

The Use of the Name of God in the Liturgy

Information for Pastors & Liturgical Leaders

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Why can we no longer call God “Yahweh” in the liturgy?

The Office of Worship has received numerous inquiries regarding a recent communication from the Holy See’s Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. The communication, issued by the Congregation on June 29, 2008, states:

In liturgical celebrations, in songs and prayers the name of God in the form of the *tetragrammaton* YHWH [Yahweh] is neither to be used or pronounced.

The letter offers a deeply theological reflection on the reason for this. In the early Hebrew culture, to speak someone’s name indicated a special relationship that people dared not presume with God. From the earliest times the name of God “as an expression of the infinite greatness and majesty of God...was held to be unpronounceable...” When the word appeared in Scripture, they would instead say “Adonai,” which has come to be translated as “Lord.” Other words, and even the name of the Word Incarnate—Jesus Christ—are used to denote God, but the name YHWH remained unspoken by early Christians just as it had for their forbearers.

Why can we say Christ Jesus and not Yahweh? Essentially, YHWH is the Triune God’s Name in the Judeo-Christian tradition. For the sake of Tradition and out of respect for the Jewish faith and people we carry on this awe-filled practice.

The communication from the Vatican notes that “in recent years the practice has crept in of pronouncing the God of Israel’s proper name...” In the United States, this is most prevalent in some popular liturgical music such as *Sing a New Song* and *You are near*. According to the U.S. Bishops’ Committee on Divine Worship (BCDW), the current *Lectionary for Mass* and the forthcoming *Roman Missal [Sacramentary]* do not use the name of God in this manner and therefore will not be affected.

The BCDW is working with Catholic music publishers regarding this issue. Most publishers are offering “quick fixes” in the form of downloadable material that can be incorporated into the repertoire. Unfortunately, since the letter was circulated in this country in the latter half of this year, even annual publications (such as *Breaking Bread 2009* from Oregon Catholic Press) do not incorporate the changes into the hymnals. If you have specific questions, it would be best to visit the website of your hymnal’s publisher or call them directly.

When Bishop Arthur Sarratelli, chair of the BCDW, contacted his brother bishops with the Holy See’s wishes, he noted that this presents us with “an opportunity to offer catechesis for the faithful as an encouragement to show reverence for the Name of God in daily life, emphasizing the power of language as an act of devotion and worship.” This

also provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the continuous practice of offering such great reverence to the Lord's name dating back to our ancestors in the faith.

For more information, go to the Office of Worship webpage at www.madisondiocese.org, then go to the *Ministries* toolbar and access *Worship*. A bulletin announcement is attached to this communication.

Websites of music publishers

GIA	www.giamusic.com	1-800- GIA-1358 (442-1358)
Oregon Catholic Press	www.ocp.org	1-800-LITURGY (548-8749)
World Library Publications	www.wlp.jspaluch.com	1-800-566-6150