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It's not the composer's place to denigrate worship styles

28 November 2013 by Bernadette Farrell

Last week the composer James MacMillan announced that he was going to stop writing congregational music for the Catholic Church because he wanted Catholics to rediscover Gregorian Chant. He said decades of "mind-numbingly depressing banality" had followed the Second Vatican Council. He cited songs by Paul Inwood, Dan Schutte and Gerry Fitzpatrick as examples of the style he wanted the Church to get away from. Here another writer of church music responds.

What makes good liturgy? The Prophet Micah poses the same question: What worship does God require? And the answer has no solutions for the liturgy or music committee. No recipe. Only this: do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8).

We, the people of God, have always found it easier to obsess about the details of perfect worship than we have to examine what acting justly really means. We've found it easier to argue over hymns and songs – than to serve those different from ourselves. Christian liturgy announces the hope that we can live together as brothers and sisters in a just society. "Your kingdom come, your will be done."

Arguments over style are a distraction. The *Liber Usualis* book of plainchant did not arrive complete from heaven, it evolved through centuries of human effort. The same is true of all music. Every genre, including plainsong, includes good and bad examples.

Songs we treasure carry the prayer of generations and earn this respect from the people. Throughout the Reformation the people of God began to sing and participate, they separated the wheat from the chaff, adopting some songs and letting others go. The same can be said of our own time. The unanimous vote at the Second Vatican Council on the constitution on the liturgy was the fruit of more than 70 years of effort. The vision was full and active participation in our common baptism. A conversion that removes my own needs and desires from the centre of my life and replaces it with others'. Paul Inwood's piece – **Centre of my life**, that James Macmillan cited in his blog posting – expresses this reality for many people.

It is not my place, and neither is it James Macmillan's, to denigrate songs which enable people to pray, to celebrate hope, to grieve, to love and to follow Christ.

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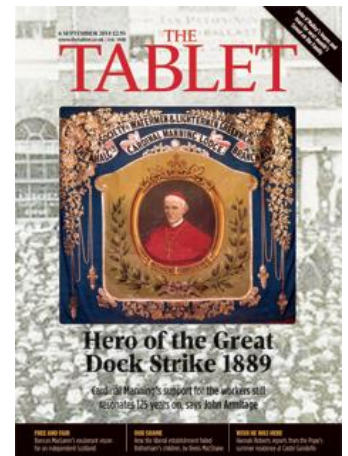
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Mr Macmillan is entitled to his opinion. As am I, and I don't like fake American folk songs...

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