



FOUNDATION FOCUS

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How Will You Spend Your Love?

by Tom Wilkinson, Vice President, Development

Oscar Hammerstein II was arguably the greatest lyricist of the golden age of the Broadway musical. Perhaps not as witty as Cole Porter, as urbane as Lorenz Hart, or "all-American" as the Russian émigré Irving Berlin, Hammerstein's sunny optimism flowed into his lyrics and he captured perfectly the hopefulness of the post-World War II era.

His landmark shows included 1927's *Show Boat*, written with Jerome Kern, a show that first broke the color line on Broadway and featured a racially integrated cast. His legendary collaboration with Richard Rodgers produced *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I* and *The Sound of Music* among other, less well-remembered shows. His influence was felt far after his death in 1959, through his protégé Stephen Sondheim, who revolutionized American musical theatre over his prodigious career.

South Pacific won the Pulitzer Prize in 1949, the first musical play ever to do so. Hammerstein anticipated the civil rights movement of the coming decades with a song called "You've Got to be Carefully Taught," sung by the doomed Lt. Joe Cable as he lamented his own racist reaction to his affair with a Tonkinese girl. He sings:



Oscar Hammerstein II

*You've got to be taught to hate and fear,
You've got to be taught from year to year,
It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear -
You've got to be carefully taught!*

*You've got to be taught to be afraid
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,
And people whose skin is a different shade -
You've got to be carefully taught!*

*You've got to be taught, before it's too late,
Before you are six, or seven or eight,
To hate all the people your relatives hate -
You've got to be carefully taught!
You've got to be carefully taught!*

Backers of the show wanted the song removed, for fear of offending anyone. One state representative in Georgia went so far as to introduce a bill in the state legislature condemning the show when it was playing Atlanta on its first national tour in 1953. Hammerstein told reporters that it was indeed a song about racial prejudice. The song stayed in the show.

But this is a column about stewardship, and what does Oscar Hammerstein II have to do with that?

When doing research for *The Sound of Music*, specifically for the song "Climb Ev'ry Mountain," sung by the Mother Abbess to the young postulant Maria, Hammerstein struck up a correspondence with Sister Gregory, a teacher at Rosary College in River Forest, Illinois. In a letter to Hammerstein about the religious vocation, she framed two essential questions - "What does God want me to do with my life? How does God wish me to spend my love?"

How does God wish me to spend my love? What a fabulous question, a question that cuts right to the heart of what it means to be a Christian steward.

I especially like the premise of the question, that we all have been given a measure of love by God, the giver of all that we are and all that we have, and that God expects us to spend and share the love we've been given with others. How do we do that? How do we denominate love? We get a clue from the promise we make each time we welcome new members into the church - through our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness. Each of us has been carefully taught by God - our creator, redeemer, sustainer - to share the blessings God has given us, in whatever measure.

In a 1958 interview with Mike Wallace, Hammerstein recounted a conversation on 57th Street and 8th Avenue in New York with a beat cop who had stopped him for jaywalking on his way to a rehearsal. The policeman asked, "Do you mind if I ask you a question? Are you religious?" Hammerstein said, "Well I don't belong to any church." The cop patted him on the back and said, "Ah, you're religious alright." Hammerstein continued, "I went on feeling as if I'd been caught, and feeling that I was religious. He had discovered from the words of my songs that I had faith, faith in mankind, faith that there was something more powerful than mankind behind it all. And faith that in the long run, good triumphs over evil. If that's religion -- I'm religious."

"And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love."

Spend it wisely.



As the stewardship voice of the Florida Conference, the Foundation is ready to help you, your family and your church with anything related to comprehensive Christian stewardship.

For more information please call, click or write us at 1-866-363-9673 toll-free; www.fumf.org; or PO Box 3549, Lakeland, FL 33802.

Sources:

Asch, Amy, editor. *The Complete Lyrics of Oscar Hammerstein II*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 2008.

Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin, The Mike Wallace Interview, kinescope, March 15, 1958.

I Corinthians 13:13, New Revised Standard Version