

POLITICALLY CORRECT HYMNALS

In “Silent Night,” the baby Jesus’ sex is not mentioned. “Faith Of Our Fathers” is now “Faith Of the Martyrs.” “O Beautiful For Spacious Skies” is now “How Beautiful, Our Spacious Skies” and sings praises of all the Americas, not just one America.

Even the “right hand of God” is sometimes changed to the “mighty” or “strong” hand of God, lest left-handed people be offended.

These lyrics, revised in the United Church of Christ’s *New Century Hymnal* issued last June, reflect a trend of religious denominations offering their congregations modernized, “politically correct” hymnals.

Many hymns are being rewritten to be more gender-inclusive. In the United Church of Christ, language that might offend minorities and people with disabilities “darkness” and “blind” to symbolize spiritual ignorance, for instance has often been changed. Military language also is less common, and poetry by South Africans and American Indians is increasingly present.

In addition to the United Church of Christ, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the Moravian Church in America have adopted new hymnals or supplements in the past year. Several other mainline churches already had revised their hymnals, but none went as far as the United Church of Christ.

The book’s 617 hymns include such old favorites as “Amazing Grace,” printed in English and Lakota, an American Indian language and “Just As I Am,” minus a reference to “poor, wretched, blind.”

The UCC’s 6,200 congregations are not required to use the new hymnal, which balances masculine and feminine images of God and sometimes refers to God as “her.” And some aren’t sometimes for financial reasons, sometimes for theological ones.

The Rev. Charles Ford, pastor of the UCC’s First Congregational Church in Boylston, Mass., said his congregation’s response has been mostly negative.

“They do not want to use that hymnal,” he said. “We are experiencing a reaction to the exclusivism of political correctness. If you don’t use politically correct language, you’re out.”

The UCC is an openly avowed liberal denomination. This hymnal project is only one indicator of their identity with “the religious left.”

Even if they used a good hymnal (which they don’t and probably won’t), the UCC would still be a long, long way from being commendable to anybody for any reason.