

HYMNAL REVISION COMMITTEE

REPORT 2001

Nominated by the Hymnbook Advisory Committee

Mrs A Cadden	Rev Canon GL Hastings
Dr D Davison	Rev Canon DP Hoey
Mr D Drinkell	Miss V Ireland
Rev TW Gordon	

Nominated by the Liturgical Advisory Committee

Dr AF Carver
 Rt Rev EF Darling (Chairman)
 Rt Rev HC Miller, Bishop of Down and Dromore

Nominated by the APCK

Rev Canon MAJ Burrows
 Rev Canon JW McKegney

Nominated by the General Synod Standing Committee

Dr E Newman-Devlin
 Mr M White

Co-opted on the recommendation of the APCK

Dr K Milne

Secretary to the Committee

Ms J Howard

CHURCH HYMNAL 5TH EDITION

It is a joy to find that the new Church Hymnal has received many plaudits with regard to its content. The range of hymns has met with numerous tributes, not alone for the introduction of so many new hymns and tunes, but also for the re-introduction of some well-beloved items omitted from the fourth edition of the Church Hymnal. It is pleasing to learn that the publishers Oxford University Press have received praise from a variety of sources, indicating that the hymnal is felt to be the best they have ever produced.

This is a tribute to our Church as a whole. The book we have today is not merely a result of the views of those who served on the Hymnal Revision Committee, but represents the hopes, wishes and suggestions of the countless Church members who wrote to the Committee in the course of its preparation to express their point of view. In that way, the Church took ownership of the book and the praise it has received is an acknowledgement of their love of hymnody and its definitive place in our worship. Their views are also what helped to define the Hymnal's style, content and size.

LAUNCH SERVICE

The new Church Hymnal was officially launched on 9 September 2000, at a service held in St Patrick's Cathedral. This was attended by over 800 people, who travelled from parishes in all corners of the island in order to attend – a true testament to the Church's love of hymnody.

The service took the form of “Songs of Praise”, with Pam Rhodes of the BBC lending her own special presence and conducting a series of interviews with some of those involved in producing the hymnal – Dr Donald Davison, the Rt Rev HC Miller, children from Strandtown Primary School, Ms June Howard, and Rev Canon Michael Burrows who was interviewed in place of the Rt Rev EF Darling, Chairman of the Hymnal Revision Committee, who was present but unable to take part in the service as he was recovering from illness.

The interviews were interspersed with singing led by the choirs of St Patrick’s Cathedral, St Molua’s Parish Church, Stormont, St Mary’s Cathedral, Limerick, Strandtown Primary School, Belfast, the Girls’ Choir of Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin and the New Worship Singers. Mr John Dexter, the Director of Music at St Patrick’s Cathedral, conducted the congregation in a short rehearsal before the service commenced which ensured their familiarity with the music. During the service itself, each hymn was started by one of the choirs, with the congregation then joining in.

At the close of the service, Archbishop Eames dedicated the new hymnal.

It was a truly moving and inspiring occasion and it was a joy to hear the Cathedral filled with such wonderful music – a fitting start to the life of the 5th edition of the Church Hymnal.

CD “LOVE OF GOD, LIFE OF FAITH”

A double album CD, “Love of God, Life of Faith” was released in conjunction with the launch of the Hymnal. The album was produced by Mr Stephen Hamill of All for Music and contains 49 tracks.

Seven different choirs were used, with a total of over three hundred performers from all over Ireland, and the two and a half hours of music is witness to their dedication. Most of the singers are amateurs who gave freely of their time in order to make the recording possible. The styles are wide ranging – from Plainsong and traditional Irish tunes, through Victorian and more recent “conventional” style hymns, to Taizé and contemporary ‘pop’ worship songs. The CD programme is biased in favour of new items from the hymnbook, although there are also some exciting fresh arrangements of favourite tunes as well as new words clothed in a popular idiom.

The following choirs perform on the CD: St Anne’s Cathedral Choir, Belfast; Christ Church Cathedral Choir, Dublin; St Molua’s Parish Church Choir, Belfast; St Mary’s Cathedral Choir, Limerick; Strandtown Primary School Choir, Belfast; The St Molua’s Consort and The New Worship Singers.

POST-PUBLICATION

A variety of issues have arisen since the book’s publication last September which led to consultation at a number of levels. The Standing Committee has discussed these issues at length and has endorsed the comments set out below following consultation between representatives of the Hymnal Revision Committee, the APCK, the Secretariat of the General Synod and the publishers, Oxford University Press. It should also be borne in mind that Oxford University Press, as the commercial publishers, had to make a variety of decisions on format and design, based on commercial reasons. It is, however, hoped that the following comments will help clarify at least some of the points under debate.

The hymnal is heavy to hold, for children and the elderly in particular. Could thinner, lighter paper not have been used?

In opting for the paper used, consideration was given to a number of factors. Complaints had been taken on board that the finer paper used in other publications, such as the Alternative Prayer Book, was subject to tearing and “see-through”.

The publishers have assured us that using thinner paper would have reduced the thickness of the book, but only by approximately half a centimetre. However, this would not have had a significant effect on its weight, as the density of the paper is the determining factor and there would have been little difference in this regard.

Cost constraints were an additional factor. Paper prices in recent years have escalated greatly and with an awareness of the widespread plea to produce the hymnal at an acceptable cost, it was apparent that the use of finer paper would result in a much more expensive book. The publishers have estimated that the retail price of a thinner paper edition would have been in the region of Stg £20.00 to Stg £25.00.

Why are the pages of the new Church Hymnal so large?

The pages were produced in a larger size with wide margins as this makes the print clearer and easier to read. This is shown when comparison is made with other books, where text is spread to the edge of the page. A narrow page margin also creates difficulty in reading text close to the inner or gutter margin, necessitating bending the spine and subsequent damage to the binding.

The new page size also means that a greater number of complete hymns may be fitted on one page, thus reducing the overall book size

Why was the print not made larger than the previous edition?

Many Church members found that the print size in the 1960 edition was too small. The numerous complaints made in this one regard at that time were greater than all of those raised in relation to the 2000 edition. This fact was borne in mind and the typeface used in the new Church Hymnal is, in fact, larger. However, due to the bigger page size, there appears to be a perception that the print is smaller.

Why was it decided to insert a melody line?

The decision to provide a melody line in the new hymnal was made at an early stage of the book's development and was based on a variety of factors:

- It was felt that this would be helpful due to the large number of new hymns and the fact that in modern hymnody particularly, words and music are inextricably linked together. They meld to create a distinct spiritual atmosphere and to print words without music would lead to loss of meaning.
- Nowadays, the majority of hymn books are being printed with a melody line. For example, "BBC Songs of Praise" is one of the more recently published hymn books which has been produced with a melody line.
- Changes in education have meant that increasing numbers of children are today taught to read music and we have already had reactions from some parishes where young people have been delighted with the insertion of the melody line, as they are already used to this being supplied in their school hymnals. The melody line will become invaluable should our formal choirs decline, but greater numbers emerge from the education system with the ability to read music.
- The Committee was cognisant of the fact that complaints were received that a words only edition of "Irish Church Praise" was printed rather than one with a melody line. It was suggested that this hindered congregations in learning new hymns in contemporary style and resulted in old tunes being used as inappropriate substitutions.

- Some smaller parishes were in favour of a melody line edition as they do not have four part choirs, and are saved considerable expenditure in not having to purchase the full music edition.
- When the Revision Committee initially reported to the General Synod in 1996 its intention to include the melody line in the congregational copies of the hymnal, the Synod gave widespread approval to this intention.

Would the book not have been cheaper if it was produced in a “words only” format?

Oxford University Press has advised that there would have been very little difference in price.

Price is not simply determined by the book’s size, but by a variety of costs including, most importantly, copyright. Many of the hymns in any hymn book are bound by copyright and a fee to each copyright holder is involved. The amount of the fee can vary, but in some cases is substantial. A words only edition would have involved exactly the same copyright costs.

Why not have a “words only” version in addition to the melody line and full music editions?

Producing a “words only” and melody line version of the hymnal would have had enormous cost implications. A considerable subsidy was necessary in order to publish the full music edition and retain its retail cost at an affordable level.

Publication of a words only edition at this point would also be a breach of faith with those in the Church of Ireland who have happily embraced the new hymnal and with those who contributed to its content and design.

Will an electronic version be made available?

Discussions have taken place with the publishers which subject to agreement, would result in the publication of an electronic version with all the benefits that would derive from computer applications. The publishers have, however, advised that if such an edition were to be produced there would be a two to three year period between agreement and production.

Have any steps been taken to provide for the visually impaired?

A large print edition of the 1960 edition of the Church Hymnal was not commercially viable and Oxford University Press have expressed a similar opinion with regard to the 5th edition. They estimate that they would sell fewer than 1,000 copies, but would have to produce a minimum print run of 3,000. This means that the book would cost approximately Stg £35 to Stg £40, probably placing it outside the price range of much of its intended market. The book would also be far too large and cumbersome.

However, with the generous help of the Braille Department of HM Maghaberry Prison Co Antrim, it is now possible to receive Braille copies of the new Church Hymnal on order.

Requests for Braille copies should be channelled through The Secretary, Hymnal Revision Committee, Church of Ireland House, Rathmines, Dublin 6, as HM Maghaberry Prison regret that they are unable to deal with requests directly.