

GOOD HYMN – BAD HYMN

“The Battle Belongs To The Lord”

Words and Music by Jamie Owens-Collins
1985 Fairhill Music

In heavenly armor we'll enter the land,
The battle belongs to the Lord.
No weapon that's fashioned against us will stand,
The battle belongs to the Lord.

Refrain:

And we sing glory, honor, power, and strength to the Lord,
We sing glory, honor, power, and strength to the Lord.

When the power of darkness comes in like a flood,
The battle belongs to the Lord.
He'll raise up a standard, the power of His blood,
The battle belongs to the Lord.

When your enemy presses in hard, do not fear,
The battle belongs to the Lord.
Take courage, my friend, your redemption is near,
The battle belongs to the Lord.

What's right?

This contemporary praise song brings to mind several Biblical texts that proclaim the victory of the cross over evil. First, Romans 8:37-39: “In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” And also Luke 10:18: “And [Jesus] said to them, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.’”

The song's refrain echoes Revelation 5:12, also echoed in Handel's Messiah: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” And it is similar to the battle imagery in Luther's “A Mighty Fortress.”

All in all the text and music work together to convey the victorious Christian message that we are saved not by our own doing, but by the strong arm of the Lord.

With all these Biblical themes “The Battle Belongs To the Lord” is a good praise song for today.

“Breathe on Us, Creative Spirit”

Rev. Bruce Benson
St. Olaf College Chaplain

Breathe on us, Creative Spirit, peace beyond all anxious noise
Still our hearts to catch your whisper,
turn our fears to hopes and joys'
Use our lives to serve your purpose, give our hidden skills a voice;
Hallow all our gifts and talents. We are yours; our hearts rejoice.

Poet, painter, music maker: all your work, as tribute bring.
Scholar, actor, graceful dancer: make your skill an offering.
Your uniqueness finds a welcome safe beneath God's holy wing.
Let your gifts now grow and flourish, let your spirit rise and sing.

Word of God, eternal springing, wake and fill our minds we pray;
That your truth may be our guide in all we think, and do, and say,
Let integrity and justice mark the work we do each day.
Stir our hearts that we may ever your command of love obey.

In all times and in all places, praise and glory be expressed
To the God of all creation, ever living, ever blessed.
In our worship and our living keep our eyes on what is best,
‘Til we feast around the table where you welcome every guest.

What's wrong?

The above hymn, sung yearly at graduation, is bad but not because it is offensive. Rather it is bad because it presents a laundered message: God is nice, we're nice, and everybody is saved in the end, as the last line of the hymn proclaims: “Til we feast around the table where you welcome every guest.”

The text is reminiscent of H. Richard Niebuhr's summary of liberal theology: “A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.”

Perhaps the hymn is bleached out in order not to offend those St. Olaf students and their families who are not Christian.

Perhaps the hymn represents the college's view of what Christian faith is – a spur to do good, an affirmation that all are good, and the assurance that religious differences really don't matter because in the end all will be saved anyway.

What hymns could do a better job of proclaiming the gospel at graduation and sending graduates into the world? Some options:

- LBW #553 Now Thank We All Our God
- LBW # 551 “Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee”
- LBW #561 “For the Beauty of the Earth”
- LBW #557 “Let All Things Now Living”