

## Hymns to Avoid

Recently, the USCCB committee on doctrine reviewed about 1,000 commonly used hymns to discover any theological or catechetical errors which might preclude the hymns from use in the liturgy. They applied two principles: 1) Is the hymn in conformity with Catholic doctrine; 2) Is the hymn expressed in image and vocabulary appropriately reflective of the usage of Scripture and the public liturgical prayer of the Church?

The list below includes the songs the Bishops' Committee discussed, as well as our own list of hymns to avoid from the Confirmation and First Eucharist Manual, along with the explanation of theological deficiencies in the songs. The list is not exhaustive. But the goal is to give you some principles and vocabulary in deciding which hymns/songs may or may not be suitable for liturgy.

Further cause for pause at the moment is the situation surrounding David Haas. Without rushing to rash conclusions, or joining the cancel culture, we may want to hold off on his music. It may be a moot point anyway, as many publishers are no longer including his music in their hymnals.

### Problematic Hymns from the Bishops' Committee

#### [Theological Criteria Found Here](#)

1<sup>st</sup> category: Hymns with deficiencies in presentation of Eucharistic doctrine

General problem of seeing the Eucharist as mere symbol. Bread and wine remain bread and wine. Lack of sacrificial theology, in favor of communal gathering. Downplay of Priesthood/Victimhood of Christ and the role of the ministerial priest.

1. *"God is Here! As We His People"* – This hymn speaks of "symbols to remind us of our lifelong need of grace." We hear that, "as bread and wine are taken, Christ sustains us as of old." Bread and wine are still bread and wine, ie. no Transubstantiation.
2. *"Now in This Banquet"* – speaks of bread that is broken, wine that is poured. Bread that is broken is a scriptural phrase, but when used with wine that is poured, the referents are mere bread and wine. No language in Scripture referring to the Eucharist as mere wine. "Cup" is used to designate the Precious Blood. No reference to the sacrificial nature of the Mass. Instead, the image is of a spiritual banquet where we gather to have ordinary bread and wine.
3. *"All are Welcome."* – image of the Eucharist as an ordinary meal where one eats bread and drinks water and wine. Nothing points to the Mass as sacrifice. Also carries a Pelagian strain: "Let us build a house..." as if our actions took precedence over God's initiative. The Eucharist makes the Church.

4. “*Let Us Break Bread Together On Our Knees.*” – vs 2 refers to wine again in connection to the Eucharist which has no theological backing. Wine refers to ordinary wine.

2<sup>nd</sup> category: Hymns with deficiencies in presentation of Trinitarian Doctrine

General problems of avoiding masculine language for God. Suggestions that God has parts. Confusion over words which designate Trinitarian relations (Father, etc.), with other properties which apply to all Persons equally; eg. Creator. A doxology that mixes these terms should be avoided.

1. “*The Play of the Godhead*” – confusion over terms. Vs 1. “With God the Creator, and Christ the true Son, Entwined with the Spirit, a web daily spun.” Creator could apply to Son and Spirit too, not proper term for Father. Implies that the First Person is God, while the others are not, as if only the First Person creates, making the others subordinate (unintentional Arianism).
2. “*Led By the Spirit*” – speaks of “Source of Life” as referring only to First Person, but it can be applied to all three, especially to the Spirit through appropriation.
  - It is safest to stick to the Baptismal formula (Father, Son, and Spirit) in doxologies

3<sup>rd</sup> category: Hymns with deficiencies regarding God and His relations to humans

General problems in respecting God’s transcendence above creatures and yet His willingness to condescend in Divine Revelation. Therefore, language that puts God “beyond all names” misleads us to thinking that we can’t say anything meaningful about God.

1. “*God Beyond All Names,*” – fails to respect God’s transcendence: “Go beyond all names...All around us we have known you/ All creation lives to hold you”. Fails by putting God in position of dependency upon human creatures: “In our living and our dying/ we are bringing you to birth.”

4<sup>th</sup> category: Hymns viewing the Church as a human construction

General problems in conceiving the making of the Church or Kingdom of God as our work. Jesus brings the Church to be through His self-giving love in the Eucharist and death on the Cross.

1. “*Sing a New Church.*” – “Singing a new Church into being” implies that the creation of the Church is our work, also leaving open the possibility that the new “church” is essentially different than the old.
2. “*As Fire is Meant for Burning*” – speaks about the mission of the Church not being “to preach our creeds and customs, but to build a bridge of care.” This significantly reduces the evangelizing mission of the Church. Fails in proper ecclesiology.

5<sup>th</sup> category: Hymns with incorrect doctrine on the Jewish People

General problem in conceiving the Jews as solely responsible for Christ’s death.

1. *"The Lord of the Dance"* – "Holy People" referring to Jews is used sarcastically. Also, the Jews were not the only ones responsible for Christ's death. The Romans also consented. We also share in the cause, as our sins made His sacrifice necessary.
2. *"Oh Crucified Messiah"* – again places the burden of guilt for the Passion solely on the shoulders of the Jewish people. Also, the song implies that Jesus was totally left abandoned on the Cross. Not true, as there were some representatives there.

6<sup>th</sup> category: Hymns with incorrect Christian Anthropology

General problem of seeing the human person as merely a material being, without a spiritual life. Again, a trend to emphasize our work over God's. Also, a lack of understanding and correct catechesis on Original Sin.

1. *"Canticle of the Sun"* – "Praise for our death that makes our life real, the knowledge of loss that helps us to feel." Death is punishment for Original Sin, and makes our lives less real than originally intended by God.

### **Hymns to Avoid from Manual of Confirmation/First Eucharist**

-All Are Welcome (Marty Haugen)

- Deficient presentation of Eucharistic doctrine. "Let us build a house where love is found in water, wine and wheat; A banquet hall on holy ground where peace and justice meet ..." The image of the Eucharist is of an ordinary banquet where one drinks water and wine and eats wheat bread. Further, water is not on the same level as bread and wine as matter for the Eucharist, and to list them in sequence therefore only increases the implication that we are at a banquet eating ordinary food together. There is nothing else in the hymn to mitigate this impression. Someone who sings this song frequently would have a hard time imagining that the Eucharist can be and is worshipped or is in any sense a "sacrifice." The hymn is also objectionable throughout on ecclesiological grounds as well, since it repeats the phrase "Let us build a house ..." as though our actions make the Church. This hymn shows the relationship between faulty Eucharistic theology and faulty ecclesiology.

-Anthem (Tom Conry)

- Does not adequately emphasize that human action is intended to follow upon God's action and initiative in the world. Although our need for God and the salvation won for us in Christ is mentioned in the verses, the self-celebratory lyrics of the refrain are presented without clear reference to the work of Christ. Lyrics either are not based on scriptural or liturgical texts or use excessive poetic license, presenting the content of the faith in an ambiguous way [e.g. "We are question, we are creed", "he was rage against the night"].

-Ashes (Tom Conry) **Revised 2019 version may be used**

- Denies God's initiative in our salvation and attributes it to ourselves. "We rise again from ashes to create ourselves anew." "Then rise again from ashes, let healing come to pain; Though

spring has turned to winter, and sunshine turned to rain. The rain we'll use for growing, and create the world anew..." All of the baptized are made participants in Jesus' paschal mystery, by which they were redeemed, but they cannot be said to be the agents of their own salvation. "Jesus desires to associate with his redeeming sacrifice those who were to be its first beneficiaries." [CCC 618]

-City of God (Dan Schutte)

- Gives the impression that it is primarily our work that builds or makes the Church or the Kingdom of God. The lyrics do not adequately emphasize that human action is intended to follow upon God's action and initiative in the world.

-Lord of the Dance (Sydney Carter)

- Contains a doctrinally incorrect view of the Jewish People. See Verse 3: "I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame/ The Holy People said it was a shame/ They whipped and they stripped and they hung me high/ And they left me there on a Cross to die." The phrase "Holy People," referring to the Jews, is used sarcastically. And the whole Holy People did not reject Jesus, nor crucify him. Some Jews and some Romans did it. (NB: The classical "Reproaches" should not be placed in this category, because the phrase "my people" can and does refer equally well to the pilgrim People of God, the Church. Theological ambiguity pervades the lyrics, and the ambiguity is intentional: "I see Christ as the incarnation of the piper who is calling us. He dances that shape and pattern which is at the heart of our reality. By Christ I mean not only Jesus; in other times and places, other planets, there may be other Lords of the Dance. But Jesus is the one I know of first and best. I sing of the dancing pattern in the life and words of Jesus." [Sydney Carter in Green Print for Dance]

-Now in This Banquet (Marty Haugen)

- Deficient presentation of Eucharistic doctrine. "Now in this banquet, Christ is our bread; Here shall all hunger be fed. Bread that is broken, wine that is poured, Love is the sign of our Lord." "Bread that is broken" is scriptural but, when this phrase is paired with "wine that is poured," both become indications of simple bread and wine. There is no scriptural language that calls the Eucharist, outright, "wine." The hymn singer receives the impression that the wine is still wine, and that this is a banquet where "love" is the sign, and Christ, in some spiritual sense, is our

bread. Catholic usage has bread and wine as the "signs" under whose appearance Christ's sacrificial love is substantially present. Love is not the "sign" but the reality. Again, the image is that of the Eucharist as a spiritual banquet with ordinary food, bread and wine. The words offer no hint that the Mass is the sacrifice of Christ re-presented.

-One Spirit, One Church (Kevin Keil)

- This song is essentially a 'dressing up' of the hymn "Come Holy Ghost." The lyrics of "Come Holy Ghost", a translation of the ancient hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*, are left intact and are theologically sound. The lyrics of the refrain however, tend toward self-celebration. "We are

a pilgrim people, we are the Church of God./ A fam'ly of believers, disciples of the Lord./  
United in one spirit, ignited by the fire./ Still burning through the ages, still present in our lives.”  
It

seems that the songwriter intended to use the symbolism of fire as an image of the Holy Spirit's actions [CCC 696], but it is clumsily written. It would be better to just sing “Come Holy Ghost”.

-Sing a New Church into Being (Delores Dufner)

- Presents the Church as essentially a human construction. “Sing a new Church into being, one in faith and love and praise.” This implies or even states outright that the Church is essentially our creation. It also leaves open the possibility that there could be a new Church replacing the old one.

-Table of Plenty (Dan Schutte)

- Deficient presentation of Eucharistic Doctrine. The “Feast of Heaven and Earth” is presumably a reference to the wedding feast of the Lamb [Rev. 19:7,9], the heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the new Jerusalem [Rev. 21], of which the Eucharist is a participation [CCC 1090]. But the lyrics neglect the sacrificial character of the Paschal Banquet, “...which is at the same time, and inseparably, the sacrificial memorial of the sacrifice of the cross in which the sacrifice of the cross is perpetuated and the sacred banquet of communion with the Lord's body and blood.” [CCC1382] Further, the Eucharist is presented in such a way that the bread and wine signify in some vague way the presence of Jesus, but not that he is truly, really, and substantially contained under the Eucharistic species.[CCC1374]

\*A note on the Responsorial Psalm: A hymn or song may not be used to replace the Responsorial Psalm. The text and response for the Responsorial must be from the Lectionary for Mass. The Psalm text may also be taken from the Revised Grail Psalm, which have been approved for use in the Liturgy in the United States.