



Committee on Doctrine

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MEMORANDUM

TO: BISHOPS OF THE USCCB
FROM: BISHOP KEVIN RHOADES
CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON DOCTRINE
SUBJECT: RESOURCE FOR EVALUATING HYMN LYRICS
DATE: 10 DECEMBER 2020

As we are all aware, over the years concerns have been raised regarding the lyrics of hymns and songs used in the liturgy that may be misleading or lacking substance. Given the power of music to reinforce the words that are sung by the people, great care must be taken to ensure the doctrinal integrity of the lyrics. The importance of the doctrinal integrity of the lyrics of hymns sung during the sacred liturgy was emphasized by the Second Vatican Council: “The texts intended to be sung must always be in conformity with Catholic doctrine; indeed they should be drawn chiefly from holy scripture and from liturgical sources” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 121).

In order to assist bishops in their oversight of liturgical celebrations in their dioceses and in the granting of the *Imprimatur*, the Committee on Doctrine has created a resource, “Catholic Hymnody at the Service of the Church.” This resource identifies common deficiencies in the lyrics of hymns and songs, for example, with respect to the Eucharist, Christology, the Trinity, and Ecclesiology. It has been modeled on the 1997 Report by Archbishop Daniel Buechlein on “Ten Common Deficiencies in Catechetical Materials” that provided an important impetus to the development of means for the evaluation of catechetical materials. The intention is to offer guidance and to heighten awareness of the doctrinal implications of hymn texts. This resource also suggests some approaches that help to balance doctrinal integrity and poetic license.

We hope that this resource will be helpful for bishops as they evaluate the suitability of hymnals proposed for use in their diocese. We also hope that it will be helpful for composers and hymn publishers as they create hymns and gather them into hymnals. We therefore encourage bishops to share this resource with composers and hymn publishers in their dioceses. You may also wish to share it with diocesan worship offices, pastors, and parish musicians.

The Committee on Doctrine also wants to remind bishops that it is available for any bishop who desires assistance in the evaluation of hymns or hymnals.