

Dr Al Smith Tribute- September's Hymn of the Month 2025

By
Bill Dagle

The Bible says that life is like a vapor that soon passes away. So it is when a friend or a loved one is taken home to glory. We are happy that they are with Jesus, but saddened by their departing. Well, on August 9, 2001, I experienced these mixed emotions when I received the sad news that my friend and mentor, Dr. Al Smith, had departed for Heaven. I call him my mentor because he introduced me to hymn stories and my friend because of his encouragement in the study thereof and service to the King of Kings.

Born in Midland Park, New Jersey, on November 1916, Alfred B. Smith would grow up to become a composer, gospel artist, soloist, publisher, recording artist and an authority on church music. He held an honorary music doctorate from John Brown University and was a graduate of Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College. It was at Wheaton College that Al Smith and classmate, Billy Graham, formed a gospel team with Smith as the song leader and Graham as the evangelist.

In 1941, Dr. Al published his first chorus book, "Singspiration," which led to the Singspiration Publishing Co. in 1943. I remember so well the "Action Series" songbooks for boys and girls that I sang from as a ten year old in Sunday School. Little did I realize that someday I would know as my friend the publisher, Dr. Al Smith, and count it an honor to follow in his footsteps.

I think that of all the accomplishments of Al Smith, he'll probably be best remembered for his music. He set the world to singing songs like, "His Banner over Me Is Love," "My Father Planned It all," "Surely Goodness and Mercy," and my favorite, "For God so Loved the World."

The year was 1939 and a young Al Smith had spent an afternoon with gospel song composer, George Stebbins. As Al put it, Mr. Stebbins had drawn back the curtain of time sharing stories about Moody, Sankey, Bliss and Fanny Crosby. Later that afternoon, on his way to Oneonta, New York, there arose within Al a desire to be used of God as He used those dedicated men and women of yesterday. Reviewing the great songs that God had permitted Mr. Stebbins to write, Al Smith soon found himself humming a melody. As he drove along, a familiar theme began to fall into place; and by the time he reached Oneonta, he had completed all but one phrase. Later that evening, Frances Townsend, a friend and English teacher, added the missing phrase; and a song that has blessed millions was born:

For God so loved the world He gave His only Son to
Die on Calvary's tree, From sin to set me free; Some day He's Coming
Back, What Glory that will be! Wonderful His love to me.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16