

Slightly problematic ~~Wonderful~~ words of life

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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This past spring, Mary Louise Bringle revealed in the *Century* that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) hymnal committee voted against including the popular song “In Christ Alone” after the copyright holder rejected a lyric change (“Debating hymns,” May 15). Bringle’s brief reference to this in a sidebar provoked quite a reaction, focused mostly on the theological implications of the committee’s preference for saying “the love of God was magnified” at the cross in place of Stuart Townend’s original line, “the wrath of God was satisfied.”

What I found most interesting was the reason the committee didn’t anticipate any problem getting permission: the altered version of “In Christ Alone” had already been published in the Baptist hymnal *Celebrating Grace* (2010).

How did this happen? J. Thomas McAfee, president of the eponymous publisher of *Celebrating Grace*, declined to tell me. He did send a statement: Celebrating Grace “apologizes that an unintentional mistake was made by using an unauthorized text.” The publisher is taking full responsibility; it’s also “diligently working to correct the error,” as the statement continues.

But even if McAfee personally redacts the offending line from every pew hymnal and PowerPoint in the land, churches may well keep singing it.... [Continue reading my piece in the new issue of the *Century*](#)