



through BOB BENNETT'S Eyes

FRTC: I understand that your investigation of Christianity was stimulated by the conversion of your friend Dan Ruppel of the Christian comedy group Isaac Air Freight.

Bob: Yes, Dan and I have been best friends since we were twelve. We were renting a house here in Downey, California, when — to make a long story short — he just decided that there was a spiritual void in his life. He began investigating a potpourri of spiritual alternatives. And, as a matter of course, he started reading the Bible. By reading the New Testament, he evolved into making a commitment to the Lord. That really affected me — just seeing that beginning witness of his mind being changed just by reading the Scriptures.

FRTC: So later you started your own search?

Bob: I was convinced that I didn't just want to follow in his footsteps because he was my friend. So I came to a separate decision, even though we had conversations about it. My basic idea was to start from scratch. It had been so long since I'd given any serious thought to the question of religion, that when I picked up the Bible and started to read it, it was like a whole new thing. So that's often times what I encourage people to do — to start from square one, reading about Jesus as if it were for the first time. I encourage them to get to know Him on

that basis — then everything else will fall into place. I think upfront proclamation is just fine. But I think we need to give people a lot more credit for being able to make up their minds... and the Holy Spirit a lot more credit for being able to illuminate their understanding.

FRTC: Who would you consider your mentors in music?

Bob: I grew up in what has been called "the great folk music scare of the 60's," listening to The Kingston Trio, The Brothers Four, Peter, Paul and Mary — and that's where I gained my appreciation for acoustic guitar music. Then in high school it was Crosby, Stills, and Nash — people like that. I've always been drawn to acoustic music. But also to songwriters — the Stephen Bishops, Joni Mitchells, and Paul Simons of the world. There's just something about good songwriting that covers everything. And if I had one wish for the efforts of Christian musicians as a whole, it would simply be that we continue to strive to be better writers. Just by the way the church is set up, we are used to having a lot of our thinking done for us. We go to church on Sunday, and a trained minister gives us exegesis of the scriptures and translates those things into modern living. Many times we want our music the same way, and I think we often take away the joy of discovery. When I sit down and listen to a piece of music, the best writers

allow me into the process. They don't just lay it out like reading somebody the weather. I guess it's the difference between watching a weather report and walking outside in the rain. One is a sort of hands-on I'm-in-the-middle-of-it experience. And the other is simply listening to some guy tell you how things are.

FRTC: How would you describe your growth as a musician since the recording of your first couple of records?

Bob: Well, I think there's just more confidence in what I'm doing. Also, from a lyrical standpoint, the first LP was a basic statement-of-faith record. And having made that statement, I feel the freedom to go on and write about other things — rather than keep making the same record over and over. So, as an artist, I like to write about as many things as I can. As C. S. Lewis said, we don't need Christian history books — we need Christians who write history books. Christians who are out there doing good work.

FRTC: Is the music on *Non-Fiction* a change in direction for you in any way?

Bob: Just in the sense that it's not "Matters of the Heart, Part II." I mean, every record is its own "novel" for me.

FRTC: What prompted you to write about such deep issues of human need?

Bob: Well, I just began to realize that there was something deeply wrong in the way that I viewed the world. It was still intensely self-centered, except that I had switched over to Christian jargon to justify that self-centeredness. You can build this counter culture for yourself, and then you don't have to deal with the rest of the world. I'm not sure yet whether we should be ashamed of our affluence. But I know one thing — it can certainly anesthetize us and keep us from seeing what's really going on in the rest of the world.

FRTC: Did you really have a "Waking Falling Dream" — like your song describes?

Bob: That was a poetic way of describing an experience I had when my wife and I were watching some TV programs about famine. We saw starving parents holding their starving children, and the thought struck me — those people don't love their children any less than I love mine. With a new baby in our house, my wife

and I just looked at each other — knowing that all of that was a world away from our experience, yet feeling that we could relate with the loss of life. You could probably call this a "message album" — but it's still a pretty subjective piece of work, through my eyes. Instead of writing a song that says "Don't you know there's a hunger problem?", my approach is to take it from a real personal point of view — and then hope that people identify with that point of view.

FRTC: What unique things can Christians say about crucial issues such as poverty and war?

Bob: It's not so much in the proclamation of the problem that Christians can do a better job, but there's definitely a difference in the response. I faced a real temptation to write the Jesus-will-take-care-of-it-all song. But if I took the easy answer route, I would just take people to the brink of really being concerned and wanting to respond and then neutralize it by saying, "Oh, it's okay — everything's going to be just dandy now 'cause Jesus will feed the world." Well, unless manna falls from the sky again, that job has fallen to us. So the bottom line, the real hope of this music is in the way that people with real heart respond to it.

FRTC: Is there a particular song on *Non-Fiction* that states the thesis of the album?

Bob: "Voices" seems to sum up. It talks about having a heart for people and being able to hear what they're saying — with their words and their lives. We need to be constantly trying to hear not only the voice of the Lord, but also the voices of other people. Not only hearing the truth of the Bible, but also the truth of people's situations. We live in a society that is so loud and boisterous... we're constantly bombarded by responsibilities and media... that we sometimes have difficulty *feeling*. That scares me a lot. And I think the big danger for Christians is that often times we mistake correct doctrine for being correct in our lives. We mistake correct information for living it out. It's real important to me to realize that faith and works do go hand in hand. It's right to say that faith saved us. But after that, faith should compel us to do as well as to be.