersed throughout are some sixty unnumbered readings. These readings are unnumbered and not included in the overall numbering of 255 selections. One final observation on the choices for inclusion: one will not find any hymns by an author

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<sup>5</sup> *Sing the Wonders* is printed at a size of 9 ¼ in. x 6 in.

named Gaither, neither will one find any hymns by composers from the New English Renaissance movement of hymn writing, including Wren, Routley, Green, Leech, Kaan, or Dudley-Smith. These exclusions seem to be quite purposeful and such choices will contribute to *Sing the Wonders* having a limited imprint on mainstream hymnody.

Those who choose to use *Sing the Wonders* are like bystanders, overhearing a conversation nearby. It was never intended for their consumption in the first place, but they will have been able to make good use of it and take it to heart when all is said and done. Kreider is clear about the hymnal and its intent being for their local congregation. To offer criticism seems somewhat unfair as they did not set out to create a hymnal for all peoples and all places. Instead, when their product was completed, they decided to offer their hard work, labor, and service to the Body of Christ as a whole. For this, they are to be commended. However, because of the limited selection and overbearing amount of newer hymns, this collection will not achieve widespread use, nor should it.