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**GUIDELINES FOR MODERN ENGLISH IN HYMNS**

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*Adopted by the Department of Hymnody, June 1988. The Department prepared these guidelines to supplement its earlier Statement 12, 'Principles for the words of hymns', particularly the last part. The immediate purpose was to help the Department in its task of collecting and preparing new hymns and translations for a proposed new hymnbook, as resolved by the 1987 General Convention (Resolution NO. 264.*

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- 1 Sound theology is of prime importance.
- 2 No hard and fast rules can be laid down for modernisation. There will always be a tension between the need for continuity with the past and the need for understandableness. Each hymn must be treated on its merits: some older well-known hymns may be left fairly much in original form because they are known and loved (although later verses may be changed more than the first); hymns not so familiar to our congregations may be extensively revised.
- 3 The author's original intentions deserve respect. However, there is historical precedent for revising hymns, since a hymn differs from a poem in that it is taken up by the community and so becomes more than the expression of an individual.
- 4 Modern language differs from older language not only in vocabulary but also in such features as sentence structure, imagery, level of formality, 'density' of thought, knowledge of allusions, and the use of pictures rather than abstract concepts and logical development. The imagery, themes, and forms of expression need to relate to today's Australian Christians. While the liturgy has remained relatively constant through the ages, every culture and age has contributed its own hymnody.
- 5 Translated hymns generally need to be in modern English, preferably reworked from the original, unless the translation is a well-known 'standard' one. Accuracy is important, but a hymn should read like English, not like a translation. This may mean some paraphrasing, some condensing, some modification of elaborate rhyme schemes and imagery strange to our ears.
- 6 Older English hymns can be modernised to varying degrees. This will depend on how understandable, relevant, and well known they are. Some may be left with an 'archaic' feel as 'period pieces' — but not at the expense of understandableness. First lines particularly will often have to be left unchanged.
- 7 Modern English hymns, ie hymns written now, need to be in contemporary language, without pious or 'poetic' clichés or archaisms (unless perhaps a particular mood is deliberately being created). Modern hymns need to be seen as belonging to our times.

- 8 The language of hymns is also the language of worship. It needs to be clear and readily understood, since God uses words to communicate to his people in worship. It needs to also be rich, beautiful, and dignified, since in worship we glorify the Triune God and celebrate the mystery of his gracious presence. But the mystery of God is not the same as obscurity of language.