

FOREWORD

In September 1976, I was half of a two-man team invited to lead the music for a "Bicentennial Camp Meeting Celebration" held at Riverside Park, a United Methodist campground near Milford, Nebraska. The other half of the team was Dr. Carlton R. Young, Professor of Church Music at Scarritt College in Nashville, Tennessee, and also the music editor for Agape publications. Out of that chance acquaintance, I was invited to submit some ideas for a "musical for young voices" and soon thereafter came "Barbecue for Ben."

My hope is that "Barbecue" will help bring alive, in some small way, the profound message of this beloved Biblical story. Many theologians have lifted up this parable of the father and his two sons as expressing the heart of the Christian gospel: that God's love for his children is not dependent upon their merit, but is freely given—with them free to accept or reject it.

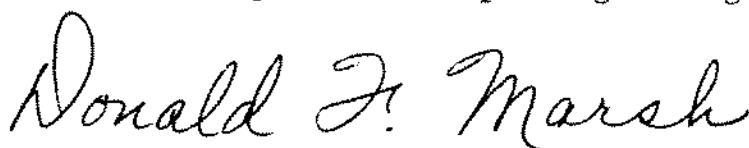
An interesting sidelight to the preparation of this musical is the way numerous persons, on hearing of the project, said to me, "Well, I hope you give the older brother a fairer shake this time!" This, of course, misses the above point altogether! As Jesus tells it, and the final song sings it, "He loves us all the same." At the end of the story, the prodigal is back inside with the father, and we are left hoping that the older brother (who has shut himself out) will also return, for we know that God loves him, too.

Children seem somehow able to accept this insight more readily than we adults, who rather expect God to fit neatly into our own system of legalities and economics. So perhaps it is appropriate that the story should be told here by "young voices," ready to celebrate joyfully at the drop of a hat, or the return of an erring child.

The *Today's English Version* of the Bible was used in preparing the text and lyrics of "Barbecue for Ben" (Luke 15:11-32).

This is a good place to point out that I am *not* the Donald S. Marsh who, with Richard Avery, has written many songs for contemporary Christian worship—many of them published also by Agape. This word may save that Don Marsh, whose work I admire, and also myself, some explaining as "Ben" gets around.

My thanks go to my wife, Helen, for her patient help, informed by many years of ministry with children in church school classes; to Beverly Schliefert, Steve Griffith, Kim Walters, and the Junior Choir of Christ United Methodist Church, Lincoln, Nebraska, for giving this musical its indispensable trial run; and to Carlton R. "Sam" Young and the good folk at Agape for their encouragement and shepherding in bringing "Ben" to musical life.



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