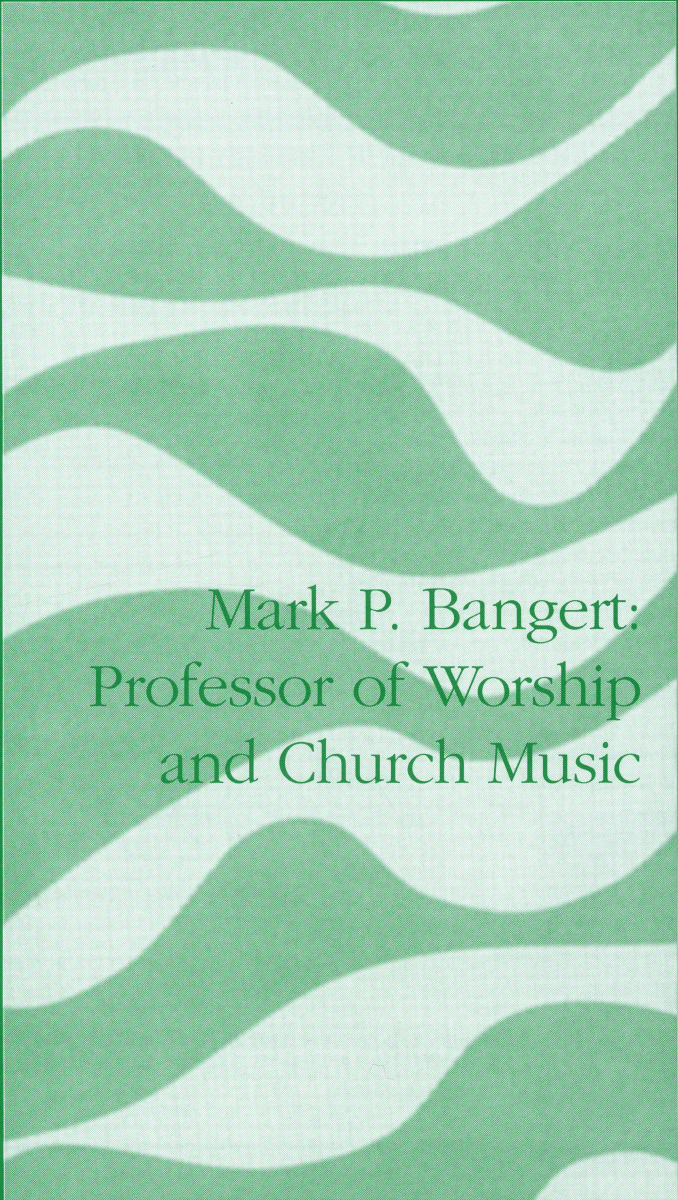


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Mark P. Bangert:  
Professor of Worship  
and Church Music

**CURRENTS**  
in Theology and Mission

# Currents

## in Theology and Mission

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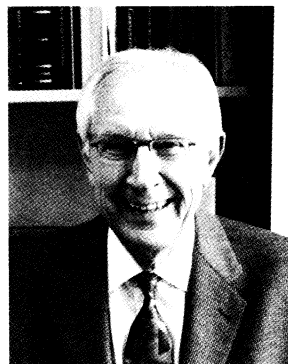
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# Mark P. Bangert: Professor of Worship and Church Music

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His full title is John H. Tietjen Professor of Pastoral Ministry: Worship and Church Music, and every word of that title is brimming with significance. I first met Mark Bangert fifty-four years ago, and for the last forty we have been faculty colleagues. In that time I have only begun to take the measure of the man. Time fails us to tell of all of his skills and identities: pastor, lover of the church's common worship, skilled oboist, conductor of multiple choirs, including for the last fourteen years an annual Bach for the Sem concert in Chicago, specialist in the "Occasional Services," explorer of ethnic music, and friend. I invited people to write for this Festschrift on the occasion of his retirement because they shared one or more of his passions, and because they have been colleagues and mentors on the way. The essays are preceded by a moving and lyrical tribute by Dean **Kathleen D. Billman**.

**Robert Bergt** gives his kudos to Mark by writing about Buxtehude's oratorio "The Limbs of our Sacred Suffering Jesus." It can rightly be called the first evangelical, that is, Lutheran, oratorio. The seven cantatas that make up the oratorio are meditations upon passages from Scripture that reveal the depth of Buxtehude's biblical knowledge. In addition to the biblical passages, the oratorio includes a medieval Latin poem, "Hail! Savior of the World!" composed in the thirteenth century by Arnulf von Löwen. This poem inspired Paul Gerhardt to write "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded." This essay provides a fresh translation of the libretto by the author and a commentary on its musical and theological highlights. Buxtehude was a principal mentor of Johann Sebastian Bach, just as Robert Bergt functioned in this role for Mark Bangert.

**James L. Brauer** outlines a theology of praise that draws on Melancthon's reference to "the sacrifice of praise" in the Apology (Article XXIV). Both testaments reveal a pattern of praise that lifts up the words and deeds of God in thankfulness and song. Thankful praise is focused on the Lord's doings, not on anything the worshipper may offer. A sacrifice of thanksgiving does not merit forgiveness but is rendered by those who have already been reconciled. Examples of thankful praise are found in a hymn referred to in the Book of Concord (All Mankind Fell in Adam's Fall, *Lutheran Worship* #363), hymns by Paul Gerhardt (Awake, my heart with Gladness, *LBW* #129; Evening and Morning, *LBW* #465), a post-communion prayer from Luther (*LBW* #74), and the text of a Bach cantata (*The Heavens Declare the Glory of God*). The liturgical song This Is the Feast centers its praise on the Lamb of God whose blood sets us free. A sacrifice of thanksgiving draws creature praise, obedient praise, and fervent praise into thankful praise.

**Lorraine Brugh** draws on a Bangert theme when she writes of the intersection of music and theology, of clergy and musician, and of parish and seminary. Following Luther, Bangert insists that all music has within it the potential to glorify God. Musical imagination present in all peoples needs to be cared for as if one were caring for a good gift of creation, meant by the Creator for the welfare of people. Music's ability to change its message from one context to the next further evidences the Other behind its creation. A trinitarian view locates the second person of the Godhead as the focus in the weekly assembly. Through the preaching of the gospel the Holy Spirit leads us into the holy community, placing us in the church's lap, where the Spirit preaches to us and brings us to Christ. The trinitarian journey is a journey of music and Spirit, gift and Creator, centered in Jesus Christ, whose presence is actualized through word and song.

**Robert Buckley Farlee** discusses the variety of songs in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Most of these hymns fall into three types: metrical hymns from the 16th to the 20th century, global song, and contemporary song. The latter type is frequently criticized for its individualistic tone and for its insufficient differentiation from the "ordinary" song of the culture. The Lutheran World Federation's *Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture* insists that Christian worship relate dynamically to culture in at least four ways. It is transcultural, contextual, countercultural, and cross-cultural. The impulse to raise our voices in song of praise to God or in moments of lament is virtually transcultural. The contextual factor goes back to Luther's championing of congregational, vernacular hymnody. The *Nairobi Statement* reminds us that Christians are called to oppose those elements of culture that contradict the gospel. The songs from the past in *ELW* are largely free from the imperialistic attitudes that characterize some hymns written in the 19th or 20th centuries. Perhaps too much "king" language has been preserved, but there are more alternative images in *ELW* than in its predecessors. We are nudged toward being cross-cultural when we expose ourselves to songs of foreign cultures or from domestic cultures not our own.

**Gordon W. Lathrop** suggests that culturally disciplined visual art can be clear of voice, communal, multilayered, and theologically significant. As a case in point he discusses the 15th-century icon of the Holy Trinity by the Russian Andrei Rublev. This icon depicts the visit of the angels to Abraham and Sarah, whose loving gracious yielding to each other presents the flowing life of the Triune God. The Eucharistic cup on the table in the icon holds out the promise of life, embraced by the flowing reality of God. We can understand the Eucharist better by paying attention to the stories about meals in the Gospels and in the early church. Luther taught that one could not eat and drink of this amazing sacrament of love without being brought to fight, work, pray, and have heartfelt sympathy for all the wretched ones. On the Rublev icon the central figure, Jesus, raises his hand in blessing, but the figure on the right, the Spirit, also enables this meal. The figure on the left, the Father of the Son and the source of the Spirit,

who utters the word we hear in church, is also the one who spoke the word by which the world was created. The Trinity is God as God is encountered in Jesus Christ and in his meal with the church. As the figures in Rublev's image lean toward each other, so the table forms us to turn toward our neighbor.

**Elaine J. Ramshaw** offers very helpful guidelines for the use of congregational singing at funerals, including identifying dozens of possibilities from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Music connects with our emotions, expresses and evokes them, and makes them humanly livable. Singing is usually the assembly's most active involvement in the service and bonds the community together. Cultural realities militate against singing, and these are complicated by small crowds at some funerals. The article offers suggestions for how to overcome these obstacles and also for funeral hymns directed to the four parts of this sentence: (1) This particular person (2) has died and (3) we grieve, (4) hoping in the promises of God. Many Americans seek to avoid the reality of death, and hymns that speak directly of it can bring the fact of death home. Appropriate funeral music prays not to remove the process of grieving but to bless it. Hymns of hope may comfort us with the assurance that God is always with us or express confidence in and gratitude for God's presence throughout our lives.

**Frank C. Senn** reports that Bach's profound spiritual conviction is the soul of his sacred works; he was the perfect synthesis of music and theology. Bach's Mass in B Minor was first performed in its entirety more than a century after he died. The article investigates the structure of this mass and notes that several movements were anthologized from earlier compositions. The most dramatic moment in the whole Mass is the contrast between "he was crucified" and "he was raised" in the Credo. Bach did not skim over the confession of the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church" but set it to a dance-like pastorate that suggests the shepherding nature of the church. The final chorus, "Give to us peace," hints that in the eve of his own life Bach had achieved an almost mystical depth of inner peace. Bach used the catholic form of the mass but simultaneously infused this catholic form with the evangelical rediscovery of the gospel. Against the rationalism of the emerging Enlightenment, Bach praised not some nondescript divine being or the great architect of the universe, but God the Father, Son, and Spirit. In this mass Bach created the ultimate expression of his faith.

You can't retire from a vocation, of course, and Mark will continue to lead us in worship and music. Even these words in *Currents* are not the last word about Mark. Future issues will contain essays by **Kurt Hendel**, **Ralph W. Klein**, and **Craig Satterlee** that were written to honor our jubilarian but that the covers of this issue could not contain. In these ever-changing times, Mark Bangert has provided both the *cantus firmus* and the grace notes to the church's song and meal—and still provides them.

*Ralph W. Klein, Editor*

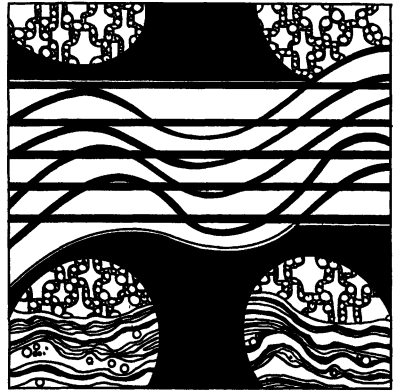
# Mark Bangert: Thanks for the Polyphony

Kathleen D. Billman

*Dean and Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago*

In his interdisciplinary study *Bonhoeffer's Ethic of Discipleship*, Kenneth Morris underscores the importance for Bonhoeffer of a musical term that he employed as a theological metaphor in his later writings. Morris notes that it brought Bonhoeffer joy because "it expressed better than anything else the simultaneous commitment to a God who is 'wholly other' and yet the social world in which [God's] Word is established," as well as the "multidimensionality" of the Christian life."<sup>1</sup>

That musical term is *polyphony*, "a fugue in which a primary and unchanging melody (the *cantus firmus*) is progressively joined by counterpointed melodies which superficially oppose it but, taken as a whole, blend together into a powerful



1. Kenneth Earl Morris, *Bonhoeffer's Ethic of Discipleship: A Study in Social Psychology, Political Thought, and Religion* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986), 65.



harmonic whole."<sup>2</sup> Eleven months before his execution Bonhoeffer wrote:

God wants us to love him eternally and with our whole hearts—not in such a way as to injure or weaken our earthly love, but to provide a kind of *cantus firmus* to which the other melodies of life provide the counterpoint. . . . Only a polyphony of this kind can give life a wholeness and at the same time assure us that nothing calamitous can happen so long as the *cantus firmus* is kept going.<sup>3</sup>

“Polyphony” seems a felicitous term for celebrating a musician’s legacy, even if the particular musician being celebrated substituted a course in ethnomusicology for a required course in polyphonic notation when he studied musicology at the University of Minnesota!<sup>4</sup> But, following Bonhoeffer’s lead, this brief tribute employs *polyphony* as a theological metaphor. The focus is thus not on Mark Bangert’s extraordinary musical ability and contributions but on a particular treasure of the Lutheran tradition that he helped me appreciate more deeply, which seems integral to

the *cantus firmus* of God’s love and grace, to which Mark has given witness: *The finite is capable of the infinite*.

Augustana Chapel at LSTC, the dream Mark yearned for and worked with President Echols and others to help bring into existence, is not ornate. The simplicity of the space signals that “you don’t need a lot of stuff to worship. Less is more—and less is just fine.”<sup>5</sup> But certain material things loom large. No one can be with Mark for very long without noticing just how seriously he takes certain material “stuff”—font, water, bread, wine, word, table, cup, cross, oil, ashes, ambo, organ.

Mark wanted the baptismal font to be a visible, powerful sign in the new chapel. Unless one’s sight or hearing is impaired, one can hardly stand anywhere in Augustana Chapel without seeing the enormous baptismal font or hearing its splashing water. At first it was difficult to get used to the distraction of all that flowing water—a kind of *cantus firmus* in its own right, running underneath the singing, praying, and preaching; the giving and receiving of bread and wine. During the closing chapel service of the school year in Augustana Chapel, after months of baptismal reaffirmations and services accompanied by the sound of flowing water, participants are invited to take off their shoes and wade through the pool of water in the font toward ventures of which they cannot see the end-

2. Morris, *Bonhoeffer’s Ethic of Discipleship*, 65.

3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, enlarged ed., trans. Reginald Fuller, Frank Clarke, et al., ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 303, quoted in Morris, 65.

4. Jan Boden, “Mark Bangert: Faith and Music,” *LSTC Epistle* (Winter 2008), 12.

5. Boden, “Mark Bangert: Faith and Music,” 12.



ing, through perils unknown. Hands are there to assist worshippers into and out of the pool without slipping. Emerging, feet wet and sometimes with faces smiling and wet with tears, friends in Christ wordlessly seem to recognize both the pain of imminent separation and the wondrous geography of the Spirit, which knows no bounds of region or synod, culture or nation, time or space, but only the Christ who is there in every flood and ford.

. . . the spiritual is intimately involved with the material, the truth about God inseparable from the ordinary, as inseparable as God was from humanity in Jesus. If these things are crutches, so be it. They will then be for us the very “ford, bridge, door, ship, and stretcher” that Luther said we need. These things are for “every seeking soul.” These things show us something about all things.<sup>6</sup>

Mark has witnessed to Christ’s presence “in, with, and under” sacraments and their earthy, earthly signs, and taught us so much about the power and beauty of ritual through his presiding as well as his playing, his teaching as well as his conducting. There have been many moments when, together with him, we have stood on holy ground.

Of course, in the recognition of and reverence for what the finite is capable of bearing lies danger as well as promise. If what happens there does not nurture in us that faith that “Christ is *everywhere*, closer to everything created than these things are to themselves,”<sup>7</sup> the treasured worship space can become an idol. The means through which grace comes can be confused with grace itself, dulling in us the wonder that the Spirit blows where it wills and is not, finally, governed by ecclesiastical management.

I have been helped by Mark’s description of worship as keeping alive rather than resolving such necessary counterpoints, like a suspension bridge that spans two shores

and needs tension in the wires to uphold it.<sup>8</sup> One can treasure earthly things without idolizing them, but not always easily.

This creative tension, this polyphony of voices and melodies of life together, all relating to *cantus firmus* in ways not always harmonic, is perhaps easier to trust in theory than in practice. One may yearn to reach *terra firma*, not live on a bridge; to hold onto the sounds and notes that are familiar and pleasing; to hurry to a chord that resolves dissonance rather than let the dissonance open up new musical possibilities. But the resolutions are not, finally, in our hands.

Mark Bangert—musician and conductor; presider and liturgical scholar; preacher and teacher—there are so many themes one could celebrate, and we celebrate them all. But perhaps the gift that I am most grateful for is Mark’s faithfulness in reminding us, time and time again, that “in, with, and under” what we can touch and handle is the Christ whose grace and mercy are infinite, into whose song we are invited. Only that One has a score large enough to hold all songs of praise and lament, hope and despair, triumph and failure, and the power to resolve the broken chords and unfinished symphonies of life together. When such faith “speaks” in any limited human life, those who are touched by that faith are better able to hope, and better equipped to sing.

6. Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 89. The quote from Luther is taken from “The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ,” *Luther’s Works* 35 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1960): 48.

7. Vitor Westhelle, *The Scandalous God: The Use and Abuse of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 29; emphasis added.

8. Oral presentation by Mark Bangert at the pre-conference gathering of the 2008 LSTC Leadership Conference.

# The First Evangelical Oratorio

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Robert Bergt

*The American Kantorei*

*Conductor and Music Director*

*St. Louis, Missouri*

I wish to honor Mark Bangert upon his retirement with a discussion of Dietrich Buxtehude's oratorio *Membra Jesu nostri*. In this, the first oratorio of the evangelical church of Germany, the heart and core of the gospel is proclaimed. A lasting close relationship between us began when Mark was a student at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis; the friendship has endured with collegiality through more than four decades.

The musical heritage of such evangelical masters as Schütz, Schein, Scheidt, Hammerschmidt, Hassler, Ebeling, Praetorius, Bach, Buxtehude, Brahms, Mozart, Luther, Gerhardt, Distler, Micheelsen, and Bender flows into the mainstream of Mark's life and work. What was begun in his home life, stressed in early schooling, continued through secondary, college, and seminary education, tested and tried by experience—all of this became focused and expressed in his ministry. The current in which he swims today continues to flow into mature reflection and expression that is always Christocentric.

Good church music is *sacramental* in content. That is, it is a conveyor for God's good news of salvation in a needy world; *sacrificial* response in and by faith ascends with praise and adoration to the Highest One, who alone sits at the right hand of God. Lectures, sermons, and innumerable rehearsals are invested in the action of sacrificial life. In such a life, Mark has

raised many questions about multicultural worship and how such worship becomes possible. In his investigations and teaching, Christocentricity is the magnetic pull upon which the swinging needle in his compass comes to a rest. This gospel message, proclaimed in Buxtehude's oratorio centuries earlier, has made it possible for Mark to stay the course in the midst of every current.

## **The limbs of our sacred suffering Jesus**

Buxtehude's oratorio *Membra Jesu nostri patientis sanctissima* (The limbs of our sacred suffering Jesus) was composed about 1680. With this dedicatory intention in mind and heart, we enter a brief study of Buxtehude's first evangelical (Lutheran) oratorio. Recently it has been made available in a superb edition by Carus Verlag, Stuttgart, Germany. The edition consists of a full score for the conductor and organist; a piano/vocal score with all of the choruses, arias for soloists and trios; a choral edition for SSATB, without orchestral ritornelli, solo and trio arias; orchestral parts for two violins; violone (cello); contra bass; and, for Part VI, five gambas. A critical apparatus points out problems and solutions related to the publication.

Buxtehude added to the original score the note, "humillima Totius Cordis Devotione decantata," that is, "sung wholeheart-

edly in most humble devotion.” From this remark and the score’s musical content it can be said that the work is not a lament, a dirge, or a pietistic gush of emotion as the holy limbs of the Savior are viewed. Rather, the music suggests that it is an outpouring of praise, a cascade of thanksgiving; in it there is a plea for a victorious death. The seven cantatas that constitute the oratorio are meditations upon passages from Holy Scripture that demonstrate Buxtehude’s biblical scholarship.

Buxtehude, no doubt, chose the seven passages that form the backbone of the oratorio, each one a surprise in its own way: nowhere else are the chosen passages associated with Jesus’ passion and death. The Bible verses that occur at the head of every cantata, following a brief and appropriate sonata, demonstrate Buxtehude’s unusual knowledge of the Holy Scriptures and his appropriation of them. Buxtehude’s familiarity with the Old Testament indicates how he saw the history of Israel as prototype of God’s redemptive plan. The choruses containing the seven passages are repeated at the conclusion of each cantata, thus emphasizing the main theme and its intent.

The medieval poem *Salve mundi salutare!* (Hail! Savior of the world!) was composed in Latin verse about 1250 A.D. by Arnulf von Löwen. It often is incorrectly attributed to St. Bernard of Clairvaux. Doubtless he quoted from *Salve munde salutare*, but it has since been proven that Arnulf was its author. The poem became immensely popular throughout Europe in the seventeenth century, both in its Latin original and in vernaculars, especially in the German language. Paul Gerhardt based his *O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden* squarely on Arnulf’s Latin poem. Each cantata as a whole becomes a basis for adoration, prayer, praise, and petition. These remain useful

today—the cantatas are not antediluvian, archaic, or old-fashioned.

More than two hundred extant choral works from Buxtehude’s pen are in Latin poetry. These are Vulgate psalm renditions, many of which are for solo voice, others involving chorus and orchestra. New Testament canticles form another cluster of Latin texts in his music. Still others are from other literature, such as the case in point here. Such practice indicates a daily use of Latin in his life, as was the case with Martin Luther and Johann Sebastian Bach. The use of Latin connotes the continuity of the church with its Western mother.

Each of the seven cantatas is headed by a sonata for instruments alone. Usually the model is for two violins, a violone (cello), contra bass, the fundamental (the bass notes on which the chord structure is formed) playing an octave below the cello much of the time. However, there are certain parts in which the violone has a unique and separate function apart from the bass. At times the organ supplies the accompaniment of the arias without a cello or bass undergirding the bass continuo line.

Following is an outline typical of all seven cantatas that constitute the oratorio.

1. *Sonata*—Instruments alone. Cantata Nos. 1 through 5 and No. 7 are for violins 1, 2; violone, and organ, often with string bass playing the bass line. No. 6 is scored for five gambas and no violins.

2. *Concerto*—A five-part chorus, SSATB, and instruments perform the biblical text.

3. *Aria*—Solo voices (SSA or ATB), or trios of these voices, perform short Latin poetic strophes. As a rule, there are three arias for varying voices, short in duration, some of which have *ritornelli* (short passages by instruments alone). Selected strophes of Arnulf’s poem form the textual bases for all of the arias.

4. *Concerto*—No. 2 is repeated by the tutti (entire) ensemble. The exception is No. 7, in which a brilliant and florid “Amen” is added.

The first movement of all seven cantatas is a *sonata*. These short movements act like a prelude, introducing the full chorus with instruments before the biblical passage that follows. Insightful reflections on the spiritual content of what is to immediately follow constitute the musical content of each sonata. The music, in and of itself, is conducive to meditation.

Opera had been introduced one decade earlier in Hamburg, a city near Lübeck where Buxtehude lived and worked. He may have served as harpsichordist occasionally for the opera company. From the overtures to operas Buxtehude may have learned the importance and function of an overture and incorporated its form into his many cantatas.

The second movement to the seven cantatas is a *concerto*, not to be confused with the longer work for solo instrument yet to come in the late Baroque period. The concerto here is tutti section, that is, for chorus and instruments. A selected passage from Scripture is its text.

An *aria* follows the chorus, with stringed accompaniment. The aria sections of the cantatas are subdivided into three parts, either for solo voice or for combinations of three voices. Meditations that contain aspects of adoration, praise, thanksgiving, imploration, or benediction come in between the outer framework. The music is set to the poetic strophes by Arnulf.

The opening concerto is then repeated in all of the seven cantatas. Thus every cantata is framed by the Scripture passage. In this way, Buxtehude displays an adeptness not only as a mature musician and composer but also as one who is steeped in Scripture, history, theology, and Latin poetry.

*Membra Jesu nostri* draws together seven cantatas into one 65-minute major oratorio. The worshiper’s attention is not challenged by long and involved arias and choruses. The work became an attractive oratorio in the worship cycle of Lent/Easter from 1680 onward at the St. Mary Church in Lübeck.

Buxtehude’s organ-performance ability was famed throughout Germany and surrounding countries, but it is possible that the fame of this oratorio also induced Bach to make his well-known journey to visit Buxtehude in the North German city in 1705. At the age of twenty the unmarried Bach asked for permission to be absent from his post in Arnstadt to visit Buxtehude for a period of three or four weeks. He walked 450 kilometers one way to make the trip. He became so intrigued that he stayed nearly four months—and was severely reprimanded when he returned home.

Many traces of Buxtehude’s influence may be found in Bach’s music. Perhaps foremost is the element of sophisticated writing of contrapuntal style in the organ music of Buxtehude. Furthermore, modulations to both neighboring keys and far-off unrelated key signatures are commonplace in Buxtehude’s organ works. Bach learned such things from Buxtehude, which he combined quickly with techniques learned from Pachelbel through Bach’s older brother, Johann Christoph.

Buxtehude’s idea of combining numerous cantatas into one large oratorio had wide influence. It may be that Bach received the idea for his Christmas Oratorio from Buxtehude. Much like the oratorio under discussion here, Bach combined six cantatas for the various feasts and festivals of Christmas, New Year, and Epiphany into one oratorio. Bach also came away from Lübeck with the idea of moving entire motets used for funerals, weddings, and

other occasions into cantatas and other large works. Some motet-like structures also are transferred into larger works, such as Bach's four *Missa brevis* settings. Bach had to notice the beginning and ending signatures of Buxtehude's writings; each contained "INJ," *in nomine Jesu* ("in the name of Jesus"), and/or "SDG," *Soli Deo Gloria* ("to God alone be glory").

### **Buxtehude's compositions for solo voice**

Much of Buxtehude's best composition is for solo voice. About two-thirds of his vocal music is either for single voice or chamber movements in the form of duets and trios. Most often there is *basso continuo* (either organ alone, with cello, or with cello and bass) accompaniment with one, two, and more treble instruments playing descants.

Because more than half of Buxtehude's choral works are for a single voice, in today's terminology, it is found that these often are lumped together under the generic title "Cantata for Solo Voice," or, more simply, "Solo Cantata." However, three groups with variant styles and titles were composed by Buxtehude—*concertos*, *ciaconnas*, and *arias*—all of them published today as "cantatas."

When Buxtehude captioned a section with the word *concerto*, it applies to settings of prose texts from biblical and/or extrabiblical sources. It is written for either an ensemble of voices and instruments or for solo voice. For Buxtehude *concerto* is a choral structure in his many writings.

Furthermore, the *concerto* form is *durch-komponiert*, that is, through-composed, without repeats of sections, and it is fugal and contrapuntal in style. The *aria* form, on the other hand, contains two and three repeats of the same musical phrases with identical *ritornelli* for orchestra. In

these repeated sections the selection of the voice may change, for example, from soprano 1 to soprano 2, then to bass for the third strophe. *Concerto* form religiously ignores the repeated device and is through-composed. Single words in the *concerto* form become repeated, dramatized, underscored, and highlighted by repetitions. Single words in the *aria* form are seldom repeated. As in liturgical settings each statement and word occurs a single time.

*Ciaconnas* are the second definable group of solo chamber songs for single voice, or for two, three, four, even five voices accompanied by various instruments, usually violin 1, 2, and violone; Buxtehude favors the sound of solo gamba (cello). He draws texts from German Psalmody in this grouping. Six of his compositions are known as *ciaconna*. In them the base line contains an *ostinato* bass, that is, notes that are repeated stubbornly (without change) over and over again. The scheme of the sequence of notes might be very simple, employing but a few basic sounds upon which agreeable harmony is created. Some schemes become long and more involved, and they also are repeated many times over.

The third grouping of songs that are mostly for solo voice are called *arias*. The texts are original, extrabiblical poems in Latin and/or German. Songs in *aria* form composed by Buxtehude that are still extant number 41.

Each of the seven cantatas that constitute the oratorio *Membra Jesu nostri* contains movements of all three forms. *Concerti* frame every cantata; these are sung immediately after the sonata. They are repeated again as in a summary at the conclusion. The *aria* formats follow the *concerto*. Almost all of the *arias* are presented three times, each time by a different voice. Buxtehude's settings of Arnulf's poetic

strophes are brief, but always interesting. The ostinato bass lines occur infrequently in the oratorio.

Buxtehude loved the solo voice for its expressive qualities. Perhaps the number of singers in Lübeck were fewer at his time; this may be a contributing factor as to why he chose to write often for the solo voice. Singers in his choir numbered sixteen or fewer. The size of the orchestra is small as well, perhaps even one on a part, not exceeding three violinists on each of their two parts. As in the music of Heinrich Schütz, the solo voice became the musical medium for portrayal and communication of both the prose and poetic texts. Similar reasons may be the cause for his numerous creations for ensemble and solo stringed instruments.

My English translation of the oratorio follows. Brief musical and interpretive comments are given at the beginning of each cantata, stated in outline form.

## The oratorio

*In nomine Jesu* [Buxtehude's caption]

*I. Ad pedes*—Meditation stirred by the feet of Jesus.

The first cantata is scored for two violins, viola da gamba (cello), five voices (SSATB), and basso continuo. Like another passage, from Isaiah 52:7, Buxtehude's music calls to mind the "feet of him who brings good tidings," that is, the messages of prophets who called Israel to repentance, effective in their time, but whose fulfillment was yet to come. Thus "in the fullness of time," the one whose feet walked among God's people validated the words of all prophecy. Therefore, the church has engaged in a never-ending walk, a procession moving through time to the ends of the earth, following in the footsteps of the Savior.

1. *Sonata* (instrumental introduction: two violins, viola da gamba, basso continuo)

2. *Tutti* (entire ensemble, SSATB and strings)

*Behold, upon the mountains the feet of him who brings good tidings and proclaims peace!*—*Nahum 1:15*

3. *Aria* (The following poem was authored by Arnulf von Löwen, 1250 A.D.)

a) Soprano 1

*Hail! Savior of the world;*

*Hail! dearest Jesus!*

*I would like to hang with you upon your cross.*

*Verily! You know why;*

*Grant me your strength.*

b) Soprano 2

*The nails in your feet, the severe beatings,*

*And the deep wounds,*

*I view them with deepest emotion;*

*Your fear filled appearance is a Memorial of your wounds.*

c) Bass

*Dear Jesus, merciful God,*

*I cry out to you, I am the one who is guilty,*

*Show yourself to me in mercy,*

*Do not dismiss me, the unworthy one, From your holy feet.*

4. *Tutti*. The text from No. 2 is repeated.

5. *Tutti*. The text from No. 3 is repeated.

*II. Ad genua*—Meditation stirred by the consideration of Jesus' knees.

6. *Sonata in tremulo*—*Tutti* instruments. Tremulo, the bowing of the musician's right arm, began as early as in the seventeenth century, as the scores of Monteverdi and Heinrich Schütz attest. The sound is achieved by rapid up and down strokes of the bow of stringed instruments. The strokes create a shimmering effect. Jesus' knees no doubt weakened and possibly trembled

because nails pierced his feet. Buxtehude, however, brings to mind the dandling of a child upon the knee of a mother. The picture is of God caring for Israel, his child, and jostling the child at the knee. This is the ultimate good that derives from the crucifixion of Jesus for God's entire creation. Thus the back-and-forth motion of extremely quiet tremolo movement and the quickly paced allegro sections suggest Buxtehude's reading of God's action as presented in this brief cantata.

7. *Tutti* (SSATB)

*You will nurse and be carried upon her arm, and you will be dandled on her knee. —Isaiah 66:12*

8. a) *Aria*—Tenor

(Poem by Arnulf von Löwen)

*Hail, Jesus! King of the saints,  
You welcome hope of sinners,  
Hanging upon the wood of the cross,  
As a guilty man, yet true God,  
Falling down on buckling knees.*

b) *Aria*—Alto

*How shall I respond to you,  
Oh faint in action, hard of heart?  
How shall I repay your love,  
You, who elected to die for me,  
So that I may not suffer two deaths?*

c) *Aria*—Trio: Soprano 1, 2, and Bass

*In order to beg you with pure mind—  
This is my first concern.  
It is neither work nor beneath dignity  
But I will be cured and made clean  
As I embrace you.*

9. *Tutti*. No. 7 is repeated.

*III. Ad manus*—Meditation while considering the hands of Jesus.

10. *Sonata*

Zechariah 13:6b contains a stunning answer to a question: "Say to any one who asks, 'these wounds I received in the house of my friends.'" The people to whom the prophet is speaking inflicted these wounds.

During the postexilic period, Israel became restless and disobedient to Yahweh. The prophet here proclaims that the Day of the Lord is at hand and calls for change within Israel's behavior. Applying this passage to Christ, the reference is to wounds inflicted by nails in Jesus' hands. The sin of humankind is the cause of such cruelty. The quiet joy contained in the threefold aria that follows seems to indicate that Buxtehude saw the gospel side of those wounds. In them he found vindication for the believer, granting comfort at the hour of death.

11. *Tutti* (SSATB)

*What are these wounds in the palm of your hands? —Zechariah 13:6*

12. *Aria* (Poem by Arnulf von Löwen)

a) Soprano 1

*Hail Jesus, good shepherd!  
Fatigued in agony (struggles),  
You who are torn asunder on the wood,  
Yet affixed to the wood,  
By your outstretched hands.*

b) Soprano 2

*Sacred hands, I embrace you,  
And though lamenting I find delight in you,*

*I give thanks for these severe blows,  
For the hard nails and holy blood,  
I embrace you with tear-filled eyes.*

c) Trio: Alto, Tenor, Bass

*Washed in blood from your wounds  
I commend myself totally to you.*

*May your holy hands*

*Defend me, Jesus Christ.*

*In my last hour of distress.*

13. *Tutti* (No. 11 is repeated by the entire ensemble)

*IV. Ad latus*—Meditation about the wound in Jesus' side.

14. *Sonata*

The first two chords recall the opening appeal, "Behold, Look!" See the rugged

clefts in the rock and protection of a cave. These are pictured in the music by leaps of jagged octaves played by the violins with rugged accentuation. That angularity continues into the following scene presented in No. 15, "Arise, my love." There, blood mingled with water flows from the pierced side of Jesus. But the mixture is not bitter, it is "sweetness of honey," with power to wash dirty hearts clean. Therein lies the protection of the cave.

The jagged leaps of octaves in the violin lines depict the rugged clefts within the rocks. What better protection can come than that which comes as a free gift through faith in Christ on the cross? From an adoring heart flows the adoration expressed in the poem of Arnulf, wherein the bride/bridegroom picture of Christ and the church continues.

15. *Tutti* ensemble (SSATB)

*Arise, my love,  
my fair one, and come away,  
O my dove into the clefts of the rock,  
into the covert of the cliff.  
—Song of Solomon 2:13–14*

16. *Aria*

a) Soprano 1

*Hail, side of my Savior,  
where the sweetness of honey lies  
concealed,  
where power of love resides,  
where from the spring of your blood  
gushes forth  
that which washes a dirty heart clean.*

b) Trio: Alto, Tenor, Bass

*Behold, I approach you,  
Spare me, Jesus, when I fail.  
Modesty, indeed, is my appearance as  
I come to you freely  
to behold your wounds.*

c) Soprano 2

*At the hour of death may my soul  
dwell, Jesus, in your bosom (side).*

*At the time of expiration may [I] hurry  
to you  
and thus avoid attack by the lion,  
and on the contrary, remain with you  
forever.*

17. *Tutti* (No. 15 is repeated by the ensemble)

V. *Ad pectus*. Reverence for Christ is wrought by consideration of nursing infants. Buxtehude's choice of 1 Peter 2:2, 3 for meditation at this point is unique. Newly instructed Christians baptized at Eastertide are encouraged to grow in their salvation "like newly born infants who long for their mother's breast milk." The music of the strings and organ suggest youthfulness, growth, and strength.

18. *Sonata*

19. Trio: Alto, Tenor, Bass

*Like newly born infants, long for the  
pure spiritual milk, so that by it you  
may grow into salvation; for you  
have tasted the kindness of the Lord.  
—1 Peter 2:2,3*

20. *Aria* (Poem by Arnulf von Löwen)

a) Alto

*Hail, my salvation, dear Lord,  
dear Jesus, my beloved.  
Hail, most revered breast,  
With trembling hand do I touch you,  
O source of love.*

b) Tenor

*My heart, O cleanse it pure,  
On fire, pious, and filled with sighs.  
Voluntarily I cast aside my own  
desires,  
Always conforming to you,  
Joining in your wondrous virtue.*

c) Bass

*Hail, true temple of God,  
I pray, have mercy upon me.  
You, the seat of all highest goodness,  
Make me one of the elected chosen ones,  
O precious vessel, O God of all.*



21. Trio: Alto, Tenor, Bass. No. 19 is repeated.

VI. *Ad cor*—Meditation upon consideration of the heart of Jesus.

22. *Sonata*. For five viola da gamba voices and basso continuo with organ. The sonata vacillates between quiet *mysterioso* and *vivace* movement, a picture that connotes total serenity, yet there is life. Buxtehude's notation indicates the identical tremolo bowing effects as in number II. It describes a scene that hangs between life and death.

The scenario seems just right for the content of the text from the Song of Solomon that follows. Yahweh speaks to his people, "You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride." Buxtehude makes intimacy all the more effective by writing for a solo trio, not the tutti chorus, in both Nos. V and VI. The metaphor contains a surprisingly new designation for God's people, "my sister."

23. Trio for three voices (SSB)

*You have ravished my heart, my sister,  
my bride, you have ravished my  
heart.*—*Song of Solomon 4:9*

24. *Aria* (Poem by Arnulf von Löwen)

a) Soprano 1

*I greet you, O highest king of my heart,  
I salute you with a happy heart,  
I am delighted to embrace you,  
And I am convinced in my heart  
That I speak intimately with you.*

b) Soprano 2

*Let your love permeate my heart,  
May it reside in its deepest most recess,  
May your love carry over to mine  
Where your heart is torn apart,  
Languishing wounded by love.*

c) Bass

*I cry out with heart's lively voice,  
dear heart, that I love you,*

*Be inclined to my heart,  
So that it may be enabled to repose  
In devotion on your breast.*

25. Trio: Soprano 1, 2, Bass. No. 23 is repeated.

VII. *Ad faciem*. Meditation on Jesus' countenance offers blessing to the believer.

26. *Sonata*. For two violins and basso continuo. Three times phrases consisting of rapid sixteenth notes and dotted rhythms are employed in the brief introduction. Could Buxtehude here have hidden a symbol for three persons of the Holy Trinity within the brief movement? Baroque composers often hid symbols in phrases, numbers of measures, numbers of beats per measure, accidentals added, then erased. The Savior's countenance here is beheld with joy and delight. Bright beams illuminate life and its way.

It is noteworthy that a worshiper who beholds the countenance of the dying Savior may not have chosen Psalm 31:16 for meditation at this point. Some may have chosen a more somber verse learned perhaps in confirmation class. Buxtehude, however, throughout this work stresses the gospel aspect of each event. The mercy and loving kindness of God is emphasized everywhere in Buxtehude's music.

27. *Tutti* (SSATB)

*Let your face shine on your servant,  
Save me by your steadfast love.*  
—*Psalm 31:16*

28. *Aria* (ATB) (Poem by Arnulf von Löwen)

a) Trio: Alto, Tenor, Bass  
*Hail, head, streaming full of blood,  
Crowned totally with thorns,  
Disfigured, wounded,  
Beaten with a rod,  
Face washed with spit*

b) alto

*While it's necessary for me to die,  
Do not be far from me  
In that horrible hour of death.  
Come, Jesus, do not delay,  
Remain faithful to me and liberate me.*

c) Tutti chorus and ensemble

*You order departure for me,  
Dear Jesus, then appear to me,  
O beloved one, whom I want to embrace;  
You show yourself extended  
On the cross for my salvation.*

29. Tutti ensemble

*Amen.*



The last three strophes, Aria No. 28 a, b, c, and the Amen to Arnulf's poem are composed in triplum meters: 6/4 (3/2 in cadential measures). The major pulse is triplum, three distinct beats in every measure. Hence the question is raised: Does Buxtehude in subtle manner suggest by this dance form that the blessing is by the Holy Trinity?

The music remains vivid, alive, and joyous throughout the last two movements, that sentiment especially underscored in the Amen section.

Finally, note that all of the seventh cantata is cast in C minor—a serious and somber key ordinarily. Yet Buxtehude maintains joy throughout. This key should

be signed with the signature of three flats—that of C minor. But there are only two written flats in the signature; one flat, the E-flat, is missing. Bach does the same thing in his Passion according to St. Matthew, and several other scores as well: One flat is not in the signature. It disappears from the proper signature loci. Therefore, it must be written singly into the score over and over, hundreds of times, in each voice of the manuscript.

It is this author's conjecture that this is possibly a way for Bach and Buxtehude to say with the angel: "He is risen! He is not here! He is ascended!"

*S.D.G.*

# A Lutheran Theology of Praise

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Lutherans are perhaps known more for proclamation than for praise. The Reformation reexamined the medieval church practices, especially those which had hidden the good news of forgiveness by faith in Jesus Christ. Martin Luther and others created hymns that sang the gospel into people's hearts. Could praise, combined with proclamation in this Reformation way, serve the church even today?

Melanchthon's "sacrifice of thanksgiving" may best summarize this Reformation approach. In the 1530 Diet of Augsburg Lutheran princes and municipal governments had given their "confession of faith." In response to the papal representatives' critique (the Roman Confutation) Melanchthon published his Apology to the Augsburg Confession (1531) in order to defend the 1530 statements. In it he gave particular attention to the topics of original sin, the nature of works, the seven sacraments, the sacrifice of the Mass, and, above all, the article on justification. In Article XXIV, The Mass, Melanchthon discusses the "sacrifice of thanksgiving." He employs this concept to show that the Reformers did not abolish the Mass but kept it, using it better than their opponents. Melanchthon explained why they kept it:

Ceremonies should be observed both so that people may learn the Scriptures and so that, admonished by the Word, they might experience faith and fear and finally even pray. For these are

the purposes of the ceremonies. We keep the Latin for the sake of those who learn and understand it. We also use German hymns in order that the [common] people might have something to learn, something that will arouse their faith and fear. This custom has always existed in the churches. For even if some have more frequently used German hymns and others more rarely, nevertheless almost everywhere the people sang something in their own language. No one has ever written or suggested that people benefit from the mere act of hearing lessons that they do not understand or that they benefit from ceremonies not because they teach or admonish but simply *ex opere operato*, that is, by the mere act of doing or observing. Away with such Pharisaical ideas! (Apology XXIV, 4-5)<sup>1</sup>

Melanchthon pointed out that especially on the Lord's Day the ancient church had a public or common Mass, not a private one. In their Confutation the opponents had piled up statements to show that the Mass was a sacrifice, pointing to references in Scripture and the Fathers even though the Augsburg Confession had purposely avoided the term "sacrifice" because of its ambiguity. Melanchthon reminded them that the Lord's Supper does not grant grace *ex opere operato* or merit forgiveness for others. Peace with God and reconciliation

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1. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000). All quotations are from this translation.

come through faith, not works (Rom 5:1). A crucial point was the distinction between *sacrament* and *sacrifice*.

It is the purpose of this article to explore Melancthon's "sacrifice of thanksgiving" as a theology of praise.<sup>2</sup> Could it be a useful antidote to weak theologies of praise that too easily erode a focus on the gospel? I thus offer a biblical perspective of praise, identify competing theologies of praise, summarize Melancthon's sacrifice of thanksgiving, discuss a few examples of Thankful Praise from Lutheran practice, and urge the legacy to continue.

### Biblical perspective

An English definition of *praise* has two possibilities: (1) an expression of warm approval, admiration, or (2) extolling of a deity, ruler or hero.<sup>3</sup> Parallel expressions like "glorify" (to ascribe glory) and "magnify" (to make greater in importance) carry similar import.

The Old Testament's vocabulary for praise occurs primarily in the Psalms, Isaiah, and Jeremiah; there are words like *tehillah* (renown, praise, glory), *halal* (praise), *yadah* (praise, confess), *zamar* (give praise). Deuteronomy 10:21 shows a preoccupation with the object of praise, describing what God has done: "He is your praise; he is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things that your own eyes have seen." Isaiah 42:8 talks of God's jealous expectations: "I am the LORD, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols." Isaiah 60:6, a prophecy involving the Gentiles, ties proclamation and praise together with deed: "A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD." The psalms are songs that praise. Psalm 113, for example, calls

for praise by servants of the Lord who will praise the name of the Lord forever because the Lord is high above all nations, the Lord lifts up the poor and needy, the Lord gives the barren woman a home and makes her a mother. Often the actions of God are listed, as in Psalm 103:1–5:

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—

who forgives all your iniquity,

who heals all your diseases,

who redeems your life from the pit,

who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Old Testament praise typically focuses on what God has done. Extolling the attributes, promises, and actions of the Lord is the central act.<sup>4</sup>

The New Testament treats the praise of God similarly. Luke 18:43 reports that the blind man near Jericho and all who witnessed his healing were focused on the actions of God: "Immediately he regained his sight and followed him [Jesus], glorifying God; and all the people, when they saw it, praised God." Jesus himself, after healing the ten lepers, comments on the true thankfulness of the one who praises God

2. For a more on praise see James L. Brauer, *Worship, Gottesdienst, Cultus Dei: What the Lutheran Confessions Say About Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), Chapter 7.

3. S.v. "Praise" in *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973).

4. Note that Luther's Large Catechism (III, 48), in discussing the hallowing of God's name, makes a similar point: "For there is nothing that [God] would rather hear than to have his glory and praise exalted above everything else and his Word taught in its purity, cherished and treasured."

and connects the praise with faith:

Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well. (Luke 17:15–19)

Revelation 15:3–4 too has the heavenly creatures look to the deeds and attributes of God when singing about the Lamb of God:

And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb: "Great and amazing are your deeds, Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, King of the nations! Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your judgments have been revealed."

Thus both testaments reveal a pattern of praise that lifts up the words and deeds of God in thankfulness and song. That song declares the holiness and goodness of the Lord by the mouth of those who trust God and want all to rely on the Lord.

### Competing theologies of praise

There seem to be four primary types of praise: Creature Praise, Obedient Praise, Fervent Praise, and Thankful Praise.

*Creature Praise.* The first type takes its cue from a passage like Psalm 100:1, "Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth." It works from the command to praise. Everyone must praise God. It is commanded, and all who hear the psalm imperative must join in. Like members of an audience who are invited to applaud for an act, it says, "Just 'give it up' for God!" It is the thing to do if you hear the master of ceremonies call for your participation. There

is not much one has to know or commit to; just join in. It is simply what is expected of an audience member. The talent and action are on the stage. Since all the earth is the Lord's, every creature should praise the Creator. This is very much a First Article response. It is Creature Praise.

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**B**oth testaments reveal a pattern of praise that lifts up the words and deeds of God in thankfulness and song.

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*Obedient Praise.* The second type is like the first but calls also for obedience to the Lord's commandments. Psalm 112:1–2, for example, says, "Praise the LORD! Happy are those who fear the LORD, who greatly delight in his commandments. Their descendants will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed." Both verbal acknowledgment of the greatness of God and right behavior are demanded. Words alone could be hollow, perhaps even hypocritical. Thus, in Isaiah 1:16–17 obedience is required: "Remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do good; rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow." The LORD wanted more than praise, festivals, offerings, and prayers. Without righteous obedience there is no real praising of God. In this theology praise and obedience to the law are combined. It is Obedient Praise.

*Fervent Praise.* A third type of praise theology calls for fresh, heartfelt exuberance. Psalm 149:1–3 is the model: “Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the faithful. Let Israel be glad in its Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King. Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.” In some ways this is like the first type in that it rests on recognizing God as the Maker of All. Yet it is distinguished in this way: The one who praises is to be so touched by God that the act of praise will also encourage others to praise the Lord. It demands that the body move in energetic joy and that instruments too be employed to underline the fullness of the praising act. It is focused more on the feeling of closeness to God and on the exuberance of the praiser before God than on the deeds of the Mighty One. Such singing need not mention any particular promises, attributes, or deeds of God. This praise involves both a feeling of the nearness of God and an excited responding to God.

Because this type of praise is a somewhat recent development, a description of how it might work is useful. Barry Liesch’s *The New Worship* explains many features of this kind of praise.<sup>5</sup> For Liesch the Spirit of God must animate any form, if it is authentic worship. It is not the form that makes one spiritual; rather, as he puts it, “behavior and holy living reflect spirituality.”<sup>6</sup> Essentially, the Spirit is in the praiser, and the praising behavior is testimony to the presence of the Spirit. The act of praising is a power for prompting others to praise. Liesch outlines the “Wimber Five-Phase Model,” a kind of mini-service of fifteen to forty minutes that can generate and express this close-to-God experience. Liesch writes,

Long, uninterrupted sections of worship [singing praise] allow people time to offer their whole selves (mind, will, and emotions) to the Lord without distraction. Accordingly, this Five-Phase model contains adoration and intimacy phases that allow us to linger in God’s presence.<sup>7</sup>

It takes planning, insight, and skill to do sustained sections of public singing that move through the five phases, from (1) *invitation* to (2) *engagement* to (3) *exaltation* to (4) *adoration* to (5) *intimacy* with some closeout. As he describes it, the invitation phase “accepts people where they are and begins to draw them into worship.” It can be celebratory, upbeat, and oriented toward praise. The engagement phase uses a text that is addressed to the Lord. In the exaltation phase people sing out to the Lord employing words like “great, majestic, worthy, reigns, Lord, mountains and so on.”<sup>8</sup> High notes and a greater dynamic are needed to increase the intensity and to express a sense of God’s greatness. During the adoration phase the dynamics are subdued and the pace slower, and melodic range is reduced. Key words are “you” and “Jesus.” The intimacy phrase is the most personal and the quietest. One can address God as “Daddy” or “Abba.” The personal pronouns “I” and “you” are key. Accompaniments are soft; percussion may be eliminated. The closeout song can be a big summarizing piece and speak of dedication or of exaltation.

Because this kind of praise is focused on the inner world of the singer, pointing to the saving deeds of God is not a key element. Nor are the promises of God a key ingredient. Not even trust (faith) in God

5. Barry Liesch, *The New Worship: Straight Talk on Music and the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996).

6. Liesch, *The New Worship*, 20.

7. Liesch, *The New Worship*, 47.

8. Liesch, *The New Worship*, 50.

seems important. Only reverence for and closeness to God (adoration and intimacy) seem essential to Fervent Praise.

*Thankful Praise.* The fourth kind of praise theology can be seen in Psalm 136:3–4: “O give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures forever; who alone does great wonders, for his steadfast love endures forever.” Here praise is an act of thanksgiving that is linked to the goodness and mercy of God. This mercy is more a promise made than something one can lay claim to, for it overcomes the unfaithfulness of the worshiper with the gift of pardon and peace. After the fall humans are incapable of complete trust in God and unselfish love for others. The attitude and behavior that God seeks can come only through God’s transformation of the worshiper’s heart. Indeed, a person who knows God’s mercy and relies on it will give thanks for it. Praise will grow from thanksgiving for God’s merciful attitude, promises, and actions, especially as they are shown in Christ. This kind of praise is obviously focused on the Lord’s doings, not on anything the worshiper may offer. It can be compared to a thank-you card that cheerfully identifies the gift that prompted the expression of thanks.

### **The sacrifice of thanksgiving**

In today’s exchange of songs among theological traditions it is all too easy to encounter an orienting theology that has no focus on the gospel and Christ’s saving activity. Recall that, after the Augsburg Confession had been presented before the Holy Roman Emperor, Melancthon accepted the task of responding to Roman Catholic arguments that held that sacraments confer grace *ex opere operato* (by the act itself, apart from faith) on those who put no obstacle in the way. His opponents also maintained that the Mass was a sacri-

fice for sins of the living and the dead by which sin was taken away and God was reconciled.

In the Apology, then, Melancthon wished to show how the Lutheran position was both what Scripture said and what the ancient church had taught. First, he established that the Lord’s Supper does not grant grace *ex opere operato*. Romans 5:1 is clear: Grace is received by faith. “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” His second task was to show that the Mass is not a propitiatory sacrifice. A *sacrament* is “a ceremony or work in which God presents to us what the promise joined to the ceremony offers.” A *sacrifice*, however, is “a ceremony or work that we render to God in order to give him honor.”<sup>9</sup>

There are two kinds of sacrifice, and they should not be confused. The first kind is *atonement* sacrifice, “a work of satisfaction for guilt and punishment that reconciles God, conciliates the wrath of God, or merits the forgiveness of sins for others.”<sup>10</sup> Melancthon explained that all of the Levitical sacrifices (sin or burnt offerings) foreshadowed the one atoning sacrifice accomplished by the death of Christ (Heb 10:4, 10). They were symbols of a future offering and had lost their purpose after the death and resurrection of Christ. The second kind of sacrifice is *eucharistic* sacrifice. A sacrifice of thanksgiving, he said, “does not merit the forgiveness of sins or reconciliation but is rendered by those who have already been reconciled as a way for us to give thanks or express gratitude for having received forgiveness of sins and other benefits.”<sup>11</sup> Eucharistic sacrifices are

9. Apology XXIV, 18.

10. Apology XXIV, 19.

11. Apology XXIV, 19.

a continuous activity, for they are spiritual sacrifices through the work of the Holy Spirit in those who believe in Christ. The church<sup>12</sup> is a holy priesthood, which offers spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5). Romans 12:1 calls for Christians “by the mercies of

preaching of the gospel, suffering on account of the gospel, and similar things.”<sup>17</sup>

How do these make the name of the Lord great? Melancthon writes:

The proclamation of the gospel produces faith in those who receive the gospel. They call upon God, they give thanks to God, they bear afflictions for their confession, they do good works on account of the glory of Christ. In this way the name of the Lord becomes great among the nations. Therefore “incense” and “a pure offering” do not refer to a ceremony *ex opere operato* but to all those sacrifices through which the name of the Lord is made great, namely, faith, prayer, the preaching of the gospel, confession, etc. (Apology XXIV, 33)

If faith receives the benefits of Christ’s saving death and resurrection, the fruits of faith flow from a thankful heart for what God has done. The outward acts of worship will not reconcile; righteousness comes through faith. Thankfulness does not save but is rather a “fruit” of faith. Hearing the gospel makes a believer want to receive the remission of sins and the gift of righteousness through Christ and to produce spiritual things, namely, good works—all to the glory of Christ. Faith and the fruits of faith honor and glorify God, for they are the spiritual worship that God seeks.

Praise that focuses on an outward saying of thankful words, then, does not truly honor God. If an act of praise is treated as an act of reconciliation, it dishonors the

God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” “Spiritual worship” fears and trusts God.<sup>13</sup> Faith is the key. A sacrifice of praise is offered to God by lips that acknowledge God’s promises and deeds (Heb 13:15). Such eucharistic sacrifices are prayer, thanksgiving, confession, and the like.<sup>14</sup> None of these can be done apart from faith and the thankfulness of one who trusts the promises of God.

Obviously, these are not mere outward acts. Melancthon provides a definition of true worship (John 4:23–24) when he writes, “In summary, the worship of the New Testament is spiritual, that is, it is the righteousness of faith in the heart and the fruits of faith.”<sup>15</sup> With various passages he shows that this is the teaching of Scripture.<sup>16</sup> The new and pure sacrifice, then, is “faith, prayer, thanksgiving, confession, the

12. The church is those who believe; see Large Catechism II, 34–59.

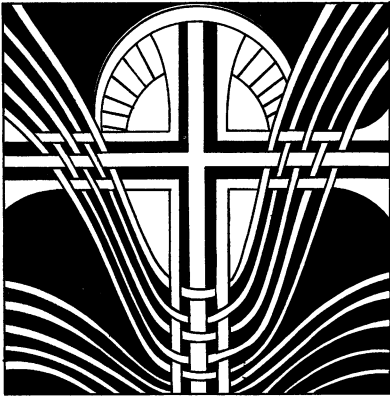
13. Apology XXIV, 26.

14. Apology XXIV, 26. In another place Melancthon identifies these sacrifices as “the preaching of the gospel, faith, prayer, thanksgiving, confession, the afflictions of the saints, and indeed, all the good works of the saints” (Apology XXIV, 25).

15. Apology XXIV, 27.

16. Jer 7:22, 23; Ps 50:13, 15; Ps 116:17.

17. Apology XXIV, 30.





death and resurrection of Christ. Or if it is said and done without faith, it is an empty, hypocritical act before God. Although such things appear to honor God, the Lord rejects them because they lack faith.<sup>18</sup>

Because Creature Praise seeks to express primarily a creature-Creator relationship, Obedient Praise views praise as a demonstration of correct behavior, and Fervent Praise seeks to affect inner dimensions of the one who praises, is it not Thankful Praise that most clearly honors the saving work of Christ? Melancthon's biblical concept of eucharistic sacrifice rightly keeps one from imagining that God wants an outward act of praise or an act of praise that seeks to make peace with God.

### Examples of thankful praise

Thankful Praise can be found in the practice of the Reformation period and its tradition of worship. A few examples follow, including a hymn referenced in the *Book of Concord*, a hymn by Paul Gerhardt, a post-communion prayer from Luther, and the text of a Bach cantata.

In the celebration of the Mass among Lutherans hymns were included. Luther also instructed Christians to end their morning devotions with a hymn.<sup>19</sup> The *Formula of Concord* quotes from the hymn "*Durch Adams Fall ist ganz verderbt*" when discussing original sin in order to show how such teachings were incorporated in its songs:

... we believe, teach, and confess that original sin is not a slight corruption of human nature, but rather a corruption so deep that there is nothing sound or uncorrupted left in the human body or soul, in its internal or external powers. Instead, as the church sings, "Through Adam's fall human nature and our essence are completely corrupted."<sup>20</sup>

The hymn was published already in 1524 and widely used as a didactic hymn.<sup>21</sup> Sig-

nificant here is how Lazarus Spengler's (1479–1534) seven-stanza text continues, saying how this sinful corruption from birth makes everyone prone to evil but that Christ, the second Adam, came to take our place and offer the gift of grace to all who believe. Everyone, therefore, can have hope because of God's gracious gift.<sup>22</sup> The application of law that opens the hymn is turned into an occasion for gospel proclamation. Those who have hope in Christ then have cause for thanksgiving to God. The gospel telling is the grounds for faith and for giving honor to the Lord. It is not merely doctrine, it is Thankful Praise for God's promises and actions.

A century after the Reformation one finds Thankful Praise in the hymns of Paul Gerhardt (1606–1676). There are ten in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. It is obvious that Thankful Praise drives his hymns for Christmas (LBW #23, #46),<sup>23</sup> Lent (#105, #116, #117) and Easter (#129). In these

18. Cf. Isaiah 1:10–20, Amos 5:21–24, and Rom 14:23.

19. Small Catechism, VII, 3.

20. Formula of Concord, Epitome I, 8; Solid Declaration I, 23.

21. *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982) #363 gives this translation, with a shortened meter: "All mankind fell in Adam's fall, One common sin infects us all; From sire to son the bane descends, And over all the curse impends."

22. EKG #243, stanza 6 reads: "*Mein' Füßen ist dein heilige Wort / ein Leuchte nah und ferne, / ein Licht, das mir den Weg weist fort; / so dieser Morgensterne / in uns aufgeht, / so bald versteht / der Mensch die hohen Gaben, / die Gottes Geist / denen verheisst, / die Hoffnung darauf haben.*"

23. Note, for example, LBW #23, stanza 4: "Your thirst for my salvation / Procured my liberty. / Oh, love beyond all telling, / That led you to embrace / In love, all love excelling, / Our lost and fallen race."

texts the key is not so much praise of God as it is trust in God. Trust brings gladness because joy is anchored in Christ's salvation, as stanza 1 of "Awake, My Heart, with Gladness" demonstrates:

Awake, my heart, with gladness,  
See what today is done;  
Now after gloom and sadness,  
Comes forth the glorious sun.  
My Savior there was laid  
Where our bed must be made  
When to the realms of light  
Our spirit wings its flight.<sup>24</sup>

Can this type of praise be found even in a hymn that deals with the created world? Gerhardt's "Evening and Morning" (*LBW* #465), a poetic discussion of living under the steadfast love of God, gives ample evidence. His original had twelve stanzas; *LBW* reduced it to four. Its abbreviated version says that God is to be praised for evening, morning, sunset, dawning, wealth, peace, gladness, preservation from danger—all out of God's mercy. Gerhardt adds: Give me pardon, Lord, and guide my doings so they please you. Stanza 4 then praises God for such gifts:

To God in heaven All praise be given!  
Come, let us offer And gladly proffer  
To the creator the gifts he doth prize.  
He well receiveth A heart that believeth;  
Hymns that adore him Are precious before him  
And to his throne like sweet incense arise.<sup>25</sup>

The twelve stanzas of the German original show how Gerhardt's poetry worked the topic. The opening stanza anchors it all in God's light, which gives life.<sup>26</sup> Already in early Christian hymnody light and sun are names for Christ (Matt 5:14, John 1:5, John 8:12) and could easily be taken that way here. Knowing God's love in Christ, then, the Christian looks to God's merciful care in each day and situation. Gerhardt applies this to head, body members, eyes, and every life situation. The focus is on

trust in God and what God does in a disciple's life. Though the name of Jesus is never directly stated in Gerhardt's highly crafted poetry, his stanza 9 clearly speaks of God's forgiving mercy, putting all sins out of sight.<sup>27</sup> Everything is dependent on trust in God's redemption and God's care. Stanza 12 can then proclaim that it leads one to calm and joy-filled thoughts in every life situation.<sup>28</sup> Through Christ, life with God is one of continuous Thankful Praise.

In his German Mass Luther provided a post-communion collect, which appears in *LBW*'s liturgy for Holy Communion.<sup>29</sup> It gives thanks for "the healing power of this gift," namely, the benefits of salvation in Christ received by faith in the eating and drinking of his body and blood. It asks God to use the sacramental eating and drinking

24. *LBW* #129, st. 1. In German *EKG* #86, st. 1 reads: "Auf, auf, mein Herz, mit Freuden / nimm wahr was heut geschicht;/ wie kommt nach grossem Leiden / nun ein so grosses Licht! / Mein Heiland war gelegt / da, wo man uns hinträgt, / wenn von uns unser Geist / gen Himmel ist gereist."

25. *LBW* #465, st. 4.

26. *EKG* #346, st. 1, begins: "Die güldne Sonne / voll Freud und wonne / bringt unsern Grenzen / mit ihrem Glänzen / ein herz-erquickendes, / liebliches Licht."

27. Its concluding lines say, "God, my crown, forgive and spare [me]; let my faults be removed from your sight through [your] grace and favor."

28. *EKG* #346. Stanza 12 already looks forward with joy to heaven: "Have joyous plenty and blessed calm to abide in the heavenly garden; that's where my thoughts are focused."

29. "We give you thanks, almighty God, that you have refreshed us through the healing power of this gift of life; and we pray that in your mercy you would strengthen us, through this gift, in faith toward you and in fervent love toward one another; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord." *LBW*, p. 74.

to make faith in God and love of one another stronger. It is objective, not looking at subjective inner desires or emotions but only to what is spiritual worship, namely, faith that receives the gift and the fruits of faith that flow from it “for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.”

A cantata by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), “*Die Himmel erzählen die Ehre Gottes*” (The Heavens Declare the Glory of God, BWV 76), chosen somewhat at random for its opening line, provides a sample of Thankful Praise by choral and instrumental forces. During his first year (1723) as *Kantor* in Leipzig Bach presented this grand, two-section cantata on the Second Sunday after Trinity. The thought flow of the fourteen movements, primarily a sequence of *recitative* (setting up of a situation) and *aria* (song about a sentiment), can be summarized as follows:

#### Part One

1. *Chorus*—The heavens declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1).
2. *Recitative*—God’s grace and mercy proclaim him everywhere; his heralds call us to join the feast.
3. *Aria*—Seek God’s grace, for through Christ all have salvation.
4. *Recitative*—Many turn to other gods but a Christian clings to Christ.
5. *Aria*—I continue to worship Christ.
6. *Recitative*—Lord, you called us out of darkness and your Spirit makes us alive and continues to nourish us.
7. *Chorale*—God’s grace blesses us with eternal life through Christ.<sup>30</sup>

#### Part Two

8. *Sinfonia* by orchestra—*adagio, vivace*.
9. *Recitative*—God, bless your people so that they may honor, believe, love, worship and magnify you.
10. *Aria*—Enemies may hate me, yet I joyfully cling to Jesus.

11. *Recitative*—Christ’s love lives in me and strengthens my love for others.

12. *Aria*—Show your love by what you do, for Christ died for all.

13. *Recitative*—All Christians must honor and praise God’s love.

14. *Chorale*—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, let your people and all the world magnify and thank you.<sup>31</sup>

The cantata leaves no doubt for what God is praised, namely, that God’s mercy through Christ is what calls us to God and makes us people who are filled with love. God’s love is in us even when the world rejects us. God helps us show that love in all that we do. All Christians will praise God for this love and will magnify the name of the Trinity. The text balances faith and obedience (fruits of faith) while keeping central what God does, that is, loves us and fills us with godly love. It is both personal and doctrinal, anchored in a trust of God that truly honors the holy name. Aspects of Creature Praise, Obedient Praise, and Fervent Praise are incorporated into the Thankful Praise. It admirably illustrates a Lutheran theology of praise.

### A legacy

These few examples show that a central core of Lutheran creativity, especially for song and prayer, employed the kind of Thankful Praise that Melancthon’s theology of the “sacrifice of thanksgiving” had identified and extolled in Article XXIV of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession. Whether consciously derived from this article or not, the concept of Thankful Praise

30. The chorale is stanza 1 of Luther’s “*Es wolle Gott uns gnädig sein*.” See *LBW* #335.

31. Stanza 3 of Luther’s “*Es wolle Gott*.” See *LBW* #335.

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is clearly driving these texts. Even today this legacy can be the “yeast” that expands the limited dimensions of Creature Praise to encompass the Lamb’s glorious redemption, that overcomes the entrapments of law-oriented Obedient Praise, and that links an inward Fervent Praise to faith in God’s rescuing actions in Christ.

In the 1970s when Lutherans desired a Hymn of Praise with a resurrection accent, they did what the ancient church had done in creating the *Gloria in excelsis*. They found a scriptural basis (*sola scriptura*), assembled the text “This Is the Feast,” and centered

the praise on the Lamb of God whose blood sets us free (*sola gratia*). It sings of thanksgiving for the one great “propitiatory” sacrifice. In the midst of a service that delivers the Word of God and administers the Lord’s Supper it reminds everyone that the awesome deeds of God are the reason to trust the Lord (*sola fide*). Like the hymns of the Reformation and of Paul Gerhardt, like the prayer of Luther, and like the cantatas of Bach, this song recalls the story of God’s rescue of sinners through Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection. It is driven by a theology of praise that is both global and personal, expresses both awe and joy, acknowledges God as both the object of faith and the source of the fruits of faith, and gives expression to the whole Christian Church’s and each believer’s “Alleluia” (Praise the Lord).

Let Lutherans then not focus on outward acts of praise, or confuse atoning sacrifice with the sacrifice of thanksgiving, but rightly combine praise with proclamation of salvation in Christ. They will then employ their legacy, one that draws Creature Praise, Obedient Praise, and Fervent Praise into Thankful Praise.

# The Trinitarian Journey: Music as Gift and Sounded Word

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During a recent class period at Valparaiso University, undergraduate students studying church music discussed a chapter from Mark Bangert's current writing project, *Intersection: Traffic at the Corner of Christian Assembly and the World of Music*. Mark was present for the class session and led the students through one of his chapters. It occurred to me then, and continues to impress me, that Mark's own musical and theological journey has been about intersections: the intersection of music and theology, of clergy and musician, of parish and seminary.

Such intersections we might even expect from him, given his background and training in Lutheran music and theology. Perhaps more surprising are some of the intersections that he has created in his own pursuit of a Lutheran understanding of the church's music. Grounded in Luther's understanding of music as "sounded Word," Mark's search for intersections has taken him from the chapel and classroom in Chicago to Geneva, Switzerland, and to Ruhija, Tanzania. What he has found there and brought to our attention has caused him to enlarge his own ideas about Lutheran church music, classical music training, and the very nature of music in the assembly. What he has never lost in the journey is Luther's theology and belief that all music has within it the potential to glorify God.

As he found new intersections for the church's music, his own ideas and strictures had to fall apart and regroup to include new locations. The church musician's role expands with these intersections, and this caused Mark's own role as leader in church music to grow and change.

Along the way of the physical journeys, a perhaps even more important journey has developed: a theological one. This was a journey through the persons of the Trinity: from God as Creator, to Word, and finally to Spirit. Luther accompanies Mark on this journey, proving a trusty companion. The Spirit is never far behind.

Opening to new directions in the church's music in our time has been as confusing as making choices at an abundant buffet. Does one enter the world of popular and folk style for new songs? Does global music and its many forms offer resources? Is Contemporary Christian music here to stay, and does it need attention? What about the minimalist composers of the classical music stage? How does post-modernism affect the church's music? Who has a place for the church's music? There needs to be discernment and wisdom to the process. Just knowing where to start is half the challenge.

Since the publication of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* in 1978, the geographical intersections of congregational song have

greatly widened. Published in 2006, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* contains hymns from a global community far beyond the reaches or imaginations of *LBW*. As music from Pacific Rim, Africa, Central and South America finds its way into North American worship books, with it comes an ever-expanding array of multiple voices. Its welcome in many local assemblies still remains a challenge. Musicians need skills in leading new types of congregational song. Assemblies need to know what value lies in learning music that is new and, sometimes, startlingly different. The music is now before us, in *ELW*'s hymnody and liturgical music. It awaits our awakening to its value in our weekly assemblies, in our daily prayers, and in our songs at home.

There is impetus and urgency in keeping the questions about the church's music open and fluid. For a church musician following in the tradition of Luther, the question of music in the church is never far away from the question of music in the public space, in and across cultures. Music was undeniably a gift of God for Luther, wherever that music is found. Drawing on Luther, Mark wrote about the extension of music's giftedness to include music outside of the classical Western canon. In 1994 he explored these ideas in *Worship and Culture in Dialogue*.

The musical impulse, that musical imagination present in all peoples, needs to be cared for as if one were caring for a good gift of creation meant by the Creator for the welfare of people. To lose any micromusic is to lose a manifestation of the musical impulse as if losing a species of creation.<sup>1</sup>

Focus here on music as a gift of creation becomes both a liturgical and an ethical concern. Recognizing the availability of music from around the globe is both an opportunity and a challenge for the church. The church musician is also a steward of

creation in caring for the multiple varieties of musical cultures accessible today.

For us in the twenty-first century, the immediacy of music in public and private space, the commodification of music into a matter of personal choice and purchase, continues to place such concerns about music, especially in the liturgy, prominently in view. While often unquestioned in popular culture, music's place is central and essential to everyday life in ways more immediate than ever before. Just so, the church's music, with its focus on communal participation and preference for live musicians, faces its own raft of choices.

What, then, does music do? Nathan Mitchell in his book *Meeting Mystery* proposes that music allows God to speak through this audible art. "Perhaps, then, music's source—and ritual's—is that inaudible Other whose 'word' is the discourse of the body . . . for the body is how we listen most deeply to the world."<sup>2</sup> This "speaking" quality of music reflects its nature. It is different with every rehearsal or performance; it cannot be fixed and never changed. By nature music is flexible, capable of carrying meaning and responsive to the performers who make it.

In a postmodern world, music makes meaning as it moves through time. It is not shackled by a fixed truth but develops meaning as it is presented in each new context. In a world of multiple sources of meaning and multiple truths music provides both means and medium. "Meanings arise from a complex series of interactions between speak-

1. *Lutheran World Federation Studies: Worship and Culture in Dialogue*, ed. S. Anita Stauffer (Geneva, Switzerland: Department for Theology and Studies, The Lutheran World Federation, 1994), 186.

2. Nathan D. Mitchell, *Meeting Mystery: Liturgy, Worship and Sacraments* (New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 45.

ers and hearers.”<sup>3</sup> In making music in the assembly, meaning develops through the song, through the interplay between instrument and voice, leader and response, text and tune. This dialogue is music’s essence. These qualities also pattern a postmodern approach to meaning-making that opens new paths for each.

Multiple and multilayered meanings have always been part of music’s texture. No two persons hear music the same way, brain theorists now tell us. This is not new for those of us who make music in the church. We have long heard stories that a long-cherished hymn spoke with new meaning when sung at the bedside or graveside of a loved one. We know ourselves that a hymn we may have played or sung for years suddenly takes on new meaning when we meet our own spiritual crises. Music’s ability to change its message from one context to the next further evidences the Other behind its creation. Fluid and ever changing, music crosses boundaries and barriers as it continues to speak in new contexts.

What does that mean for the Christian assembly? Here we can draw parallels between music and the church’s liturgy. For music’s prominent place is no accident in the Christian assembly; in fact, music and liturgy support each other in fundamental ways. Music and liturgy both contain within them the ability to bring expression to the deepest human longings, to the highest human joys. “Beyond the loss and lamentation that breathe in all our music and ritual, there lives *affect*, the ability not merely to have emotions but to *feel* them.”<sup>4</sup> Music and the church’s liturgy are partners in a meaning-making event called worship. In Word and Meal, prayer and song, the church gathers to speak in God’s presence those meanings and truth that summon the heart. Music and liturgy’s flexible form welcomes all into the circle, gathers meaning from the

Other and the others who join themselves together that day as the body of Christ. It is nothing short of miraculous. It is also the most ordinary of events. This is the encounter of the Christ present in the body gathered, in the singing assembly, in the Word and Meal. This is the Meaning that finally subsumes all of our multiple meanings.

Here the trinitarian journey locates the second person as focus in the assembly. At each gathering, Jesus Christ is present in the Word read, proclaimed and received by all. Music bears that Word, brings it forth into the community, gathers all around it.

Luther and Bangert agree about music’s role here. In a Heritage lecture given at LSTC in October, 2007, Mark explored the dynamic interplay between Word and music. Commenting on Luther’s idea of God giving language and song so that we might better praise God, Bangert commented,

... for interpreters of Luther this linkage of music and the Word of God is equally fertile ground as Luther’s claim on music as gift of God. His focus on the Word of God throughout his theological career makes this combination all the more attractive. Further, this change of perspective leads the current discussion away from the first article of the creed to the second article of the creed, where God’s definitive gesture towards the world is incarnation in the Logos.<sup>5</sup>

The second person of the Trinity is the voice of God as we hear it among us. Even more, it is the voices we hear in multiple dimensions, styles, and cultures. Music has long spoken in multiple voices. The very idea of polyphony is that independent voices speak simultaneously, creating a web of voices and sound. Rather than producing

3. Mitchell, *Meeting Mystery*, 21.

4. Mitchell, *Meeting Mystery*, 46.

5. Mark P. Bangert, “That Was Glorious:” Another Look at Luther on Music as Gift of God. Heritage Lecture, 2007, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.



chaos, masterful polyphony links these independent musical lines into a whole in which each voice has a place. There need not be a supreme voice, for each is enhanced by the others.

Although European polyphony precedes the Reformation by a couple of centuries, this multiple-voice idea travels to other sites and times. African song, for example, often relies on polymeter, more than one rhythmic structure played or sung at a time. These multiple voices interact with one another, creating an intricate matrix of instruments, leaders, and singers. For example, one drummer who plays in 3/4 time and a second drummer who plays in 4/4 time will together create a macro-rhythm that cycles and repeats every 12 quarter-note beats. In the combining of these rhythms, yet another rhythm is created that is larger than the previous two.

Mark's journey to Tanzania led him to learn how this type of African song worked and showed him new ways multiple voices contribute to the musical whole. In interlocking meters, drummers create a complex matrix that undergirds the church's song. In interdependence between singers, often a cantor/leader, and drummers, a cacophonous mixture of song appears. These

voices create a texture of intricacy and beauty that can have as many voices as there are people in the song. This was a new way of seeing how song worked in the community. Mark embraced this music, learned much about its ways, and returned to teach many others how to lead and teach African song in North American settings.

Along the way, other aspects of African song appeared and edified those who sang. Such song requires a community to sing it, a community who will actively engage itself as it sings. The song often requires drummers to set the rhythmic framework, a singer who will lead, and others who will respond. So another multiplicity of voices appears as the dialogue of a call and response develops in the assembly. Everyone joins so that the song goes on. The engagement happens person to person, answering in response to the call of another, entering into the beat the drummers initiate. The music arises from inside each participant and forms a whole of interdependence: singer, drummer, dancer—and sometimes all of these.

Without speaking a word, this music offers to teach much to those who think that singing in church is an individual activity that one may choose (or not) to sing from an individual book. This dynamic African song reminds the community that it is in fact a community, that all are needed to make the song each time it is sung. In our culture of individual music-making, this kind of singing offers a challenging and interesting alternative. Music is never just a private engagement. In the Christian community, it is part of our identity as the body of Christ, an interdependent collection of persons gathered around the font and the meal. Music brings that body to life as it breathes together and sings the communal song.

So we can see multiplicities in every direction: multiplicity of musical voices,



multiplicity of musical styles and original languages, multiplicity of geographical locations. Yet even among these multiplicities a whole becomes visible. Music creates a place where we can see one another in relation to music's whole, and ultimately, to each other. "A community is born, polyphonic even in plainsong, enchanted by sonorous apparitions even within the war of counterpoint."<sup>6</sup>

Here we see how music's place in the liturgy becomes primary, pointing us to the community's identity. Music is not for its own sake in the Christian assembly. It is for the sake of the Word, proclaimed in its various ways. Music gathers the assembly, calling everyone to join the gathering. It proclaims and supports the Word, giving voice to the living Word in the assembly's midst. Music accompanies us at the Meal, surrounding us with song as we receive Christ's presence for us. Finally, music sends us out, gathering our voices a final time before we leave. In all these ways and more, music undergirds our assemblies, bringing the congregation's voice to bear on every aspect of our worship. Music and the Word are inseparable in the assembly.

Mark's recent writing evidences yet another movement in the trinitarian journey, seeing the Spirit at work in the gift of music. In African music, as in much of music from around the globe, there is a built-in fluidity and flexibility that defies definition. Just as the Spirit blows where it wills, this music cannot be pinned down with exact representation on paper, or exact reproduction from one time to another. Like the Spirit, it changes with each new presentation, with each new assembly. Perhaps it is these qualities that partially led Mark's journey to the Spirit. As always, Mark finds in Luther this trinitarian movement of the Spirit. His present writing project, *Intersections*, which brought him to

that discussion with the students at Valparaiso, describes the journey through the persons of the Trinity. "Through the preaching of the Gospel the Holy Spirit first leads us into his holy community, placing us in the church's lap, where he preaches to us and brings us to Christ."<sup>7</sup>

With that, of course, we have been led into the third article of the Creed, giving one cause to join Luther in saying "The Holy Ghost himself honors [music] and holds it in high regard."<sup>8</sup> This movement to the Spirit is a challenge to himself and to many who make music in the church. Music led by the Spirit is open to change and improvisation, variety and multiplicity. Isn't that exactly what is around us in the church and in our culture? Accepting the challenge of allowing for the Spirit's lead is a tall order for leaders trained in liturgical worship. If the trinitarian journey leads us there, however, can we avoid or ignore it?

Perhaps it is these qualities of the Spirit that our assemblies need. In our day of exactitude and precision, of perfectionism and addictions, perhaps this music can lead to an opening of the Spirit in our own lives. Is this trinitarian journey a personal one for Mark? I suspect so. In any event, it is a journey of music and Spirit, gift and Creator. It is a journey centered in Jesus Christ and Christ's presence in the Word proclaimed and sung. The journey continues.

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6. Jean-François Lyotard, "Music, Music," in *Postmodern Fables*, trans. Georges van den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 229.

7. Mark P. Bangert, *Intersections: Traffic at the Corner of Christian Assembly and the World of Music* (draft), Chapter 2.

8. *Luther's Works* 37, The Creed, 435.

# Songs Formed by Cultures, Culture Formed by Song: Evaluating and Using Song Genres in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*

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When we open our hymnals on Sunday morning, what do we sing? Old favorites? Newer praise song? A piece from the global church? Such questions have long been with us, but with the publication of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW)* they have a fresh urgency. This new primary worship resource for the ELCA continues the move toward a broader collection of hymn and song resources for our worship. *Lutheran Book of Worship* included hymns from locations such as India, Czechoslovakia, and Liberia in addition to the usual European and American suspects. The supplement *With One Voice* took bold steps (for Lutherans) especially in the direction of Spanish-language song and pieces from Africa. It also opened the door to at least a conservative sampling of music from what has been labeled the “contemporary” stream.

With this new resource in *ELW*, though, it becomes difficult to ignore the presence of the global church among us. (It might be noted that although I was involved in the preparation of music for that publication, I had only a minimal role in the selection of that music.) Many African traditions are represented, as are many countries in Cen-

tral and South America and the Caribbean. The Asian church, too, makes inroads, though more tentatively because the structure of much Asian song makes it more difficult for untrained Western singers. And there is more contemporary song. The selection may not satisfy many who use that style of music on a weekly basis, but it must be remembered that this is a “legacy” resource—one intended to be used for 25 years or so—and that complicates the inclusion of music which almost by definition is not intended to be used for a long period of time.

Nor is this opening up of global and stylistic voices limited to the hymn and song section. Both within the liturgical musical settings and especially in the extensive Service Music section (#151–238) in *ELW*, one’s interest is piqued by numerous fine examples of global voices and lyrical contemporary song. Because these are more likely to be overlooked for the time being while assemblies are learning primary settings and newer hymns, it would be worthwhile to point to such examples as Swee Hong Lim’s flowing Kyrie (#158), Thomas Pavlechko’s driving Gospel Ac-

clamation (#170), James Capers's offering song settings from *Liturgy of Joy* (#183, #185), the haunting Lamb of God setting by Matti Rantatalo (#197), and Rawn Harbor's moving setting of Into Paradise May the Angels Lead You (#222).

But, to get to the point of this article, we must apply to this catalogue the good Lutheran question "What does this mean?" On its face, this wonderful variety of music could be seen simply as reflecting the reality that our world has shrunk, to the point that it would seem odd if we Lutherans limited ourselves to a narrow canon of Northern and Western European-heritage hymnody. (And yes, it would have been a travesty if, in an attempt to reflect global realities, large numbers of core Lutheran hymns had been left out, although people can and will disagree on such distinctions.) But there are deeper realities at work.

First, what is the significance of these varieties of assembly song? They are, after all, only songs—and there are significant Christian traditions still today that place little value on such extra-liturgical congregational singing. Look at the Eastern Orthodox traditions, in which the song of the assembly is often limited to, at most, brief liturgical responses, a far cry from the hymns to which Lutherans are accustomed. Even in the Roman Catholic Church, which has undergone a remarkable musical renaissance in the decades since the Second Vatican Council, hymnic expressions (as opposed to music that is integral to the liturgy) are still officially relegated to a secondary position. A new statement by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, after providing guidelines for dialogues and acclamations, antiphons and psalms, and refrains and repeated responses, addresses hymns in this way:

At Mass, . . . congregational hymns of a particular nation or group that have been judged appro-

priate by the competent authorities . . . may be admitted to the Sacred Liturgy. Church legislation today permits as an option the use of vernacular hymns at the Entrance, Preparation of the Gifts, Communion, and Recessional.<sup>1</sup>

Not to denigrate the Roman Catholic understanding of the relative merits of kinds of church music, which has a well-developed logic and tradition, but this is a far cry from the enthusiastic embrace of hymnody by Martin Luther and his followers down to the current generation. While Lutherans are by no means alone in this respect for the power and the pastoral utility of the assembly hymn, this branch of Christianity has worked hard at providing a theological rationale for it. A brief look at some of those underpinnings will be helpful as we prepare to look at the discrete hymnic voices present in *ELW*.

It is widely known that Luther valued music highly, on its own as well as within worship. He saw it as a vehicle for God's word. In 1523 he wrote to George Spalatin,

Our plan is to follow the example of the prophets and the ancient fathers of the church, and to compose psalms for the people in the vernacular, that is, spiritual songs, so that the Word of God may be among the people also in the form of music.<sup>2</sup>

Earlier that year, in his first revision of the Latin mass, Luther had written,

I also wish that we had as many songs as possible in the vernacular which the people could sing during mass, immediately after the gradual and also after the Sanctus and Agnus Dei. For who doubts that originally all the people sang these which now only the choir sings. . . .<sup>3</sup>

1. *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007), 115.d.

2. Martin Luther, "Letter to George Spalatin," *Luther's Works* 49:68.

3. Luther, "An Order of Mass and Communion," *Luther's Works* 53:36.

Luther's wish was soon fulfilled as the Reformation produced an extraordinary number of fine hymns. Soon an understanding developed that such singing was not mere ornamentation, not a frilly, merely pleasing add-on to the service, but a core part of the proclamation of God's word. As a document adopted by the ELCA puts it, "The assembled congregation participates in proclaiming the Word of God with a common voice. It sings hymns and the texts of the liturgy."<sup>4</sup> The *Principles for Worship* developed to guide the preparation of *ELW* underscore this view of assembly song as being essential, adding, "A healthy tension between simple and complex music enriches the worshipping assembly."<sup>5</sup>

Clearly, then, Lutherans expect to be fed richly through their song. But what sort of song shall that be?

### Categories of songs

In a denomination whose members are still overwhelmingly connected ethnically to Germany and the Nordic countries, albeit buffered by several generations in the diverse United States, we are invited to sing three types of song that may lead us to a "Hmm . . ." or "What does this mean?"

The first of these is that which is most familiar to the greatest number of us: the well-known metrical hymns from 16th- to 20th-century Germany, Scandinavia, and England. Many of us tend to accept these as our natural song, as if we were born humming their tunes. But whether it's "Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word," "Thy Holy Wings," "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," or "Lift High the Cross," why do these hymns from previous generations work in our context? Or do they not really work, except in a sentimental, bygone-era sort of way? (Because we do not consider them separately within this essay, we might also add onto this category hymns written

in our own day that have been cast either musically or textually, or both, in a style that hearkens back to an earlier syntax.)

The second large category of song is global song, described earlier in broad strokes. Whereas the first, though from earlier eras, is at least tied to most of us in an ethnic way, this group comes from cultures with scant representation in North American Lutheranism. This is not to say, of course, that Christians or even Evangelical Lutherans are scarce in these areas; we all know about the explosive growth of Christianity especially in the southern hemisphere. But, because most Lutherans in the United States are descended from Europeans, a lot of these global songs still strike us as somewhat alien. Not only are the words and melodies new, but so are the rhythms, performance practices, and instrumentation. Why would we put ourselves through the singing of songs that are not our own? (To paraphrase Psalm 137: How can we sing someone else's songs in our own land?) Naturally, this question may well have been asked by those who wrote these songs, earlier in the missionary movement, when many were asked to sing Victorian English hymns or the like because they were normative for the missionaries. Now the tables have turned. Now, because of the work of missionaries and partner churches that have developed in these areas, we have the chance to receive back that same gospel, now dressed in clothing exotic to our ears. Questions of "Why?" still linger, however. Are these, finally, mere curiosities? Do we have the right to sing these songs, and if so, within what pastoral framework?

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4. *The Use of the Means of Grace* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1997), Principle 10.

5. *Principles for Worship. Renewing Worship 2* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2002), Principle M-4.

And now, to the third genre, so-called contemporary song. (Not to beat a dead horse, but much of what would be classified as “non-contemporary” is more “of the day,” more recent, than much of what is called “contemporary.” Nonetheless, we understand at least generally what the title means.) Unlike the other two categories, this song type is undeniably closely related to many of those who sing it. It was born in recent decades, it features a musical style that is known (if not always liked) by Americans living today through its similarities to popular music, and, although some examples may come from England or Australia, it certainly is rooted in American culture. (Despite having glibly said that we know what “contemporary song” means, I will clarify that I am not speaking of recent Roman Catholic song of the Haugen-Haas mode or of contemplative song such as that arising from the Taizé and Iona communities. I see those as distinct subsets that are not addressed in this essay.) Here is music of the popular love song but with words expressing devotion to God or Jesus. Granted, it would be oversimplifying to claim that nothing more is going on. The great majority of such song performed in churches is skillfully written and clearly heartfelt. It is intended as a genuinely contemporary way of addressing our devotion to God. Yes, I believe the genre has significant built-in weaknesses, not least of which is its often individualistic tone. The question at hand, however, is the same as for the other genres: Is this appropriate song for use in today’s American Lutheran worship? And, perhaps oddly, the distinguishing focus this time is not whether it is too far removed from our daily culture and life but whether it is too closely connected. Is there such a thing as assembly song that is not sufficiently differentiated from the “ordinary” song of the culture?

Questions around culture and worship practices are not new. In many ways they can be traced through the entire history of the church: how much to borrow from Jewish synagogue practice; the extent to which it is permissible to borrow from Greek and Roman culture; Luther’s solution of combining established liturgical forms with vernacular language.

The conversation reached new levels of urgency and fruitfulness in the late 20th century. The urgency resulted from the aforementioned increased awareness of the riches present in the Christian Church around the world. With that awareness, along with memories of the church’s often colonialist approach to mission, came some fundamental challenges. Already in the 1970s, Mark Bangert, among others, was raising issues of appropriateness. Is it fair for Western Christians, still the dominant voice in world Christendom, to make use of, and in effect make their own, the faith expressions born of other Christians’ unique experiences? We, who haven’t had to deal with apartheid, or death squads, or interreligious violence—where do we get off singing songs that have been forged in such fires? Some will say such concerns are too fastidious by half; we have always borrowed others’ hymns and songs. And that is true, but because in some recent cases we may have been more closely allied with the oppressors than the oppressed, the question is worth asking. Overwhelmingly, however, the response of Christians from whose communities the songs come has been one of welcome, encouraging Western Christians to make use of these pieces, trusting that we will not abuse that privilege through disrespect.

The conversation on worship and culture has been taken up and broadened in consultations sponsored by the Lutheran World Federation. These consultations (in

which Bangert was again a core participant) bore fruit in several statements, most notably the *Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture*. It was this statement that introduced to the broader church four helpful terms describing the interaction of worship and culture:

Christian worship relates dynamically to culture in at least four ways. First, it is transcultural, the same substance for everyone everywhere, beyond culture. Second, it is contextual, varying according to the local situation (both nature and culture). Third, it is counter-cultural, challenging what is contrary to the Gospel in a given culture. Fourth, it is cross-cultural, making possible sharing between different local cultures.<sup>6</sup>

These terms are further defined and the ramifications explored in the Nairobi document, in Bangert's own work (such as his chapter, "How Does One Go About Multicultural Worship?" in *What Does Multicultural Worship Look Like?*<sup>7</sup>), and in *Principles for Worship* (see note 5). The terms were originally set against worship as a whole, helpful in understanding how Christian worship adapts, adopts, or remains constant in the face of various cultural challenges. But they also have proven useful in considering specific parts of worship, such as ritual practices and, in the present investigation, church music.

Having identified three broad genres of assembly song present in *ELW*, how can these four analytical terms assist us in deciding what to sing in church on Sunday? As a shorthand, let us speak of "Song from the Past," "Global Song," and "Contemporary Song."

### Assembly song as transcultural

The *Nairobi Statement* identifies certain elements of worship as being transcultural (beyond all cultures), such as Bible reading, the Lord's Prayer, and baptism in God's triune name. Although people singing in worship does not quite reach that same core

level, it is close. The impulse to raise our voices in song of praise to God, or in moments of lament, is so nearly universal, despite its varying forms, that it could fairly be labeled transcultural. And, of course, all three identified genres of song share in this description.

### Assembly song as contextual

Here is where matters begin to get more complex and interesting. This point involves giving worship a home in the local context, often using dynamic equivalence to reexpress a given facet in terms that speak and work equally well in the new context. How does this work with assembly song? Luther established congregational, vernacular hymnody as an equivalent to certain parts of the Latin liturgy, such as the canticle of praise (Gloria in excelsis), Gradual, Creed, and Sanctus. The principle established there seems to be that the assembly's response of praise can and should be sung, at least in part, by that very assembly in their own voice and in their own language, rather than on their behalf by clergy or choir in a privileged language.

Moving to today, we look at our three categories. Does Song from the Past work as contextual song? The key question in this case would seem to be whether, as a genre, it speaks to this context. The answer has to be yes. The language, for whatever variants it may show from the past few centuries, remains our own. Its concepts still speak to us, often very deeply. Musically, the genre is conservative, to be sure.

6. *Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture: Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1996), 1.3.

7. *What Does Multicultural Worship Look Like? Open Questions in Worship, Vol. 7*, ed. Gordon W. Lathrop (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996).

But it is far from being incomprehensible to today's American worshippers, even those raised exclusively on popular song. It may require some adjustment, but it also will strike some as refreshingly distinctive.

Global Song poses an obvious question in that, by definition, it originates in a foreign context. Can it, then, work in ours? In some cases, generally speaking, the answer would be no. Some pieces are too difficult either in language or in musical structure to work in America except in rare situations. Presumably, such examples have been vetted out of the collection in *ELW*—though, naturally, not all pieces will work in all places. The commonplace descriptions of the United States as a melting pot or salad bowl hint that exotic aspects of song will not be too great an impediment. Indeed, much of popular song is built on the rhythms of Africa and Latin America. Requiring that the pieces must be sung in their original languages probably would be fatal for the contextual judgment. But full English translations are provided for all non-English texts. The melodies and harmonies are accessible enough that, when combined with the fresh rhythms and textual charms, these songs from around the world do seem to work in American worship.

For Contemporary Song it is clear, as has been mentioned, that the connections with our culture are close. Here the question is more akin to judging the appropriateness of indigenous song from outside the Christian Church for use within Christian worship. Some would say that the close identification between secular popular song and Christian contemporary song makes the latter unfit for use within the Christian assembly. In light of other examples of successful contextualization, though, it would seem difficult to make that assertion stand. Popular musical styles can be made to work in Christian worship (but

stay tuned for the countercultural argument). And yes, some examples that are “out there” do not meet basic theological standards; but the choices in *ELW*, if not all sublime, do at least pass such basic muster.

### **Assembly song as counter-cultural**

The *Nairobi Statement* points out that Christians are called to oppose those elements of culture that contradict the gospel. Can assembly song do that? Certainly texts can be prophetic, and one could cite examples in all genres of that, although we will see that it is harder for Contemporary Song. More likely, in this regard, the telling point will be the negative: When assembly song, in one way or another, seems to yield to harmful cultural influences, it has failed the countercultural test. Of course, this often is a matter of individual judgment.

Song from the Past in general has been through the theological hoops, and so comes across well in relation to this measurement. Most of the texts that supported imperialistic attitudes have been eliminated or edited. True, there remains significant “king” language referring primarily to Christ, and some will be bothered by that. They also may notice, however, the balance in *ELW* of more alternative images for God than in previous collections.

Musical expression plays less of a role in this countercultural realm, although if one wanted to go out on a limb it could be argued that a heavy dependence on crowd-pleasing tunes and harmonies (those that push all the predictable “warm fuzzy” buttons) would fail the countercultural test.

Most of the Global Song in the *ELW* collection passes the countercultural test easily, having paid its dues in the countries and churches from which it originates. Can we inherit those virtues just by singing the songs? No, but we can expose our

communities to the insights of those who have suffered for their faith and emerged with a radiant sense of joy and community. To look at just one example, “The People Walk” (#706) has the ring of authenticity as it speaks of the poor ones of the world suffering oppression and awaiting hope. If a song like this helps lead assemblies to better understand both their complicity in the plight of the poor and their call to work for justice, it will have justified its presence in the collection.

The challenge faced by supporters of Contemporary Song is that this music originates in and reflects the heart of the world’s dominant culture, often labeled “consumerism.” Because it starts there, it is difficult for this kind of song to make a move toward counterculturalism. It may be telling that there are no songs in the “Justice, Peace” or “Lament” sections from the mainstream Contemporary genre, although, to be fair, such assignment is of course an editorial decision. Because Contemporary Song often displays such a cloud-free disposition, it is no surprise that much of it can be found in the “Praise, Thanksgiving” section. Even in such company, however, it can be startling how many of the classic examples of this genre, those most widely loved, are strongly individualistic. The “Jesus and me” syndrome is strong. Other hymns also use first-person singular, of course, but often it is easier to understand those texts as representing a community. Again, it is a matter of interpretation.

Some Contemporary Song texts take a more corporate view of worship and at least leave room for the possibility that the church has a role in the world. An example of that is “Build Us Up, Lord” (#670). One hopes that the style will continue to mature and provide more theological meat.

## Assembly song as cross-cultural

The final *Nairobi Statement* point calls us to be cross-cultural. It explicitly refers to hymnody: “The sharing of hymns and art and other elements of worship across cultural barriers helps enrich the whole Church and strengthen the sense of the *communio* of the Church.”<sup>8</sup> As members of the worldwide church, and especially being in a part of that church where it is easy for us to ignore our neighbors around the world, we are helped to become better fellow members of Christ’s body when we expose ourselves to many sung expressions of that shared faith—both those from foreign cultures and those from cultures not so far-flung, yet also not our own.

As we seek to do that, however, we have a duty to be judicious. Many are the challenges in choosing songs for the assembly to sing, and encountering unfamiliar material is by no means chief among them. Unfamiliarity can be dealt with through skillful introduction and leadership. But we who are charged with exercising theological discernment need to do so with regard to sung theology as well as spoken. The compilers of *ELW* have made a good beginning, and this essay has been only a cursory look at that—not even touching such major genres as chant and African American song. We in the congregations now are called to take up the challenge, sort through the cultures—foreign and domestic—and help give voice to the whole church, the catholic church, of all times and places. May God strengthen us in that task!

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8. *Nairobi Statement*, 5.1.



# Holy Eucharist, Holy Trinity, Real World: On Liturgy and Ordinary Life

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Among the varieties found in the musics of the world, the practices of an “integrated music” profoundly accord with the best characteristics of a liturgical assembly. The clear song, the cohesive communal force, and the multilayered tensions and resolutions of such a music really are that assembly come to expression acoustically, in its ordered noise. The very structure of this song may be seen as bringing to expression what that assembly believes about God. Such, at least, are some of the profound insights that Mark Bangert has taught us.<sup>1</sup>

Might something of the same be said about the visual arts in the service of a Christian assembly? What if we regarded, among the visual arts of the world, the practice of icon making, or “icon writing,” to be something like Bangert’s “integrated music,” and what if we thought about what it might say about the assembly and God? In this essay I explore only a single example, but I mean to suggest that such culturally disciplined visual art, while not nearly so central to the identity of the Christian assembly as music, can also be clear of voice, communal, multilayered, and theologically significant, and that it rightly finds a place in the room where the assembly meets.

So, let me invite you to think for a moment about the widely known icon of

the Holy Trinity painted in the early fifteenth century by the Russian iconographer Andrei Rublev.<sup>2</sup> Building on the iconographic tradition established by many other images of the visit of the three angels to Abraham and Sarah at Mamre, Rublev omitted everything customary to that tradition except the angels themselves and a single cup or bowl on the table between them, presenting these central figures together with a tree, the suggestion of a mountain, and part of a tile-roofed house. The story behind the icon recalls the promise of God to Abraham and Sarah when they thought they were nearly dead. But now that promise is made wider: new life for all the world, especially where there had been only barrenness and approaching death. The story has become an iconic symbol. The circular composition of the angelic figures, their loving and gracious yielding to each other, presents to us the

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1. See Mark P. Bangert, “Dynamics of Liturgy and World Musics: A Methodology for Evaluation,” in S. Anita Stauffer, *Worship and Culture in Dialogue* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1994), 183–203.

2. The icon is widely reproduced. See, for example, *Russian Icons from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century* (New York: UNESCO, 1962), plate 25, or [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrei\\_Rublev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrei_Rublev).

flowing life of the Triune God, without pretending that God can be actually painted.

Of course, the cup on the table, in the midst of that flowing life of God, recalls the story of Abraham's meal of promise. But now it too is made a present reality, addressing us. The cup contains a lamb signifying the death of Christ and his presence and self-giving in the holy supper, and the cup stands in such a way that there is room at the table for the viewers also—for the assembled church, for you—personally to approach the food and so to be surrounded by this flowing, communal life. And God's own communal reality embraces not only the church that participates in this cup; the circles of the icon, the circles of the divine life, also draw in the tree, the mountain, and the house. Indeed, the very colors of the garments of these figures are the colors of earth and sky together, and, on the angelic figure who represents Christ, the color of blood. Such a cup, firmly on the earth, transfiguring the death we so much fear, holding out the promise of life, embraced by the flowing reality of the Triune God, welcoming those who approach, in touch with tree and mountain and house, with earth and sky, is the cup of the eucharist. The church knows this cup.<sup>3</sup> You know this cup.

Only it all seems sometimes so far away—even farther away in time and space than Russia in the fifteenth century. The Trinity seems like a vague concept, a sort of heavenly puzzle too high or inaccessible for most of us to think about. The Lord's Supper may be part of our lives, but it can seem like an occasional religious exercise for the still-pious part of our personalities—perhaps our way to deal with an occasionally nagging sense of religious guilt, perhaps our annual participation in the retelling of the story of the Last Supper of Jesus, itself a long-ago event, or perhaps a communal practice that simply demon-

strates our belonging. A little bit of a wafer, hardly recognizable as bread, and a sip of wine from a common cup—what do these have to do with ordinary life? They may, indeed, have to do with the Trinity, the cup on the trinitarian table, but that may only evidence their distance from our real lives.

Some time ago I was working hard to urge the congregation I served as pastor toward weekly participation in the eucharist. One of the active members of the congregation—let us call her Hilda—had been a widow for about four years. Once, when I was talking to her about frequent communion, Hilda looked at me directly and said, "I know that is what you think, pastor, but since Henry died I simply have not sinned enough to have to come that often to communion!" We may leave aside for a moment what Hilda thought "sin" was. In any case, it is quite clear that holy communion did not have much to do with her ordinary, daily life. Or, rather, it is clear that Hilda had been taught—perhaps by many of her pastors, perhaps by me—that holy communion had to do only with an occasionally needed forgiveness of sins.

People who have worked on the renewal of the liturgy in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Mark Bangert among them, have labored to achieve a practice that would more closely connect liturgy and daily life. The goals of the liturgical movement have included

- the weekly celebration of the holy communion at the heart of the lives of our churches—a service of word and table as the principal service of every Sunday in every congregation;

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3. Indeed, many Orthodox churches in Greece place the icon of the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah in a prominent place, interpreting the meaning of the eucharist set out on the holy table in the church.

- a practice of the supper that lets us see it as truly a *meal*;
- the use of recognizably beautiful food, including a real loaf of bread and a real cup of wine in northern and western places in the world or, in any case, a substantial, recognizable and shareable portion of the basic staple food and the basic festive drink in every place;
- a thanksgiving prayer that we understand and assent to as we all stand facing each other across the table;
- a presider who proclaims that prayer beautifully, inviting and serving the assembly around the table;
- the welcome participation of everyone in the eating and the drinking;
- a collection of yet other food, or money to buy food, to be sent to those who need it, as an extension of this celebration into a hungry world; and
- the sending of everyone who eats and drinks to be themselves what they have eaten: God's bread for their neighbors and for the world.

The hope has been that the eucharist might be no longer an archaic religious practice, dominated by clergy and alienated from real life and only occasionally practiced—"holy" by being hidden away from most of us—but a large, focused, attractive and recognizable symbol, practiced at the center of every week, and casting its light over ordinary life—"holy" by being a gift that shows forth the holiness of the ordinary.

But do we understand why that might be so? And has this movement been faithful? That is, do these themes of eucharistic renewal genuinely anchor in what the New Testament and the best of the Christian tradition have to say about the origin and meaning of the holy communion? The basic Lutheran confession of the faith—the Augsburg Confession—says that the Chris-



tian church is an assembly of believers in which the gospel of Jesus Christ is purely preached and the sacraments are given away or administered "according to the gospel" (*laus des Evangelii*, AC 7). Is this liturgical renewal movement "according to the gospel"—does it proclaim the gospel? Does it follow what the Gospel books say? And what does the Holy Trinity, where we began, have to do with all of this?

We could do better than we have done in talking with each other—and I could have done better in talking with Hilda, my parishioner—about the meaning of the gathering of the Christian assembly and its regular meal. For one thing, we could talk about what the Gospels say. One of the most important things about the New Testament accounts of Jesus is the centrality of *meals* to those accounts. According to the stories, Jesus "came eating and drinking" (Matt 11:19; Lk 7:34). He ate and drank in a way that mattered, a way that was significant. He ate and drank with sinners and social outcasts. In fact, he was known for his abundant eating and drinking with them: "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them," complained one tradition (Lk 15:2). "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a

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**T**he marriage  
feast began  
with his death. So did,  
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meals that he had used.

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friend of tax collectors and sinners!” said another (Matt 11:19). But there was more. The gospel tradition contains parables Jesus told that are centered on meals. It contains his prayer “give us this day our daily bread.” It contains his command: About the hungry crowd, the Jesus of Mark says to his disciples, “You give them something to eat” (6:37). Indeed, all four Gospels contain the stories of his feeding a multitude. They tell of him speaking of his death, in one way or another, as if it were a meal (his body the “bread of life” in John and his death the “cup I am to drink” in the Synoptics). And all four make his final meal an important, interpretive part of the story of his death. Indeed, just like the prophetic tradition of Isaiah, the Jesus of the Gospels speaks of the coming of the kingdom of God as if it were a wedding feast—the wedding feast for the marriage of God and the earth. Then it was all the more scandalous that Jesus welcomed the sinners and the unclean and the powerless ones—the *hoi polloi*, the crowd, the many—to eat with him, as a kind of first taste of this coming banquet.

The eucharist in the church roots in these stories. The movement around Jesus had been marked by what some biblical scholars call “open commensality”<sup>4</sup>: the remarkable practice of an open and shared table, the sharing of food, used by Jesus for teaching and preaching, like the prophets

of old had used the “prophetic sign.” Even after Jesus was killed, these meals seem to have continued, the churches struggling to continue Jesus’ open table. In any case, it was at least partly at table that the early church discovered that Jesus was risen. Many of the canonical stories of resurrection appearances are stories of meals, commonly meals on Sunday, the day after the Sabbath, the day the churches began to gather. And when resurrection faith was born, not far away was the profound realization that, against anything we had expected, the death of Jesus was itself the beginning of the very coming of the kingdom of God, the deepest act of the marriage of God with the earth. The marriage feast began with his death. So did, in a new way, all of the meals that he had used. The feeding of the hungry multitudes and the passing out of the leftover fragments goes on. So does the continuous setting out of bread for the daughters of both the Syro-Phoenecian woman and Jairus and for all others who are afraid or marginalized. So does the sharing of a feast with Zacchaeus and with all other sinners.

These meals go on at the meal with the Risen One in the church. Taught by Paul and by the Gospel writers who preserved the story of Jesus’ last meal, the church came to know that the *food* of this new banquet was his encounterable body and his new-covenant-making blood as the Bread and Cup of this table. All of the stories of Jesus and meals, and the stories of the Risen One known at Emmaus (Luke 24) and at the seashore (John 21), stand behind the church’s eucharist. We can understand that eucharist better by paying attention to all of those stories and also to the meal

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4. John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 433–44.

stories of the Hebrew Scriptures, like that of the angels at Mamre. But the story of the Last Supper gives us the deepest significance of that meal: The risen Jesus Christ, in the power of the Spirit, gives us *himself* to eat and drink as the feast that brings us before God.

Clearly, the recovery of the centrality of the holy supper, the recovery of the event as a recognizable (though simple and quite different) *meal*, the open accessibility of the table, and its connection to sending food and help and hope into the streets of daily life are indeed faithful, are indeed “according to the gospel.”

But then, we could also talk about the best traditions of the church. This meal of Christ early on began to be kept at least every Sunday. It was joined with the hearing and preaching of the word of God, so that—just as with Ezekiel or the elder John of the Revelation—what was spoken of God could also be eaten and drunk, and what was eaten and drunk could also be read about and preached. Justin, called the Martyr, a lay teacher in Rome, tells us that in the second century in that city, Christians gathered on the first day of every week for this event of word and table. He tells us that this Sunday event was the occasion for gathering food for distribution to the hungry of the city, for orphans and widows and prisoners and sojourners of every kind.<sup>5</sup> It was right that the meal of the church should become only the fragmentary meal of bread and wine, a true feast but one in which we remain hungry, not only because it is now held in the early morning of Sunday but because the rest of the food, food gathered as if for a banquet, is rightly to be given away, not eaten up by us alone.

Years later, Martin Luther said of the holy supper that it is a feast to make us hungrier. More: It is one of the primary occasions in which God gives mercy to us

so that we, in turn, might give mercy to our neighbors. Luther called this the *admirabile commercium*, the very commerce of the City of God, the “happy exchange.” Indeed, for Luther, one could not eat and drink of this amazing sacrament of love without being brought to “fight, work, pray, and—if you cannot do more—have heartfelt sympathy” for all of the wretched ones, the suffering “with which the world is everywhere filled to overflowing.”<sup>6</sup> The gift of Christ in the holy communion flows into the needs of daily life.

Then we are back to Rublev. In fact, Rublev’s icon may help us to train our senses to see and hear and taste more clearly what is happening in Christian worship. The central figure of the icon, red-clothed, is raising his hand over the cup in blessing and love. This meal is the gift of Jesus Christ: his feeding the multitudes, his welcoming the sinners and outsiders, his establishing the wedding feast of the kingdom, his breaking the bread and showing forth the resurrection, his giving his own body and blood. His gift consecrates the feast. When we have learned that, we may hear the Scripture more profoundly as well, hearing in all of the stories this same Jesus Christ giving himself away for the life of the world. More: If you wish to see what Jesus Christ is like, watch all those people going to communion, hands out like beggars, and behold Jesus Christ in the given-away bread and cup. Then watch them leaving the church—these beggars going to be with beggars—and behold the body of Christ being given away in the world.

But there is more. The figure on the right of the icon also has a raised hand. The Spirit of God, poured out from the crucified and risen Christ—the very same power of

5. *1 Apology* 67.

6. *WA* 2:745; *Luther’s Works* 35:54.

God that hovers over all the world, creating life and peace—also enables this meal. This food is spiritual food and drink, full of the creative power of God. The Spirit gathers us together to be church and enlivens the word of the Scriptures so that the need of the world is clearly stated and the good news of God clearly announced. The Spirit empowers our leaders to serve this word in love and enlivens the meal to be full of Christ. And in the sending of the assembly, this same Spirit is our help, continuing to pour out the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and generosity—continuing to form us as body of Christ for the sake of the life of the world.

But there is more. There is the figure on the left. This gathering by the Spirit into Christ, this reading of the word and keeping of the meal, holds us before the Ancient of Days, the maker of all things, the Father of the Son, and the source of the Spirit. The word we hear in the meeting of the church, when it is the biblical word enlivened by the Spirit to speak the presence of Jesus Christ, is the very same word by which God made the world. Hearing this word, we see the world anew as good but fragile and needy, as beloved and held by God. The meal we keep takes the sustenance of this good earth—staple food and festive drink—and uses it again according to God’s purpose reestablished in Christ. Drawn by the Spirit, taught by Jesus Christ, we learn once again to give thanks (2 Cor 4:15), and so we learn to live thankfully, sharing with our neighbor, not hoarding as if we were afraid, respectful of all that is around us. The figures on the right and the center lean toward the figure on the left, pulling anyone who drinks from the cup with them. The meal brings us again to see the world made and saved and loved by God, and it brings us to stand before this God. The circle of movement among the figures flows

out to include the mountain and the tree and the house—the real places of our lives.

But then look away from the image. It is just a painting: one of the great treasures of the Christian churches, a magnificent and appropriate symbol worthy of our respect, an image that might teach us again how useful it is to have fine images in our churches, interpreting what is happening there—but still just a painting. At the heart of the gospel there are, after all, not three gods or three angels but one God, one rich, manifold, flowing life, flowing generously into all the world for its salvation and life. And there is one real meal, not just a picture of a cup. The next time you are at eucharist, look up and behold the Spirit in the gathering of the people and in the lively meaning of word and sacrament. Behold Jesus Christ in the giving away of the gospel, of forgiveness, of Bread and Cup, and of people sent away in mercy to their neighbors. Behold the Father in thanksgiving restored, the elements of the earth used with respect, and the earth itself beginning to be seen for what it is, the beloved creation of God. The eucharist itself is the likeness of the Trinity. Or, to quote the Danish theologian Regin Preter, the doctrine of the Trinity is the spirit of the liturgy, and the liturgy, the regular Sunday service of word and sacrament, is the bodily form of that same doctrine.<sup>7</sup> When we gather for word and table and sending, we are gathered in “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit,” as Paul says (2 Cor 13:13).

The Trinity is not a distant puzzle. It is God as God is encountered in Jesus Christ and in his meal with the church. And this trinitarian meal is full of significance for

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7. “Liturgie et dogme,” *Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 38 (1958): 115–28.

ordinary life. At the table, watching everyone served with a portion of the food, we learn the practice of sharing food in a sustainable *economy*. Of course, the eucharist itself is not a full economy. It is not the complete organization of food production and food distribution, and it certainly is not a system for the production, distribution, and consumption of yet other goods and services or a pattern for the protection and growth of such a system. Still, the eucharist is the enacted image of an economy, a constant economic proposal, a disagreement with closed, self-serving, self-justifying economic systems, and an invitation for all of our economic systems to relate to a wider world in earth-care and in the mutual sharing of food. That cup stands amid the constantly flowing life of God, its rounded, single form inviting anyone who comes to drink. All who come, all who are thirsty, thereby drink from what seems a limited amount of food, yet within these very limits they are drawn into the endlessly flowing life of God, into genuine festivity. Here is the management and ordering of that house, an *oikonomia*.

And the house itself—the church, the assembly, the household meeting of the people of God within the household of the earth—blends in with mountain and tree, is part of the earth and not its enemy, welcomes the presence of the all-embracing Trinity. At the table, using food from the earth and being graciously taught by God again how to give thanks and live thankfully, we are taught *earth-care*. It is not that we are given some policy or political decision in church, but rather a view is established—heard, eaten, drunk, seen—of the world as beloved and worthy of respect and care. A gnostic gospel like the so-called and recently published *Gospel of Judas*<sup>8</sup> teaches its readers to laugh at the doctrine of creation and also at the practice of giving

thanks over food, the very practice of the church's eucharist. It does this because gnosticism thinks that true religion is about individuals getting out of this earth and going somewhere else. The eucharist-according-to-the-gospel does not do this. Rather, it gathers us together, as a community, to God's table, in touch with mountain and tree and earth and sky. And it shows us an *ethic*. As the figures in Rublev's image lean toward each other, so the table forms us to turn toward our neighbor. It engages us in the commerce of the city of God, in giving away what we have been given, forgiving as we have been forgiven, strengthening in hope as we have been strengthened.

Each, in our own place, may behold and hear the Holy Trinity forming our own assemblies to bear witness to God's life-giving mercy for the world. That is especially so as we learn again and again to set out that word and that meal with renewed clarity—every Sunday, with centered beauty, with real food and strong thanksgiving, interpreting the life-giving Scriptures, proclaiming Jesus Christ, encountering the Trinity, welcoming all who come, and remembering the poor.

Then we are back to Mark Bangert's integrated music, as that assembly in the mercy of the Holy Trinity comes to audible expression, being given in sound to the world.<sup>9</sup>

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8. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2006.

9. This article is intended as an homage of thanks to Mark for his years of faithful teaching and for his friendship.

# Singing at Funerals and Memorial Services

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Music is at least as important at funerals and memorial services as words, though there is far more written about funeral preaching and praying than there is about funeral singing. If we ask people what stands out in their memory about a particular funeral or memorial service, what touched or moved them most, very rarely will they refer to any spoken words. Occasionally they will mention a ritual action (the folding of the flag with honor, the spreading of the pall with tender care), but most often they will talk about music.

There are at least four reasons for music's special importance in the rituals after death. First, music connects with our emotions, expresses and evokes them, and makes them humanly livable. Especially when mourners are in the initial state of shock, music will reach them when words are a blur. Music not only helps us express difficult emotions, it also articulates or gives structure to inchoate feelings. Mark Bangert quotes philosopher Suzanne Langer to make this point: "Because the forms of human feeling are much more congruent with musical forms than with forms of language, music can reveal the nature of feelings with a detail and truth that language cannot approach."<sup>1</sup>

This ability to give structure to emotionally charged experiences is what makes music such a powerful aid to the process of

mourning. Music can help us process the hard and scary emotions of grief; it also can evoke and reinforce feelings of hope and trust which those other emotions threaten to overwhelm.

Second, music strongly evokes the past. As John Bell writes, we can all revisit certain moments in the past when we hear songs associated with that time.<sup>2</sup> Music's power to evoke emotion-laden memory is key when we are looking for memories to grab on to and bring with us into the future absent our loved one.

Third, singing is usually the assembly's most active involvement in the service. It is always important that the whole assembly do the "work of the people," that is, liturgy, but it is especially important at times of crisis that we *do* the faith. Singing, says Bell, "requires us to take into ourselves and circulate through our system words and music which others have written and . . . to make these our own."<sup>3</sup> The words "circulate through our system" more thoroughly

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1. Suzanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (New York: Mentor Books, 1951), 189, quoted in Mark Bangert, "The Role of Music in the Burial Liturgy," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 13 (February): 31.

2. John Bell, *The Singing Thing: A Case for Congregational Song* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2000), 37ff.

3. Bell, *The Singing Thing*, 57.



in singing than in unison speaking. When we are in deep grief, spoken words often bounce off us, but words we sing resonate within us.

Fourth, group singing bonds the community. Singing together is a physical as well as emotional and spiritual experience of unity: We enter into a common rhythm and we make one sound. This felt experience of community speaks to the social isolation of the bereaved, enacting the communal support we so need. It is a pledge of Christ's presence with us into the future, in and through his body, the church. As Shelley Sanders Zuckerman writes,

People may come to a funeral feeble in spirit, but in the worship of singing together our voices rise in Christ's strength. Our dying breath is renewed by the Holy Spirit, and feeling is supported by the rest of the body, steadfast in prayer.<sup>4</sup>

### Challenges to congregational singing

There are two sets of factors that get in the way of congregational singing at funerals and memorial services. First are the cultural realities that militate against singing generally. We are a culture that encourages us to consume music and not to make it. We consume high-quality recordings of studio performances from which all the mistakes have been edited out, which raises the mental bar far above our own abilities. We get little or no music education and very little opportunity to sing together. Adults who do not attend church (and even some who do) may never sing in front of other people. In addition, unlike many cultures in which it is assumed that everyone can sing, our culture views singing as a talent that many people do not have. Bell reports that one in four people in an average group believes he or she "can't sing."<sup>5</sup>

The second set of challenges comes from the nature of the assembly at a funeral

or memorial service. If a fair number of the people present are used to singing, congregational singing goes well. Often, though, there are too few present overall—just immediate family and a smattering of close associates. Of the small group, a large percentage may be too emotionally devastated to sing without the strong support of other voices. Memorial services may have the advantage of more distance in time from the death, so the bereaved may be beyond the initial shock. These services have their own problem, though, of following a cultural pattern based more on entertainment and consumption than on the corporate action of a liturgical assembly. The use of PowerPoint slide shows, digital videos, and other media may reinforce the sense that we are here to view and listen, not to pray and sing as a group. In funerals or memorial services, the assembly may include many persons of different or no religious community involvement. They may have very little common repertoire of appropriate songs they can sing with confidence.

### How to make congregational singing possible

How many people present at the funeral or memorial service will be willing to sing? There are several ways to increase the average number of people present—and although the concern in this essay is to enable congregational song, there are certainly other reasons to work toward this end!

For one thing, the service can be scheduled on a weekend or evening, when more would be free to attend. More churches are beginning to schedule funerals in the

4. Shelley Sanders Zuckerman, "A Church Musician's Viewpoint—Font to Funeral: Alleluia," *Call to Worship* 38.3, Funeral Rites, 55.

5. Bell, *The Singing Thing*, 95.

evening, with the graveside service on the following morning. Second, we can encourage church members to come to funerals as an important way of supporting each other. Education about funerals can focus on understanding the service as a communal event, an action of the body of Christ caring for its hurting members, not a private service for only the closest mourners. The fact that workday funerals are accessible only to a relative few has led people to begin feeling that the funeral is restricted to close mourners, and it might be inappropriate for them to attend if they aren't in the first rank of the bereaved. People may need reassurance that they won't be intruding but rather will be providing the symbolic support of the wider community.

Choir members especially might be encouraged to see funeral attendance as an important ministry. As John Rodland writes, "Nowhere can the choir's true function as the servant of the community be better seen than in its leadership for funerals and memorial services."<sup>6</sup> Supporting the congregation's singing may be even more of a gift to the mourners than singing an anthem. Some congregations have a funeral choir (sometimes called a requiem choir or a resurrection choir) of singers who feel a special call to this ministry. Even at a graveside service such a funeral choir (or any small group of singers from the congregation) can support the singing of a spiritual, "Amazing Grace," or some other doable song. One argument for evening or weekend funerals is the possibility of involving a children's choir. Their participation can be very meaningful to the mourners and a good way to familiarize children with death and bereavement.<sup>7</sup>

If we wish to enable group song at funerals and memorial services, the choice of songs is key. We need to select hymns or other appropriate songs that can be sung by

those assembled at this particular service. What songs will they know or be able to pick up? A mixed group of Protestants and Roman Catholics may all know "On Eagle's Wings," in addition to "Amazing Grace" and a few other classic hymns. A less church-ed group may at least be familiar with spirituals such as "Michael, Row the Boat Ashore."<sup>8</sup> Even when a good number of those present will have a more varied repertoire of hymns, it may be advisable to use simple and/or very familiar tunes at times of high emotion, such as the beginning of the service. When people are walking in or out of church or walking to commune or gathering at the graveside, a call-and-response song, a Taizé chant, or a hymn with a repeated chorus may facilitate communal singing.

If we want people to be able to sing well at funerals and memorial services, one of the goals of worship planning year-round should be to build up the congregation's repertoire of funeral-appropriate hymns.<sup>9</sup> Such a repertoire, of course, includes many hymns we already use throughout the year, from "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" to "For All the Saints." In some cases, though, we have to be intentional about learning hymns because we may need them in times of crisis, when we won't want something unfamiliar. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW)* has a fine selection of hymns in the "lament" section (697–704); it would be good if people were introduced to them at regular worship be-

6. John Rodland, "Music for the Funeral/Memorial Service," *Reformed Liturgy and Music* 20, no. 4 (Fall 1986): 212.

7. Marilyn Witte, "Music at Funerals," *Worship '99* (September 1999), 4.

8. It's Michael the Archangel, rowing us across the Jordan River of death (chills the body/but not the soul) to the Promised Land of heaven. That's why we sing "Alleluia"!

fore they encounter them at a funeral. Even liturgical music for the funeral can be introduced on Sunday. Mark Mummert's "All of Us Go Down to the Dust" (*ELW* #223), for instance, which echoes the "This Is the Feast" of *ELW*'s Setting One (p. 101), can be used on All Saints Sunday as a refrain sung after the thanksgiving for each person who died in the past year. After a couple of years of that practice, parishioners may start asking for it to be used at funerals.

### **What are we doing at a Christian funeral/memorial service?**

The choice of songs, like all other decisions about what we do at funerals or memorial services, should serve the goals of a Christian death ritual. We can sum up the dynamic of a Christian funeral in this four-part sentence: (1) This particular person (2) has died and (3) we grieve, (4) hoping in the promises of God.

This is not a sequential outline of the service, of course; these four aspects intertwine throughout the ritual process. I use this four-part summary as a framework for the consideration of how music, especially communal song, may enable us to pray more fully and may serve our ritual needs.

#### 1. *This particular person* has died . . .

The main cultural shift in the content of funerals and memorial services in recent decades in North America and Western Europe, both within and outside the church, has been a shift from the more or less standardized, traditional rites of a religious denomination, the military, or other group to the development of more personalized rituals that focus on the character and history of the deceased individual.<sup>10</sup> From a British viewpoint, Donald Gray writes that

many contemporary memorial services are simply a celebration of a life. Although Christian hymns are sung, Christian prayers are said, and

passages from Holy Scripture are read, these are no longer the heartland of the ceremony. For the vast majority of the congregation at the centre stands the tributes, the sharing of memories, the recalling of achievements.<sup>11</sup>

Several forces have converged to contribute to this move toward focusing the death ritual on the individual's life and personality. There has been a breakdown of the corporate bases of identity. In Christian terms, this takes the form of the waning of conventional religious practice, with less credence given to the Christian worldview. The move away from corporate bases of identity has not just happened with respect to religion. It is also true of other group identities, from ethnic groups to civic voluntary associations. Contemporary Americans are less and less likely to define themselves in terms of membership in any groups that are communities of memory with ritual ways of dealing with death.

Cultural pluralism has contributed to the breakdown of group identity and greater individualism on a societal level. At a given funeral or memorial service, pluralism means that the community gathered for the service may have very little in common other than a connection to the person who died. Even if the person who died saw the meaning of his or her own life and death in predominantly Christian terms, the fact that many of those at the service do not share

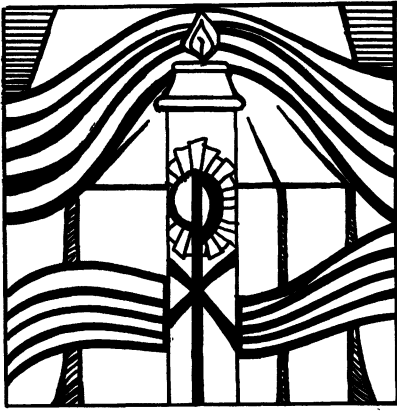
9. For a discussion of repertoire-building, see J. Michael Mahon, "Death and Music, the Catholic Tradition," *Pastoral Music* 14, no. 2 (Dec-Jan 1990): 27.

10. Lisa Takeuchi Cullen's amusing and informative book, *Remember Me: A Lively Tour of the American Way of Death* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), discusses the personalized death ritual in the United States.

11. Donald Gray, *Memorial Services*, *Alcuin Liturgy Guides* 1 (London: Alcuin Club, 2002): 36.

that worldview could tend to shift the focus of the ritual to what they *do* share: the memory of that person.

Generational factors contribute to the shift toward personalized death rituals in the United States. The baby boomers are used to personalizing and customizing many



aspects of life because of increased individualism and the consumer society's catering to this huge market over their lifetime. Younger generations have their own style of individualized consuming, with the fragmentation of popular culture and the development of technologies of personalized entertainment-on-demand.

Finally, the wish to define the death ritual as a time to "celebrate N's life" can be linked to American cultural grief avoidance. That is especially true if the emphasis is on "celebrating" in contrast to grieving. The focus on the person's life can be a way of evoking happier memories to displace the sadness we feel if we focus directly on the fact that the one we love has died.

How does all this culture of personalization sit with the intent of a Christian funeral or memorial service? The wish to remember the deceased in her/his particu-

larity is not fundamentally in conflict with the goals of a Christian funeral. Some people may say that a funeral, as Christian worship, needs to be focused on God and not on the person who died.<sup>12</sup> Christian worship, though, always involves God's word to us and our prayer to God in a particular human situation. Every Sunday, events in the community's life affect what parts of God's word speak to us most clearly, how the word is brought home to us in the sermon, how we sing and pray and greet each other, and so on. When we worship God in the aftermath of someone's death, the liturgical action and words are likewise shaped by the particularity of our grief. In addition, one of the goals of Christian ritualizing after death is pastoral care for those who mourn, and that involves helping people do their griefwork in the context of Christian hope. A central task of human grieving is to actively make memories of the person who died and to weave that narrative of memory into one's ongoing life without him/her. Our care for the health of those who mourn calls us to help them make those "memories to live by."

How do we remember *this particular person* through music and communal song? One obvious way is by incorporating into the funeral music that the deceased particularly liked. Given the fragmentation of the world of musical performance nowadays,

12. This was the dichotomy used in the mid-twentieth century among Protestants to inveigh against the then-common practice of eulogizing the dead person in an often exaggerated way, so that the picture of the person was insincerely touched up. Those eulogies were not only bad theology (works-righteousness) but also unfortunate on a secular level (fake). Happily, the culture has moved beyond that style of eulogizing, and people are generally able to ritually remember the dead person more accurately, warts and all.

one challenge is that the favorite songs of the deceased may not connect at all to many of the people gathered at the ritual; indeed, the preferred musical style may be inaccessible and off-putting to those unfamiliar with it. If the deceased had a favorite hymn, most writers on funeral music allow it to be included in the service.

Many people whose funerals we will celebrate, though, will not have a strong attachment to particular hymns. Can we somehow include secular songs the person loved? Bell writes that it can be “atrociously awkward when the family or friends of the deceased insist on having his favourite tune played, even if it is *I’m Forever Blowing Bubbles*.”<sup>13</sup> In contrast to this funny but snarky example, Paul Denyer argues that secular requests “will often have been chosen with an instinctive feeling for what is suitable to the occasion”; the lyrics may touch on “eternal themes, such as the power of love to survive and overcome death.”<sup>14</sup> Sometimes, though, a song is requested just because it evokes the likes or hobbies of the deceased. I have heard of “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” being sung at a funeral in an Episcopal church (horrifying some clergy present). In some parts of the country it is becoming routine for people to hand the church musician a CD of the deceased’s favorite songs and expect it to be played before the service.

An underlying problem here is that in current American practice we try to compress all post-death communal ritual into one ritual event, the funeral or memorial service. If the songs that will most evoke the personality of the deceased are not appropriate to a church service, the answer often is to find another place in the corporate ritual after death where such music can be played. Perhaps such recordings could be used at the funeral home during the visitation, or at the meal following the

funeral or memorial service, or at the gathering to scatter the ashes. Better yet, some of the mourners could sing songs that remind them of the deceased at such events.

In the funeral or memorial service, it may be possible for the tune of a secular favorite to be hummed or played on the organ or other instrument. The text of a favorite lullaby may not be appropriate at a graveside, but it can be deeply moving for the group to hum that same lullaby’s tune. One pastor responded to a request for “Danny Boy” by suggesting the hymn “O Christ the Same” (*ELW* #760), which can be sung to the tune of “Danny Boy.”

Occasionally one can find hymns that include images that speak to the person’s life. At the funerals of Navy veterans or sailors, we have sung “Eternal Father, Strong to Save”; at the memorial service for a gardener and landscaper, “Jerusalem, My Happy Home”; at the funeral of a weekend fisherman, “Dear Lord and Father of Mankind.” When we scattered the ashes of a sailor in Long Island Sound we sang “Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me.” A sensitive church musician may tailor the music to the specific person in other ways. One organist, playing “Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam” (the mother’s request) at the funeral of a five-year-old boy, played the accompaniment in a soft merry-go-round style—a childlike sound that touched the mother deeply.

2. This particular person *has died* . . .  
One of the goals of a funeral on a human level is to help the mourners grasp the fact

13. Bell, *The Singing Thing*, 41.

14. Paul Denyer, “Singing the Lord’s Song in a Strange Land,” in *Interpreting Death: Christian Theology and Pastoral Practice*, ed. Peter Jupp and Tony Rogers (London and Washington: Cassell, 1997), 198.

that the person they knew has actually died. This typically does not happen so much in song as in other things: in the use of the past tense in referring to the deceased in the service, in the retelling of the circumstances of the death in conversation in the funeral home or the church fellowship hall, and, most powerfully, in the ritualized actions in relation to the body—the closing of the casket, the accompanying of the casket out of the church to the hearse, the lowering of the casket into the ground, or the casting of dirt on the casket. However, hymns that speak directly of death can help bring the fact of death home to us. If the ethnic group or the congregation has a standard “funeral hymn,”<sup>15</sup> the singing of that hymn can tell us that someone has really died here. Rarely, there is a hymn that addresses the particular sort of death this person died. The Holy Innocents hymn “In Bethlehem a Newborn Boy” (*The Hymnal 1982*, #246) sings of all the victims of hate and murder, especially the young; “When Memory Fades” (*ELW* #792) may be sung when the person died of Alzheimer’s or other dementia-causing illness.

One sort of song can indeed be a way to acknowledge that this person has died: what the Roman Catholic rite calls a “Song of Farewell.” This is sung during the committal or final commendation, usually at the graveside. The classic text is the one that begins “Into paradise may the angels lead you” (*ELW* #222). The fact that that text addresses the deceased directly may give it more power to function as an act of letting the person go.<sup>16</sup> I would argue strongly for such a goodbye song, a song that becomes in our singing of it an act of releasing the person into God’s care. For some of us, the image of angels in the traditional text is not helpful, because they have been so “kitsch-ified.” There are farewell songs, however, that do not feature

angels prominently.<sup>17</sup> Especially at the grave of a child, the group can sing or hum a favorite lullaby. If people are familiar with the evening hymn “Now Rest beneath Night’s Shadow” (*ELW* #568), the second stanza, used by some as a lullaby, could be sung as a Song of Farewell by replacing “me” with “her” or “him.”

3. . . . *and we grieve . . .*

Sanders Zuckerman writes that “funeral music prays not to remove the process of

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15. For Swedes it is “Children of the Heavenly Father,” for Norwegians it is “Behold a Host Arrayed in White.” For many African Americans it is “Precious Lord.” Other hymns that have served as the traditional funeral hymn in some communities include “In the Garden,” “How Great Thou Art,” “O Day Full of Grace,” and “O God, Our Help in Ages Past.”

16. Other texts used by Roman Catholics as a Song of Farewell refer to the deceased in the third person (“come to his/her aid, O saints of God”) or speak in the first person (“I know that my redeemer lives”—not the hymn we know). Jesse Garfield Truvillion’s description of African American graveside services from his childhood lists many songs that were sung by the gathered community by memory, and all speak of death directly. Most are in the first person (“I want to see Jesus when I die”; “I’ll fly away”), although one uses the second-person pronoun (“in that great getting-up morning, fare you well”). “Faith and Integrity at Graveside,” *Call to Worship* 38.3, Funeral Rites, 22.

17. Mark Mummert suggests “Rest in Peace, Your Journey Ended,” found in *A New Hymnal for Colleges and Schools*. There is also a “song of farewell” stanza to the lullaby “All Through the Night,” which I have used in adapted form: “Hark, a solemn bell is ringing, clear through the night./You, dear N., are heav’ward winging, home through the night./ Earthly dust from off you shaken,/all immortal you will waken/with your last hard journey taken, home through the night.” This has the advantage of a tune both fairly familiar and very tender.

grieving but to bless it.”<sup>18</sup> Much of the long and hard work of grieving involves processing the welter of strong emotions: sadness, anger, fear, guilt, relief, despair, yearning, love, gratitude. As Denyer writes, music “can touch inner sensibilities that are too deep, too inchoate and too painful to be expressed in words.”<sup>19</sup> Music can give voice and shape to the hardest emotions, letting us know that we *can* grieve, we *can* feel these feelings and survive and not be cut off from others, we *can* grieve as Christians.

We sing our deep sorrow, fear, and anger despite two internalized messages. First is the censure of a common sort of piety that holds that questioning equals faithlessness and all negative emotions are suspect. Finding our questions and “bad” feelings in the psalms or in the hymnal is one of the best ways to counter that piety.

Second, and perhaps even more of a problem for many of us, is the American aversion to grief. We tell people not to “dwell on the past”; we think that the best cure for grieving is to reengage fully in life immediately. There are strengths in American optimism, but our push to the positive can keep us from letting ourselves or each other do the work of grieving. In funeral planning, this surfaces as the comment Melinda Quivik reports hearing so often: “When I go, I want everyone to just have a party and celebrate my life!” They want only joyous songs, no dirges, no minor keys.<sup>20</sup> This may reflect unpleasant experiences of funerals with draggy music that were simply depressing, or a wish that people will remember them with pleasure, not with sadness. But it is more likely to reflect a cultural myth that grief can be largely avoided, if we focus on the positive. So making space for the hard feelings and questions of grief at a funeral or memorial service is countercultural, an important gift to the bereaved who think there’s some-

thing wrong with them when they are grieving normally.

If we want music to make room for the deep sorrow and anger of our grieving, we have to pay attention to tune and tempo as well as to text. Alice Parker writes that we need to learn to recognize the tunes that will create and express deep feeling, and that to express sorrow “we need to relearn how to sing those melodies in a less rhythmic, more expressive way, unaccompanied and unhurried. . . . For rage or anger there can be a beat, and it can be heavy.”<sup>21</sup> Sometimes a song with no textual reference to loss or grief will incarnate the heavy feelings through its tender tune or its driving rhythm. Instrumental music can make room especially for sorrow: a slow movement from a viola concerto, or the organist improvising tenderly on “Children of the Heavenly Father.”

African American Christians have long had songs, both spirituals and gospel songs, where word and tune voiced deep sorrow as well as faith. White American Christians of mainstream denominations are just beginning to develop a repertoire of songs of lament.<sup>22</sup> Some of these are drawn from African American tradition: “Precious

18. Sanders Zuckerman, “A Church Musician’s Viewpoint,” 55.

19. Denyer, “Singing the Lord’s Song in a Strange Land,” 200.

20. Melinda Quivik, *A Christian Funeral: Witness to the Resurrection* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 75. This is in fact one of the biggest risks of letting Americans help plan their own funeral or memorial service; they are apt to try to make it a grief-free zone.

21. Alice Parker, “Singing in Sorrow,” *Pastoral Music* 14, no. 1 (Oct-Nov 1989): 38.

22. In addition to the songs listed here, see the suggestions in Scott Miller, “Reclaiming the Role of Lament in the Funeral Rite,” *Call to Worship* 38.3, Funeral Rites, 34–48.

**T**he familiarity of a beloved tune, or the tender way that it is played, can bring comfort apart from the meaning of the text.

Lord” (*ELW* #773—Thomas Dorsey wrote this on hearing of the death of his wife and baby), “It Is Well with My Soul” (*ELW* #785), “Give Me Jesus” (*ELW* #770), “There Is a Balm in Gilead” (*ELW* #614). Others have been written in recent decades. *ELW*’s “lament” section (#697–704) has several hymns that would work well to house the mourners’ grief at a funeral or memorial service, especially after a tragic death. “In Deepest Night” (#699) and “Once We Sang and Danced” (#701, based on Psalm 137) both picture God as grieving with us. If the tunes of these hymns of lament are too unfamiliar for the assembly to sing, they may be sung by choir or soloist. Some of them are set to familiar tunes, expressly in order to make them usable by people who are in crisis and haven’t sung them before (“O God, Why Are You Silent,” #703; “How Long, O God,” #698). Other hymns that voice grief are found in the “healing” section, especially “Healer of Our Every Ill” (#612) and “In All Our Grief”<sup>23</sup> (#615). “Peace, to Soothe Our Bitter Woes” (#381), sung (more gently) to the tune of “Hallelujah! Jesus Lives!” (#380), has been used effectively as a choir-sung benediction at memorial services and funerals.

Songs of lament are always appropriate in grief, especially after a tragic death. A teenaged boy died in a car crash, and the funeral began with the repetitive, slow St. Louis Jesuits’ “The Lord Hears the Cry of the Poor,” sung the first time by one unaccompanied voice. Even when the death is not a tragic one, though, there is always reason to lament. When O. P. Kretzmann, the founding president of Valparaiso University as a Lutheran university, died, it was a “good” death—he was full of years, and his death was a release from suffering. Most of the music at his funeral was joyous, triumphant, Easter music, with lots of trumpet fanfares, suited to his personal faith and to the very large assembly gathered. But the funeral began with a lone cantor singing Psalm 22, the lament psalm that was on Jesus’ lips on the cross, the way the service on Maundy Thursday ends after the stripping of the altar. Without that note, all the trumpeting could have felt shallow.

4. . . . we grieve, *hoping in God’s promises*.

There are several ways in which the sung music at a funeral or memorial service can nurture our hope in the face of death. As was stated earlier, the experience of singing together, as a felt reality of community, can give us hope that we will not be left alone in our grief. The community as body of Christ, and Christ himself in that body, will be there to surround us and accompany us on our journey of grief (see *ELW* #327, “Through the Night of Doubt and Sorrow”). As the voices of others fill the gaps when our voice fails us, we experience being upheld and strengthened by the Spirit.

23. Set as it is to a familiar tune, this would work well at a funeral, especially stanzas 1, 3, and 4. At a Eucharistic service, it could serve as the Kyrie.



As we are able to sing the words ourselves, we make the faith our own. The familiarity of a beloved tune, or the tender way that it is played, can bring comfort apart from the meaning of the text. “Panis Angelicus” is beloved in this context largely because of the gentle, strong, comforting beauty of the music, not because of the text.

When we look at the text as well as the musical setting, it is clear that the songs sung at funerals speak of hope and comfort on many levels. They may comfort us with the assurance that God is always with us, a caring shepherd (#502), our shelter and our refuge in life and in death (##623, 632, 787), holding us safely (#781), wiping away our tears (#619). They may express confidence in and gratitude for God’s caring presence throughout our individual lives (##447, 732, 840). They may give us a comforting picture of the dead person as asleep in God’s arms (think of Purcell’s “Evening Hymn”). They may hold out the hope of life beyond death: a resurrected life (#787) promised us in baptism (##449, 451) and in communion (#485<sup>24</sup>), a life in a heaven pictured from Revelation as a city with green gardens (#628) and golden streets (#625) or a river flowing by the throne of God (#423) or just as a great throng of rejoicing saints (##422, 425). Often we want the final hymn at a funeral or memorial service to be a strong, confident song of Christian hope, one that the assembly can sing strongly.<sup>25</sup>

Some of those who have written on funeral music have recommended triumphant Easter hymns, such as “Now All the Vault of Heaven Resounds” (#367) or “Thine Is the Glory” (#376). While at some funerals (like that of Kretzmann) such glorious song is appropriate, at others it might be better to find Easter hymns with room for grief, such as “Now the Green Blade Rises” (#379) or “Day of Arising” (#374),

which can be sung to the familiar tune of “Morning Has Broken.” We grieve with hope: it’s more an Advent mood than an Easter mood. “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” is a beautiful funeral hymn, as is “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus” set to the haunting Southern Harmony tune “Jefferson” (#254)<sup>26</sup>. At least when we put together all the songs sung at the service, there should be room for questions as well as confidence, fear as well as hope, sorrow as well as joy. We believe the light has dawned, and together we are waiting for it in the darkness. That is the hope we sing in the face of death.

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24. “I Am the Bread of Life”—this hymn can be heard as God’s promise of resurrection to this particular person who has died, if the chorus is sung as “I will raise him/her up.” Because the “her” is more surprising to the ear, the hymn in that version can be particularly moving at the funeral for a girl or woman.

25. For instance, “Now Thank We All Our God” (#840) or “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” (#890). Ending on such a jubilant note is reminiscent of Dixieland funerals, ending with “When the Saints Go Marching In.” The latter song could be used at the funeral of a child, with the verse found in Ashley Bryan’s picture book *Let It Shine* (New York: Atheneum, 2007): “Oh, when the children play in peace. . . .”

26. This minor tune has a much more Advent mood than the tunes used in the *United Methodist Hymnal* (#196—Hyfrydol) or in *The Hymnal 1982* (#66—Stuttgart). For a funeral-appropriate Advent hymn, I also love Mark Sedio’s version of the “Comfort, Comfort” Isaiah text, set to the lovely Welsh lullaby tune Suo-Gan. Published in his *A Global Piano Tour* (Augsburg Fortress, 1999).

# Bach's Mass in B minor: An Evangelical Catholic Testament

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Johann Sebastian Bach, the well-tempered composer, worked throughout his career for what he called “a well-ordered church music to the glory of God.”<sup>1</sup> It was not always easy to achieve this goal because he often had to contend with church and city councils (they were one and the same) that did not always deliver what they promised, or pietist pastors and a rationalist rector of the Thomasschule in Leipzig who believed that church music exists primarily to edify the congregation (Bach thought church music existed *solio Deo gloria*—“to the glory of God alone”). But, as Bach was at the top of his craft as a musician, he also was an astute theologian in the orthodox Lutheran tradition. To obtain the job of cantor at the Thomasschule in Leipzig he had to pass not only a musical audition but also a theological examination (conducted in Latin) given by the theology faculty of the University of Leipzig on behalf of the ecclesiastical consistory. Indications are that he passed with flying colors.<sup>2</sup>

Bach was, in the words of Christoph Wolff, “the learned musician.” Bach’s personal library contained hundreds of musical scores and works on music theory. He also had an extensive theological library that included two editions of Martin Luther’s complete works and biblical commentaries by orthodox Lutheran theologians. His copy of the Calov Bible of 1681

was well underlined and annotated. This gives us some idea of the study Bach did in preparation for composing his church cantatas. Considering the expense of books in those days, and that the Leipzig cantor bought them out of his own salary, we see how “learned” he actually was. Wolff comments that “for Bach, theological and musical scholarship were two sides of the same coin: the search for divine revelation, or the quest for God.”<sup>3</sup> It is clear from this data that Bach took seriously the theological dimensions of his church office.

There has been a tendency in recent scholarship to back away from the nearly hagiographic assessment of Bach’s life and work in former studies, such as the romantic studies of Philipp Spitta who established Bach as the supreme church musician<sup>4</sup> and Albert Schweitzer who pronounced Bach

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1. Mark Bangert, “Toward a Well-Regulated Church Music: Bachian Prescriptions with Enduring Shelf Life,” *dialog* 24 (1985): 107–12.

2. Christoph Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2000), 240.

3. Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 335.

4. Philipp Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach: His Work and Influence on the Music of Germany, 1685–1750*, trans. C. Bell and J. A. Fuller-Maitland, 3 vols. (London: Dover, 1893).

to be “the fifth evangelist.”<sup>5</sup> This reassessment is especially prominent in the work of Friedrich Blume, who argued that Bach’s application for the cantorship at Leipzig was strictly motivated by the desire to secure a university connection to advance the careers of his sons and that writing church music was “not an affair of the heart.”<sup>6</sup>

Blume’s revisionist views were countered by Günther Stiller point by point.<sup>7</sup> Whatever Bach’s sense of vocation may have been (church musician and just the best musician he could be), his profound spiritual conviction is the soul of his sacred works, and his genius may be called the perfect synthesis of music and theology. Nowhere is this genius better expressed than in the supreme legacy of his craft, the *Mass in B minor*.

The Mass is in a sense a retrospective of a lifetime’s work. It is not the product of one inspired moment or of any one particular period of his life. Bach completed the Mass near the end of his life, between 1745 and 1750, the same period during which he composed such encyclopedic monuments as *The Musical Offering* and *The Art of the Fugue*. Several movements of the Mass were anthologized from earlier compositions. Other movements Bach composed at that time or, in typical Baroque fashion, adapted from other works he had written. There is no doubt that Bach intended the complete Mass to be an anthology of the different types of choral writing that had emerged during what we call the Baroque Period. Whether or not he intended it to be more than that—a theological testament—can be ascertained only from an analysis of the musical architecture and compositional decisions.

Bach never heard the Mass performed in its entirety. Possibly, he did not intend that it be performed on a single occasion. Like movements from *The Well-Tempered*

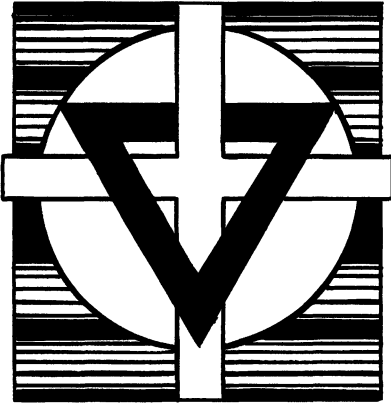
*Clavier* and *The Little Organ Book*, Bach expected parts of the Mass to be used when appropriate (which would have been the case in the Lutheran liturgy, which combined Latin and German). Such was the case when his son Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach first performed the *Credo* in 1786. Although various other sections of the Mass were performed over the next sixty years, it was not until 1859, more than a century after Bach died, that the entire Mass was performed as a whole.

The Mass reveals its anthologized nature without sacrifice to its sense of unity or strength of identity. Bach wrote it in the Italian opera tradition, with numbered movements. His original manuscript divides the Mass into four major sections, similar to the sections in musical settings of the Roman Catholic Mass Ordinary. The newly composed sections were the “*Symbolum Nicenum*” or *Credo* and the final section with the *Osanna*, *Benedictus*, *Agnus Dei*, and *Dona nobis pacem*. The third section in the manuscript, the *Sanctus*, is the one Bach wrote first. It was composed in 1724 and performed many times during his life. The first section, titled “*Missa*” and comprising the *Kyrie* and *Gloria*, was first performed on April 12, 1733, as a Lutheran Mass during the festival of the Oath of Allegiance to Augustus III, upon his accession as Elector of Saxony and King of Poland. Bach had submitted the *Missa* with

5. Albert Schweitzer, *J. S. Bach*, trans. E. Newman, preface by C. M. Widor, 2 vols. (London: Dover, 1962).

6. Friedrich Blume, “Outlines of a New Picture of Bach,” *Music and Letters* 44 (1963): 214–27.

7. Günther Stiller, *Johann Sebastian Bach and Liturgical Life in Leipzig*, trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman, Daniel P. Poellet, Hilton C. Oswald, ed. Robin A. Leaver (St. Louis: Concordia, 1984), 173ff.



a request that he be appointed court composer, but the request was denied in 1733. It was finally granted in 1736.

Bach submitted the *Missa* with his request for a royal appointment as a way to gain some leverage over the city council of Leipzig and the rector of the Thomasschule, Johann August Ernesti, with whom he was quarreling at the time over the appointment of a prefect for the boys' choir of the Thomasschule (the Thomaschor). Bach believed that only musically capable students should sing in the Thomaschor; Ernesti thought that any boy should be able to sing who had an interest in doing so. At the heart of the conflict lay the differences between the orthodox and the Enlightenment views of the purpose of worship.<sup>8</sup> Was the purpose of worship primarily to glorify God or to edify the people? This "worship war" between two honorable men, the Thomas Rector and the Thomas Cantor, did not bring much honor to either of them.

It also has been thought that Bach provided the Latin *Missa* to the elector because the elector, as king of Poland, was a Roman Catholic. His conversion to accept the Polish crown had been a scandal to his Lutheran subjects, and when the elector

had a magnificent court chapel built for the Roman Rite the citizens of Dresden erected the more magnificent Fruenkirche (Church of our Lady). It is thought that Bach's *Missa* was performed there. We know that in 1736 Bach played the dedicatory concert on the Silbermann organ in the new Fruenkirche.

However, the two-movement *Missa* (*Missa brevis*) was in keeping with the Lutheran tradition in Saxony in which the other parts of the ordinary (the Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei) were sung by the congregation to the chorale versifications from Luther's German Mass. Thus, if Lutheran composers wrote *Missae*, they typically comprised only the Kyrie and Gloria. The Creed would have been chanted in Latin by the ministers or sung in Luther's German versification ("Wir glauben all an' einen Gott") by the congregation. The Sanctus might be omitted if there were no preface, and the "Lamb of God" would have been sung in a chorale version during communion. Bach composed four of these "Lutheran masses" (BWV 233, 234, 235, 236). Each one is in six movements; five of those movements are for the Gloria. Thus, the 9-section Gloria in the *Mass in B minor* is a departure from Bach's usual treatment of this movement. This is a piece of musical architecture that we must consider in our theological analysis of the Mass.

The four major sections of the Mass are broken into sentences or phrases to give 26 independent movements. This fragmentation facilitated incorporation of previously composed movements into the new, larger work. Of the 17 choruses, nine are set for five voices (SSATB) in the Italian Baroque choral tradition: Kyrie I, Gloria, Et in terra pax, Cum sancto Spirito, Credo

8. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Bach Among the Theologians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 34ff.

I, Et incarnatus, Et resurrexit, Confiteor, and Et expecto. Six are for four voices (SATB): Kyrie II, Gratias agimus, Qui tollis peccata mundi, Credo II, Crucifixus, and Dona nobis pacem. The Sanctus is set for six voices (SSAATB). The Osanna in excelsis is for two antiphonal four-voice choruses.

The Mass opens with the intense and momentous Kyrie eleison I, which establishes the gravitas of the Mass to follow. Having seen that Bach was willing to engage in politics to get his way (he made many efforts to gain the recognition of the elector by composing cantatas on royal birthdays and on anniversaries of the elector's accession to the Polish crown—Bach used the cantata for the Polish accession as music for the Osanna in excelsis of the Mass), we note that the opening homophonic bars are similar to the masses of the Polish composer Jan Dismas Zelenka, whose support Bach enlisted in pursuit of his petition to the royal court at Dresden. The tense opening Kyrie is followed by a gentle, comforting duet between two sopranos in the Christe eleison. The duet symbolizes the two natures of Christ: divine and human. Kyrie II, with its twisting, chromatic fugal subject and its syncopated entrances, is an eloquent plea for God's mercy.

The Gloria is a contrast to the Kyrie in sound and intent. Predominantly set in major keys,<sup>9</sup> it was originally a jubilant hymn of praise and thanksgiving in honor of Augustus III. The nine movements are arranged symmetrically and feature all five vocal soloists. Many parts of the Gloria are derived from other works. The opening of the Gloria is undoubtedly a portion of a lost instrumental concerto to which Bach later added the chorus. The "Gratias agimus tibi" is taken from the opening chorus of Cantata 29, *Wir danken dir, Gott*. And the

"Qui tollis peccato mundi" is adapted from Cantata 46, *Schauet doch und sehet*. Bach not only borrowed from cantatas to compose the Gloria but also later refashioned the first two movements of the Gloria, its central "Domine Deus," and the final "Cum sancto Spiritu" into Cantata 191, *Gloria in excelsis Deo*.

Commentators have spoken about the architectural character of Bach's works. In the finished Mass, one of the most interesting aspects is the parallelism between the Gloria and the Credo. Each section contains nine movements. At the center of each movement is the crucifixion of Christ: the "Domine Deus" with its reference to Christ as the "lamb of God" ("Agnus Dei") and the "Crucifixus"—"And was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, suffered and was buried." The sacrificial lamb of God is the crucified Christ. The other pieces frame these sections on each side to form a palindrome. The most dramatic moment in the whole Mass is the contrast between the "Crucifixus" and "Et resurrexit" in the Credo, which captures the surprise of the resurrection. Some audiences have been jolted by the sudden blare of trumpets in the "Et resurrexit."

The Credo is put together from several sources. Credo I is built on the ancient plainsong Credo melody. The penultimate movement of the Credo, the "Confiteor," is also based on a Gregorian chant. Thus, Bach reaches back through centuries of musical development to compile this mass. Credo II is adapted from Cantata 171, *Gott*

9. I was asked after the talk in which this essay originated (see note 15) whether there was any significance to the choice of b-minor. The only reason I could think of was that b-minor is the relative minor key of D-major, and D is a good key for valveless Baroque trumpets.

wie dein Name. The "Crucifixus" is a passacaglia fabricated from the opening chorus of Cantata 12, *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen*. The "Confiteor"—"I acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins"—is a chorale fantasia, while the "Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum," fashioned from Cantata 120, *Jauchzet ihr erfreuten Stimmen*, is written in a concerto form. In the "Confiteor" Bach focuses more on the forgiveness of sins than on the baptism, and hence the music is more somber than joyful. Then, as if not to disturb the reflection on the gift of forgiveness, the voices and strings move up to "Et expecto"—"And I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." The melody of "Et expecto" is an echo of the "Resurrexit" in the second article of the Credo, suggesting that by raising Christ from the dead God had given hope to believers.

I would also note that, unlike some later composers of the Classical and Romantic periods, Bach doesn't skim over "I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church." Bach was at home in the church. This section is set to a dancelike pastorale that suggests the pastoral or shepherding nature of the church.

The trumpets and the palette of solo instruments Bach uses in the Sanctus add splendor to the proclamation of the glory of the Lord God of hosts. The six voices suggest the six-winged creatures flying around the throne of God in Isaiah 6. The "Osanna in excelsis" can be found in another form in Cantata 215, *Preise dein Glücke*, which, as already mentioned, was a cantata celebrating the accession of Augustus III to the Polish throne. And the Agnus Dei is an expansion of the alto aria from Cantata 11, The Ascension Oratorio.

The musical setting of the final chorus, "Dona nobis pacem," is the same as the "Gratias agimus tibi" in the Gloria. The

repetition links the texts of these two movements, as if Bach considered the plea for peace to be a thanksgiving for that peace which the world cannot give. This peace is given by the risen and ascended Lord whom the bass soloist had proclaimed as "the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ most high" in the "Domine Deus" movement of the Gloria.

Bach might well have used the musical idiom in the closing of this Mass as a personal message, that in the eve of his own life he was grateful to have attained an almost mystical depth of inner peace, both within himself and with the rest of the universe. Schweitzer noted the difference at the point of the Benedictus and the Agnus Dei between Bach's *B minor Mass* and Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*. For Beethoven, the symphonist, these two sections are the culminating point in the drama of the Mass as he conceives it; for Bach, who thinks in terms of the church, they are the point at which all dies slowly away. In Beethoven's *Agnus Dei* the cry of the pained and terrified soul for salvation is almost dreadful in its intensity; Bach's *Agnus Dei* is the song of the soul redeemed.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, at the end of his life when Bach was summing up his musical art and his theological convictions, the *Mass in B minor* becomes his spiritual testament. It is an evangelical catholic testament. Bach had no reason to choose to set to music the complete Roman Mass (as it would have been seen by his Lutheran contemporaries—Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach designated his father's work as "the Great Catholic Mass" in his posthumous 1790 index<sup>11</sup>) other than to make a theological

10. Schweitzer, *J. S. Bach*, 2:323.

11. *Protestant Church Music: A History*, ed. Friedrich Blume, Foreword by Paul Henry Lang (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), 312.

statement. If his interest was only in choosing a large form in which to demonstrate various styles of choral writing, he could have opted for other forms (e.g., the oratorio form used by Handel or his own passion oratorios). Instead, Bach used the catholic form of the mass of the ancient and medieval Western church but simultaneously infused this catholic form with the evangelical “rediscovery of the gospel” by the sixteenth-century reformers. Blume resisted the attempt to read specifically Lutheran theology into this Mass, but there is no doubt that it is Christ-centered. It dwells on the acts of God to accomplish the salvation of humanity in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Mass moves from the plea for mercy in the Kyrie to the praise and thanksgiving of God the Holy Trinity for the gift of forgiveness in the Gloria to the confession of faith in the Credo to the worship and adoration of God in the Sanctus to the gift of peace in the Agnus Dei. This theological content does not need to be seen as exclusively Lutheran, but it is certainly “evangelical”—that is, gospel-centered.

Bach’s very use of the catholic form may have served a contextual evangelical purpose. Being the orthodox Lutheran that he was, he never shied away from theological controversy. Against the rationalism of the emerging *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment), Bach’s Mass praised not some nondescript divine being or the great architect of the universe but God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One may see in Bach’s choice of the form of the mass a countercultural stance. Against the growing unitarianism of the Enlightenment, Bach was unabashedly trinitarian. The historic creeds of the church were under increasing attack in the age of Enlightenment, especially the dogma-laden Nicene Creed. Bach made it the longest movement of a massive work.

Schweitzer said that the Nicene Creed is “a hard nut for a composer to crack.” It proved to be a daunting challenge for even the greatest composers of the Classical and Romantic Eras. Schweitzer himself stumbled on these ancient ecumenical dogmas.

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## A gainst the growing unitarianism of the En- lightenment, Bach was unabashedly trinitarian.

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But Jaroslav Pelikan pointed out that John Calvin had said that the Nicene Creed “is more a hymn suited for singing than a formula for confession.”<sup>12</sup> Schweitzer may have agreed with this when he wrote that “Bach thus proves that the dogma can be expressed much more clearly and satisfactorily in music than in verbal formulae.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, in the High Mass the Creed was always chanted. In classical Lutheranism too the Nicene Creed was either chanted by the ministers or sung by the people to Luther’s versification. Some truths simply can’t be prosaically recited; liturgy is meant to be sung, including Scripture “readings” and (especially) the ecumenical creeds.

This ancient statement of dogma was never sung so powerfully and lovingly as by Bach in the *B minor Mass*. Yet Bach brought out of the text of the Creed that which is most existentially relevant rather

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12. Pelikan, 124.

13. Schweitzer, 2:319.

14. Pelikan, 125.

than emphasizing the metaphysics of *homo-ousios*—"of one being with the Father" ("consubstantialem Patri"). As Pelikan opined, "The greatness of Bach's Mass lies in the fact that it managed to take full measure of the tradition without losing itself in archaeology."<sup>14</sup>

Bach was a learned theologian as well as a learned musician. What Bach has given to musical posterity in the creation of his *Mass in B minor* is indisputably great in both respects. But "learned" sounds pedantic, and for all that Bach's great Mass may have served as a musical and theological encyclopedia typical of the Enlightenment, it appeals to its listeners with its profound emotion and deep piety. Both the musical and spiritual genius of its creator are transparent.

The Mass may truly be an encyclopedic fusion of every possible Baroque compositional style and form, and it may embody the very essence of the Baroque

art, but it transcends its historical time. Moreover, Bach's sacred works cannot be analyzed simply in musical terms, because his music is but a vehicle for the greater message. Beyond its intricacies as an inimitable study of Baroque vocal music, the Mass captures an inspirational quality defying description in words. It also is a luminous statement of the depth of the composer's spiritual commitment, and, we would have to say, of his personal beliefs. In a lifetime of serving God through music, Bach had finally created the ultimate expression of his faith.<sup>15</sup>

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15. This essay in honor of my long-time colleague Professor Mark Bangert originated in a pre-concert talk at The First Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia on June 10, 2007, at which my son Andrew Martin Senn conducted a performance of the *Mass in B minor*. When all is said and done, one must *listen* to music.



# Visions of Leadership



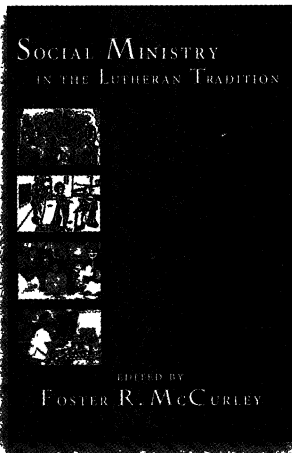
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# Book Reviews

*The Music of Early Lutheranism: Shaping the Tradition (1524–1672)*. By Carl Schalk. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001. 206 pages. Paper. 16 illustrations, 59 musical examples. \$30.99.

Carl Schalk deserves commendation for installing some historical speed bumps on the road from Luther to Bach so that travelers and tourists don't move too quickly, missing the scenery in-between. If there is such a thing as a Lutheran tradition in music, one could surmise, with Schalk, that tradition should be apparent, maybe most apparent, in the generations that closely follow the reformer. This book proposes to help us see some of the constants on that landscape of music that accompanied the growth of Lutheranism.

That the author should offer this volume at this point in his career is not surprising. He has proven himself a venerable proponent of church music in the Lutheran strain and is a living missionary of a tradition embodied in his teachers and colleagues such as Paul Bunjes and Walter Buszin (to whom the book is dedicated). Schalk here keeps alive and develops their insights and concepts.

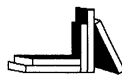
The book consists of seven central chapters, each devoted to a key player in the unfolding tradition of Lutheran church music: Johann Walter, Georg Rhau, Hans Leo Hassler, Michael Praetorius, Johann Hermann Schein, Samuel Scheidt, and Heinrich Schütz. An introductory chapter reviews some of Luther's opinions about music and provides some help for understanding stylistic changes occurring across musicdom during the 150 years that span the lives of these seven individuals. In an Afterword Schalk begins to formulate the tradition which he finds

operative in the lives and work of the seven individuals, drawing some lessons for the contemporary church musical situation. Two appendices and an index follow.

Each of the central chapters develops from the same pattern: short sketch of the individual's life, descriptions of musical output (usually with examples), a list of published works (in critical editions) and a short bibliography of further readings, usually in English. Because such a layout is typical for most histories of music, it suggests that the intended reader of this book is someone who knows, or should know, the ins and outs of musical research, who measures historical significance by output, and who understands the meaning of terms like *gorgia* and cantional, all of which leaves the interested but less-prepared reader at the margins. Specific help in interpreting the musical examples and a basic glossary would have helped to mediate the problem, but one looks in vain for either, all the more surprising since Schalk is the editor of a helpful volume called *Key Words in Church Music* (Concordia, [1982] 2004). The lack of audience focus here is unfortunate because the book contains much that would benefit the common reader.

Therefore be not faint-hearted, ye readers of this journal; there is plenty here for those who regularly need to think about and struggle with how music and faith work together. Early in the book, for instance, the author notes that all seven of these individuals—by the way, one would think that Concordia's editors could give the reader some relief from the constant use of "men" in the volume—connected their work and energy to the liturgy of the church and to the Lutheran chorale (that body of hymnody evolving from the needs of Lutheran worship for nearly two centuries). He further notes that all of these musicians were highly trained, were all involved with "secular" music (Schütz wrote the first German opera), were interested in new musical styles emerging around them, and were influential as teachers. These are characteristics worth emulating at any time.

But Schalk's research yields other common characteristics worth noting and pondering: A larger percentage of their output was in the Latin language, and that without apology; nearly all



benefited from patrons who were not afraid to invest in manifest talent; almost all worked as court musicians; nearly all were, in spite of their Lutheran commitment, ecumenically inclined and connected; all engaged the latest means of dissemination of their work, in this case from burgeoning printing enterprises; and three of the seven wrote about their theological understandings of music.

Schalk's sense of the importance of tradition gets us all to slow down a little. One can only hope that somewhere there are those who, with the same kind of reverence for their teachers and with the same kind of conviction about the constants that seemingly propelled the early proprietors of Lutheran music, will take up the interpretive task anew by receiving with gratitude what Schalk here passes on and by posing some alternative questions of these pioneers. Here are some that may provide another view of the scenery:

1. What was the music of the people like during these years? The seven musicians aptly described here worked in the best of situations and wrote for professional choirs. What did the common people sing? What was music like in the small parishes?

2. How and why did the tunes of the chorales migrate from the tenor voice, as was chiefly the case in Luther's time, to the soprano voice, as was the case sixty to seventy years later?

3. The period discussed in this volume comprises the formation of the *Book of Concord* (1580); what impact did that have on church music?

4. What is the relationship of orthodoxy/pietism and rhetoric/affect as church music increasingly takes on characteristics of the Italian Baroque in first half of the seventeenth century?

Probing such questions will help us all see these historical forays not as inhibitors of progress but rather as opportunities, as Schalk has taught us, to bounce the ball around a little on speed bumps and to see the scenery more clearly as a landscape encompassing not only Luther and Bach but also our own destinations.

*Mark Bangert*  
*Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago*

***Musical Improvisation, Heidegger, and the Liturgy. A Journey to the Heart of Hope.***

By Andrew Cyprian Love. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2003. 354 pages. Cloth. \$119.95.

Interdisciplinary studies are always fecund, but then one expects to see promise of success in the very nature of the disciplines cast together. Expectations wane, for instance, confronting a study based on figs, Ferrari shift paddles, and the feeding habits of ferrets. Is this book another such *mélange*? Hardly. Andrew Cyprian Love, a Benedictine monk of Glenstal Abbey in Ireland, has "entered several under-examined areas," he explains, so that the reader might be led to reconsider seemingly unrelated systems of thought and practice. In the end the book is amazingly relevant if one is given to a little extrapolation.

In order to understand fully the arguments of the book the practice of musical improvisation needs to be appreciated. Downplaying negative connotations, Love notes that it is best described as "exploratory sound-making of any kind, and for any purpose" (p. 4). The author himself regularly improvises at the organ, rightfully and proudly understanding himself as part of a tradition, which has been a trademark of organ playing in France for more than 150 years. But he recognizes as well that musical improvisation was, and continues to be, also at the heart of the majority of non-Western musical systems.

Most people become acquainted with improvisation these days through the jazz idiom, which, of course, has its roots in African drum traditions. Bach and his contemporaries were equipped to improvise, too. In fact, some would propose that many of his keyboard works are only skeletons of what he himself actually performed. That raises a further preliminary issue. Love argues that improvisation shows its face also in any actual musical "performance," insofar as the musicians address each presentation of a notated (or remembered, for that matter) piece with changed vigor, perception, or purpose, even though the written "music" might be the same. Finally, because spoken word is always musical in a sense, prosodic inflection is also musical improvisation.



Why has musical improvisation been under-emphasized in Western culture (the French organ school perhaps being an exception)? Love proposes that the advent of strong Cartesian philosophy in the latter part of the eighteenth century advanced a way of negotiating life completely at odds with the fundamental assumptions behind improvisation. The path proposed by Descartes led musicians to believe that they had to think their way through the music first, commit it to paper, and then act upon it, or execute a performance. Music making became a two-step process. The ramifications of this were disastrous in some respects, far-reaching and always profound. For instance, Love believes (and he is no doubt correct in this observation) that after Descartes composers became more important than performers, freedoms of performance were curtailed, and eventually scholars (whose profile was raised considerably in this new hierarchy) exerted great energy trying to find the one right version of a "piece."

Brother Cyprian thinks we are missing something. He argues that our whole notion of making music needs to be rescued from Cartesian structures and be given a new home philosophically in order to restore music's biological and anthropological purposes. Accordingly, the second part of his book explores the thought of Heidegger as a possible alternative. The key connector is Heidegger's assertion of *Dasein*, the sense of being. Music is where being "speaks." Love advances, giving music a position of privilege in the quest to be truly human. Human apprehension of existence occurs through imagination and "futural projection," which is to say that hope is central to one's sense of existence as is the moment-to-moment imaginative creation of the future. Musical improvisation is a primary activity of such creative hoping because it, like no other medium, occurs in time.

Whew. A final section relates the history of improvisation (better: spontaneity) in the church's liturgical life. Love makes a strong case for a better balance between fixity and freedom, which, he posits, can be achieved by allowing for more improvisation and spontaneity.

The book unfolds in seven chapters, each with copious notes (an obvious sign of its origins as a dissertation), a useful and fulsome bibliog-

raphy, which comprises many disciplines quite adequately, and a helpful index. Brother Cyprian is obviously well read, and I for one don't mind the dissertation-inspired endnotes, which indicate his knowledge of such disciplines as music therapy, new musicology, and ethnomusicology. Sometimes, however, the book reads like a theory of everything.

The author's line of argument is not without question. Locating, as he does, the act of music making in the biological characteristics of the human being (babbling of infants is important to him) and stressing the importance of each individual's investment in the creation of the future, Love minimizes the social dimensions of music and its widely understood purpose of establishing sonic culture and identity.

Nevertheless, there is much to be taken away from the book. Two things come to mind immediately. First, musical improvisation is also at the heart of preaching, at least as it is contemporarily understood. Can preaching be more effectively taught when it is paired with musical improvisation? Is there some value for preachers in exploring how musical improvisers go about their work? Should rap be a prerequisite to Homiletics? In the same vein, do we have a whole lot to learn here about worship (of course, the answer is yes), e.g., what is spontaneity in worship, or how can worship leaders learn how to improvise without resorting to clichés and inanities?

Second, the issue of canned church music lurks on nearly every page of this book. Arguments for hymn accompaniments on CD, choir anthems with prerecorded orchestrations, and perhaps also Powerpoint presentations lose their appeal when tested by the litmus of the improvisatory impulse. In the light of Love's work, the renewal of worship and church music requires more opportunities and assistance for carving out the future in the here and now via the discipline and skill of musical improvisation and spontaneity.

Mark Bangert



# Briefly Noted

***Earth & World. Classic Sermons on Saving the Planet.*** Edited by David Rhoads (Continuum, \$24.95 paper). These thirty-six recent sermons on ecology are introduced by R., who notes that the degradation of nature is not a problem with a short-term solution. The ecological crisis is a spiritual crisis because it results in part from our alienation from nature. R.'s involvement in the struggle to save the planet has led LSTC to designate itself as a "green zone," with efforts to be earth-friendly in all aspects of the seminary's life. He has directed a Web site, Web of Creation (<http://www.webofcreation.org>), which provides resources for faith communities around issues of ecology. This in turn has generated the Green Congregation Program. Many denominations, faith traditions, and ethnic communities are represented in this collection. Other resources to celebrate Earth Sunday can be found at <http://www.nccecojustice.org>. The Earth Ministry Web site also has many resources for worship (<http://www.earthministry.org>). Developing a sustainable life on earth in the face of ecological challenges is the "great work" of our time. *RWK*

***A Seminary in Crisis. The Inside Story of the Preus Fact Finding Committee.*** By Paul A. Zimmerman (Concordia, \$49.99). In 1970 Jacob Preus, President of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, appointed a fact-finding committee to investigate the theological position of faculty members at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. The end of this sorry tale was the suspension of seminary President John H. Tietjen, the exiling of 45 of 50 faculty members, the founding of Seminex (originally: Concordia Seminary in Exile), all in 1974, and its eventual deployment of Seminex faculty to three ELCA seminaries in 1983. Zimmerman, now in his upper 80s, is one of the two surviving members of that fact-finding committee. Pages 155–96 reprint the report

of that committee and pages 199–444 reprint the subsequent Preus report to the Synod. The rest is a self-serving description of the process, a defense of the committee, and a broadside against the so-called faculty majority. The issues, then and now, seem trivial, sectarian, and against a widespread ecumenical consensus: biblical inerrancy, verbal inspiration, the authorship of biblical books, a rigid stance against evolution, and a complaint that Concordia students prayed together with other Lutheran seminarians in the Association of Lutheran Seminarians. The author finds no fault in the procedures of the fundamentalist faction that took over and still controls the Missouri Synod, but he does admit that Robert Preus, Jacob's brother, and Ralph Bohlmann, also a Concordia faculty member and the author of *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles*, a document criticizing the faculty majority's stance, met a "few times" with him in a St. Louis hotel "to help Paul ask the right questions of [their fellow] faculty members who were reluctant to answer questions forthrightly during the investigation." *RWK*

***The One Who Is to Come.*** By Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S. J. (Eerdmans, \$18). F., who enjoys immense prestige among biblical scholars, traces the emergence of messianism to the second century B.C.E. Passages associated with the messiah in the Old Testament are concerned only with actual historical kingship. Some of these passages may present a picture of the "ideal king," but that is not yet a picture of "the messiah." In Judaism the expectation of a Jewish messiah was not of one form (there is talk of a kingly and a priestly figure, a Messiah of Aaron and a Messiah of Israel). Jewish belief focuses on the future of a messiah still to come. The Christian messiah is known as the one who fulfilled the role of Deutero-Isaiah's suffering servant of God, who has not only died for humanity, but was raised by God to give humanity hope of sharing a blissful afterlife with him. The Christian messiah differs radically from the awaited Jewish messiah, without whom, however, he would not be known as "Jesus Christ the Son of God." Pastors who want to know the truth about a central concept in Christianity absolutely must read this book. *RWK*

# Preaching Helps

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Proper 13—Proper 21, Series A

## **Luther's Small Catechism: A Preaching Text?**

I am glad that Luther's Small Catechism is included in the assembly edition of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* and the pew edition of *Lutheran Service Book*. More than a handy resource for inviting God's people to rediscover this Lutheran treasure, the inclusion of the Small Catechism in the hymnal invites preachers to read it in new ways. Though I keep the *Book of Concord* in ready reach, reading the Small Catechism from that book inspires an attitude of study. Reflecting on the Small Catechism from the hymnal affords both a certain freedom when considering the catechism and a disposition of prayer. Lately, I have been approaching the catechism as a "preaching text"—not a text for preaching but a text about preaching. I've been exploring what insights Luther's Small Catechism gives about preaching. Here I share just a few.

For starters, Luther's treatment of the Ten Commandments always gives me a headache as I am confronted by the absolute impossibility of keeping the law. Fear, love, and trust God above *all* things? How do I even know when I am loving my wife and daughter ahead of God so that I can not do that? In preaching, I need to hear and receive grace; I certainly need to preach it. "Do not despise preaching or God's word, but instead keep that word holy and gladly hear and learn it." I confess that I have weeks when I despise preaching and am not too pleased with the appointed portion of God's Word. On those weeks, Luther points the preacher beyond the task and the pericope to the preacher's relationship with God. Perhaps the preacher is not fearing, loving, and trusting God above all things.

Luther also reminds me that God's Word is bigger than I think and, often, bigger than I am comfortable with. The prohibition against murder calls us to help and support our neighbors in all of life's needs. The commandment not to steal includes the expectation that we help our neighbors to protect and improve their property and income. And, according to the eighth commandment, we are to come to our neighbors' defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light. As a preacher, these explanations remind me that, whenever I think I know what a passage of Scripture means and stop listening to it, I sell God's Word short.

I've begun including Luther's explanation of the third article of the Creed in one of my preaching lectures. I hear lots of sermons that tell me what I *should*,

*ought*, and *must* do. I wonder how I am supposed to do all the stuff the preacher tells me to do when “by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him.” Far better than telling people what they should, ought, and must do, preachers proclaim what God is doing and what people *can* do because of the Holy Spirit that calls them through the gospel and enlightens them with the Spirit’s gifts.

Turning to the Lord’s Prayer, I find Luther inadequate when it comes to daily bread. I add God’s Word to Luther’s list. Recalling Jesus’ words “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (Matt 4:4), this petition helps me to receive God’s Word with thanksgiving. Moreover, this petition keeps me humble and realistic: Sermons are daily bread and not eternal utterances that will change the world. Change comes through a steady diet of the daily bread of God’s Word.

Baptism reminds me of the power of God’s Word. God’s Word in water forgives sins, redeems from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation. My favorite verse in Scripture reminds me that “we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:23–24). To preach the gospel is powerful stuff.

Holy Communion challenges me. More than comforting me that the grace of the table will compensate for a lack of grace in the sermon, the table requires me as preacher to move toward saying in words what the bread and cup will say—Christ given and shed for you.

Mostly, the Small Catechism assures me as a preacher who, first and foremost, is a baptized child of God, that God created, provides for, and protects me; that Jesus Christ redeemed, purchased, and freed me; that the Holy Spirit makes me holy and keeps me in the true faith; that I can use God’s very name in every time of need to call on, pray to, praise, and give thanks to God. The list goes on. In preaching, I simply thank and praise, serve and obey the God who loved me first. This is most certainly true.

**Seth Moland-Kovash**, who authored this set of *Preaching Helps*, is one with whom I enjoy discussing things confessional. A 2001 Master of Divinity graduate of LSTC, Seth was one of those seniors brave enough to take an elective preaching course from the brand-new homiletics professor. Since then, we gather once or twice a year for an always edifying “table talk.” Seth serves as co-pastor of All Saints Lutheran Church in Palatine, Illinois, along with his wife Jennifer Moland-Kovash (M.Div. 2004). Seth and Jennifer are the proud parents of Carl Philip, born in 2005.

*Craig A. Satterlee, Editor of Preaching Helps*  
<http://craigasatterlee.com>

## Proper 13

### August 3, 2008

Isaiah 55:1–5

Psalm 145:8–9, 14–21

Romans 9:1–5

Matthew 14:13–21

#### First Reading

Strung through all three of the readings for today is the theme of compassion. Isaiah speaks a message of God's compassion for people. First there is compassion for the poor, for those who are thirsty and those who have no money. Interestingly, there is also compassion for those who make the wrong choices, who spend their money for things that do not satisfy. Isaiah does not speak words of condemnation for those who choose the wrong; instead, he offers the promise that if we incline our ear to the Lord we can live. We can even become a magnet of hope and life for the nations of the world.

Paul speaks of the deep compassion and grief he has for his “kindred according to the flesh.” He speaks about his emotion in very physical and bodily terms. Verse 2: I have great sorrow and endless pain in my heart (ἀδιάλειπτος ὀδύνη τῆ καρδία μου). Paul speaks of an almost literal heartache for his sisters and brothers who do not know the joy of life in Christ. This heartache and compassion is similar to that spoken by Isaiah on behalf of those who spend their money unwisely: a deep pain for them and a wish that things could be different. Also, as in Isaiah, Paul does not speak here words of condemnation. He reminds all of us of the promises of God made to the Israelites: adoption, glory, covenants, law, worship, patriarchs, and the Messiah. Paul's heartache is for all who do not know the full glory of the fulfillment of all of these promises.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus' compassion is for the great crowd who followed him on foot as he traveled by boat. Jesus' compassion was so great that he turned from his desire to find a deserted place by himself to cure them. Jesus' compassion continues in instructing his disciples to feed the people and in then feeding them himself when given the five loaves and two fish.

#### Pastoral Reflection

In J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the first book of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, the hobbit Frodo wishes that his uncle Bilbo had stabbed and killed Gollum earlier when he had first stolen the ring. We then are given the following exchange between Frodo and the wise wizard Gandalf. (Note: this version of the exchange is from the 2001 film, though it is very faithful to the novel.)

“What a pity that Bilbo did not stab that vile creature [declares Frodo] when he had a chance!”

“Pity? [replies Gandalf] It was Pity that stayed his hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need. And he has been well rewarded, Frodo. Be sure that [Bilbo] took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity.”

“I am sorry,” says Frodo. “But I am frightened; and I do not feel any pity for Gollum.”

“You have not seen him,” Gandalf breaks in. “No, and I don't want to,” replies Frodo. “. . . Now at any rate he is as bad as an Orc, and just an enemy. He deserves death.”

“Deserves it! I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgment. For even the very wise cannot see all ends. I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it. And he is bound up with the fate of the Ring. My heart tells me that he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes, the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many—yours not least.”

Gandalf's last declaration, “the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many,” becomes



a central theme of the entire trilogy. Ultimately Gandalf's prophecy comes true as Gollum participates in and ensures the destruction of the ring in the end.

Pity/compassion are central themes to much of Scripture and Christian tradition, not just the texts for this week. This encounter between Frodo and Gandalf provides a way into a conversation about compassion and pity that may be a bit different for us. It allows us to see the other side of cycles of vengeance, or cycles of apathy. Ignoring the needs of others continues destructive cycles in the same way that cycles of revenge do. In the example of the pity of Bilbo we see the way that cycles of compassion can build and serve higher purposes as well. SM-K

## Proper 14 August 10, 2008

1 Kings 19:9–18  
Psalm 85:8–13  
Romans 10:5–15  
Matthew 14:22–33

### First Reading

The Gospel reading for this Sunday is a miracle story, a story told by the Matthean community to demonstrate how this Jesus was different. From a narrative standpoint, there is a back-and-forth, ebb-and-flow nature to the story. Jesus dismisses the disciples and the crowds so he can be alone to pray (a good thing). The wind batters the disciples' boat so that it is a long way from the land and from where Jesus is (a bad thing). Jesus walks on the sea to rejoin them (a good thing). They are terrified because they do not understand what they are seeing (a bad thing), and Jesus speaks words of comfort (a good thing). Peter walks on the water himself (a good thing), becomes fright-

ened, and sinks (a bad thing). Peter cries out for salvation, and Jesus saves him. This, combined with the final strong confession of faith by "those in the boat" (verse 33) closes this story on a note that leaves us with no doubt about the nature of this Jesus.

Within this narrative structure we hear a great deal about fear and about the power of Jesus' words. First, in verse 26, the disciples are terrified (ἐταράχθησαν: troubled, as the water was with the wind blowing it). We read that Jesus *immediately* spoke words of comfort to them: "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." Jesus knows the fear and immediately speaks words of comfort, casting out fear.

Later, when Peter is out walking on the water, he becomes frightened and begins to sink. As Peter is sinking and calls for help (salvation), Jesus again *immediately* reaches out his hand and catches him. At this point, Jesus does not speak words of the same level of comfort. In verse 31 he says, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" Are these accusatory words from Jesus? Or, looking at the parallels in the narrative, is Jesus using this question as a way of comforting? We have no way of knowing his tone of voice, but perhaps Jesus was calmly and lovingly saying, "Why did you doubt? You know I would not let you fall." Regardless, Jesus' words and his power over nature elicit a strong confession of faith from those in the boat: "Truly you are the Son of God."

Each of the first two readings provides some interesting parallels to this idea of the power of words. Paul's strong words about the importance of a confession with the lips (Rom 10:9, 10, 13) speak of the power of our words about Jesus Christ. In the story of Elijah's encounter with God on Mount Horeb, we hear the power of God's Word and, sometimes, of God's sheer silence (1 Kgs 19:12).

**Pastoral Reflection**

Reflecting on these readings, I think it would be interesting to play around with the idea of voices: voices of fear, voices of despair, voices of hopelessness, voices of hope, and voices of life.

Elijah heard the voices of doom and gloom: I am the only one left. They're all out to get me. I'm all alone. God spoke surprising words to Elijah. God chose not to speak to him in the way he might have expected based on Moses' experience: God was not in the wind or the earthquake or the fire. God's presence was heard in the sound of sheer silence. Once Elijah had experienced that and known that, he was ready to hear from God. Elijah faced a challenge faced by all of us: the discernment of voices. How do we discern the voice of life from the voice of death? How do we tell what is God's voice and what is the voice of culture or personal ambition?

Skipping ahead to the Gospel reading, the disciples in the boat faced some of the same issues as Elijah did. Their experience in this story might provide us with some directions for voice discernment. The voice of Jesus was the voice they came to know and to confess as the voice of the Son of God. That voice had spoken words of comfort and peace: "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid" (Matt 14:27). That voice had invited Peter (and, by extension, all of us disciples) to step out of his normal experience and to get out of the boat. Finally, in that challenge to Peter "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" Jesus' voice combines the assurance of salvation with the challenge to our normal lifestyle and posture (doubting).

So, to recap, if you want to discern the voice of Jesus from the white noise that surrounds life, the voice of Jesus is the voice that promises peace and salvation while inviting us outside ourselves. SM-K

**Proper 15  
August 17, 2008**

Isaiah 56:1, 6–8

Psalm 67

Romans 11:1–2a, 29–32

Matthew 15:[10–20] 21–28

**First Reading**

Each of these readings emphasizes the great religious debate about in-crowd and out-crowd. Isaiah's prophecy demonstrates to us very clearly that God's intention has always been to gather all the peoples of the world, not just Israel. For those who would draw sharp distinctions between "the God of the Old Testament" and "the God of the New Testament" or between two covenants, this prophecy reminds us that God's intention has always been inclusion.

So what is it that determines who is in, who gets gathered on the holy mountain and in the house of prayer? Verse 6: "And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant—" In great Hebrew poetry parallelism, we hear the requirements: (1) join yourself to the LORD and love the name of the LORD, and (2) minister to the LORD and be the LORD's servant. Finally, (3) keep the Sabbath and the covenant.

The phrase "minister to him" caught my attention. It struck me as rather inward-focused (in terms of the community). Shouldn't we instead be ministering to the world? The verb used (שָׁרַת) is used of ministering in several different ways. One is of ministerial service in the sense of household or royal service. It specifically speaks of high service: the chief household steward, the royal "prime minister." Another usage of the word speaks of levitical or

priestly ministry in temple worship. There are two lessons here, I believe. First, we humans are seen as quite important in God's realm—parallel to a prime minister or a chief officer of the court. Also, God takes worship seriously and sees it as an important part of our lives as God's people. Those who would join themselves to the LORD are those also who worship, who minister, who offer prayers and offerings before God.

The passage from Romans also speaks of the inclusivity of God's kingdom, from a slightly different direction. Instead of Isaiah's insistence that the kingdom be opened to include all the nations other than Israel, Paul reminds us that the promises to Israel are still intact: "The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29). When God calls a people it is forever. When God makes a promise it is forever.

The Gospel reading deserves a much more in-depth treatment than this space allows. For now, suffice it to say that Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman demonstrates again the controversies and the problems of deciding in versus out. The optional verses that come before this encounter speak to some of the issues treated above related to the Isaiah reading: How does one determine boundaries in an inclusive kingdom? Jesus speaks against the boundary setting of hand-washing and, in a sense, makes the law much harder to understand or to keep. The boundary is set by what comes from the heart and comes out of the mouth.

### Pastoral Reflection

Much has been written and said about Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman. Jesus' initial response ("I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel") seems so harsh and unbiblical, at least based on the other readings before us today. Jesus calls this woman a dog. Some say he was trying to test

her or that he really didn't say "dog" in the negative sense we know. No matter: Jesus did not respond with the grace and open arms we would expect.

I take this story on its own terms, for what is presented: Jesus' mind was changed. He was convinced by this woman that she (and her unseen daughter) were deserving of some of the life and grace that he has to offer. Jesus grew in his understanding and his application of the principles of the kingdom.

We can understand this easily. It's one thing to believe that the church should welcome all people. But if *all people* really started to come, and we really had to encounter them and be changed by that encounter, our principles might be tested. Jesus faced the same challenge. And he learned. He learned how to faithfully apply the vision of Isaiah's prophecy. He learned how to faithfully apply the principle that Paul would write to the Romans: When God promises something, it sticks.

Speaking of the Romans text, this might be a good opportunity to preach against Christian supersessionism. God's promises to Israel are still valid, and Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection have not changed that. But remember, this promise of God's faithfulness to God's promises is gospel for us as well. In baptism, God has promised to adopt us, to care for us, and to wrap us in the clothes of Christ. Nothing in our lives or in the circumstances of the world can ever change that. SM-K

## Proper 16

### August 24, 2008

Isaiah 51:1–6  
 Psalm 138  
 Romans 12:1–8  
 Matthew 16:13–20

#### First Reading

This week's Isaiah reading comes squarely from what is known as Second Isaiah, which dates from the time of Cyrus of Persia. Cyrus was just about to conquer Babylon, and Second Isaiah looked forward to this as fulfillment of God's plan to return Judah from exile. Second Isaiah sees the events of history, of emperors and armies, as part of God's plan of restoration, hope, and salvation. The passage for this week promises "my salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never be ended" (v. 6). Also, "the LORD will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD" (v. 3).

Isaiah's promise is not merely words, however. Hearers and readers are not merely told to believe these promises. Evidence is given. A reason for belief is given. Hope is given something to cling to. "Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many" (vv. 1b–2). Exiles are reminded that God had been faithful in the past, to Abraham and to Sarah. They are called to remember the solidity of those promises and to hold fast again.

This same theme of rocks and solid foundations comes to us in the familiar and oft-quoted words from this week's Gospel reading. After Simon Peter's faithful con-

fession, Jesus' response includes the words "I tell you, you are Peter (Πέτρος) and on this rock (πέτρα) I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it" (v. 18).

This leads, of course, to lots of debates about what the meaning of the word "this" is . . . as in, what is the "this rock" on which Christ builds the church? Is it Peter, the man? Is it Peter's confession? Do "foundational" power and authority belong to Peter and those whom he chooses after him? Or does this power and authority belong to those who share Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah, Son of the living God?

These questions and debate might be reframed a bit. Taken in the context of our reading from Isaiah, rocks are not things on which we stand to be tall and proud. Rocks are not things we use to lord it over our neighbors and to have power and authority. Rocks are things to which we cling for strength and stability in turbulent times. Whether it's the witness of Peter, the institutions of the church passed down from his time, or the substance of his confession, it's a rock of hope and promise, not a rock of power.

#### Pastoral Reflection

The key questions for me from these texts and especially from the Gospel reading have to do with how we come to confess. How is it that we are able to say, with Peter, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God?" For Peter himself, Jesus says, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven" (Matt 16:17). Jesus places the credit for Peter's faith and ability to confess squarely with God.

Is the same true for us today? Of course it is. This may be a good time to reflect on Martin Luther's explanation of the third article of the Apostles' Creed. "I believe

that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel. . . .” All is a gift from God. Faith itself is a gift from God. The hope to which we can cling in times of storm and trouble is a gift from God.

Of course, it’s not that simple, either. Because flesh and blood does reveal this to us. Flesh and blood does reveal the nature of Jesus Christ to us. Flesh and blood in the form of parents and grandparents, pastors and Sunday school teachers reveals to us that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus’ identity is revealed to us by the many members with us of the body of Christ, to use Paul’s language from Romans 12: Prophets, ministers, teachers, exhorters, givers, leaders, and compassionate ones reveal the face of Christ to us.

Perhaps a helpful homiletical direction could be found in bringing these seemingly divergent realities together. Faith is a gift of God, we are called by the Holy Spirit, and we are strengthened by the Holy Spirit. No human arguments or beautiful words can change that or add one bit to it. And also: God grants that faith and calls us by the Holy Spirit through the words and deeds of very human ones. Through whom has God acted to grant you the ability to confess Jesus as Messiah? Start there. SM-K

## Proper 17

### August 31, 2008

Jeremiah 15:15–21

Psalms 26:1–8

Romans 12:19–21

Matthew 16:21–28

#### First Reading

In the Gospel reading, we pick up the story from Peter’s confession and head right into

Jesus’ teaching about the implications of that reality. “Yes, I am the Messiah; now let me tell you about the suffering, death, and resurrection that is to come.” Jesus begins to teach his disciples about the meaning and the cost of discipleship. So what exactly is at stake? What is the “life” that we will find if we lose it for Jesus’ sake? And what do we want to avoid forfeiting in exchange for the whole world?

The answer is our life, our  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ . According to the 2000 edition of *Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich*,  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$  speaks of the animating aspect of earthly life. “Without  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ , a being, whether human or animal, consists merely of flesh and bones and without functioning capability.” The passage under consideration today is listed under the definition “the seat and center of human life that transcends the earthly.”

We are not talking really about earthly corporeal life here. We are not talking about being willing to die for the gospel or to suffer physically for the gospel. That may be involved, but it’s not the point. Jesus is talking about being willing to lose our inmost selves, as we know them. Jesus is talking about being willing to be transformed in our animating (and animated) core.

The key question remains: What is that  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ ? What is “themselves” that we must deny to take up our cross and follow Jesus? It is our passions and our motivations, but it’s also more than that. It is our worldview and our assumptions, but it’s more yet. It’s everything that makes us human, our sentience, the glorious things about being human and the limiting and limited things about human experience. All of that. We need to be willing to have that transformed, or lost. Only when we lose the  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ , shaped by our human experiences and our sin, can we gain the  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$  intended for us as children of God.

Notice also that this is not a promise

that if you lose your earthly life (if you are killed) for the sake of gospel you will gain a future heavenly life. This is not only, or even primarily, a promise of future life. This is a promise of a transformed life here in this world.

### Pastoral Reflections

The First Reading on the nature of the  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$  and the promises of Jesus that we will find our true  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$  in him lead us right into pastoral reflection. What is the nature of that  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ , that discipleship life that is promised to us?

Paul's exhortations in Rom 12:9–21 provide some clues to the nature of faithful disciple life. Love is the basic standard and outline of life. "Let love be genuine" (v. 9) and "love one another with mutual affection" (v. 10). So the transformed life of the one who follows Jesus is marked by love, by mutual affection, by hope, by patience, perseverance, giving, and hospitality.

Paul then turns to how we should relate to those who do not interact based on this transformed life of love. When someone persecutes or curses a follower of Jesus, that one is to bless them. Vengeance is not for us to pursue, but we are to attempt to overcome evil with good. The basic advice that Paul has in this passage for how Christians are to live with others in this world can be summed up by verse 18: "If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."

How is that possible? We know from our own life experiences, as well as from the example of Peter in Matthew's Gospel, that our transformed  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$  is not the only reality within us. Like Peter, as soon as we confess Jesus as Messiah, we begin to question the plans that God has. We begin to think we know better. We set our mind on human things and not on divine ones.

This is where the connection to the first reading provides some gospel for us. Jere-

miah too has found God's call to be a difficult thing to bear. "I did not sit in the company of merrymakers, nor did I rejoice; under the weight of your hand. I sat alone, for you had filled me with indignation" (15:17). To this complaint, the LORD provides promise. "If you turn back, I will take you back, and you shall stand before me" (v. 19) and "I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze. . . . For I am with you to save you and deliver you" (v. 20).

In the midst of our battling  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ , of our struggle to set our mind on divine things and not on human things, of our battle to let love rule our actions, God promises to hold us up. God promises to deliver us. God promises to make us a strong and fortified wall of bronze. SM-K

## Proper 18 September 7, 2008

Ezekiel 33:7–11

Psalms 119:33–40

Romans 13:8–14

Matthew 18:15–20

### First Reading

Ezekiel's prophecy dates from the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. Chapters 1–24 of Ezekiel constitute oracles of warning from before the fall of Jerusalem. Chapters 25–32 (the oracles against the foreign nations) date from a few years just after the fall of Jerusalem, and chapters 33–48 are considered the oracles of hope after the fall of Jerusalem.

This passage, from chapter 33, is a part of the oracles of hope; it provides a bridge to speaking more directly about the fall of Jerusalem and the responsibility for that event. Ezekiel, as an appointed sentinel, has a responsibility to convey the warnings of

God against the wickedness of the people. Those who hear Ezekiel's message then have the responsibility to respond.

Even in the midst of this prophecy about wickedness and the responsibility for destruction, there is promise and hope. Ezekiel makes very clear that God's ultimate purpose is restoration: God's intention is always to save and give life. "As I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?" (33:11)

This intention for life, for restoration of community, and for the wicked to turn is the foundation for Jesus' advice about how the church should deal with sin in Matt 18:15–20. Each step in this process is intended to allow the one who has been wrong to see that wrong and engage in repentance. Each step is intended to lead to restoration and peace. Also, there is a very deliberate attempt to save the sinner from public ridicule and shame, if at all possible.

The final stage of this process of community response to sin occurs when someone refuses to listen to the whole community. The community is to "let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" (v. 17). Like the story of Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15, this word from Jesus seems jarring and contradictory to much of the rest of his message.

First, remember that Jesus is talking in verse 18 with the disciples and not the crowds. He is teaching them about how the community of his followers should order their life together. In this question of how to deal with community-threatening sin, the first thing that is very clear is that the intention is to restore community, to bring everyone back together. Finally, if that fails, the community is to treat the offender as a Gentile or tax collector. That is, the offender

is now to be treated as one outside the community who is sought out and invited in.

### **Pastoral Reflection**

The Gospel readings for this week and next provide some interesting perspectives on similar themes and issues. We have this week's teaching about how the community should deal with sin. Then, next week (and immediately following it in Matthew's Gospel) is Peter's question about how often to forgive. Jesus responds by telling Peter to forgive seventy-seven times and with the parable about the forgiven slave unwilling to forgive another.

There may be some very interesting ways to tie sermons together between the two weeks. Perhaps stories could be told of communities broken apart by sin and brought together through forgiveness. Powerful witness to the power of forgiveness and the need (on behalf of the wronged party) to forgive was given in the response of the Amish community of Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, in the aftermath of a school shooting there in October, 2006. This too from a community often perceived as ready to shun and turn their backs on outsiders!

Another direction for a sermon based on this Gospel reading might focus on Jesus' words to "let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." It is interesting to imagine the reaction to these words that one of Jesus' disciples might have had. Presumably Matthew was there—Matthew, the tax collector who had been welcomed and called to follow. I imagine that his first reaction might have been disbelief. Was Jesus now going to turn out just like all the other religious teachers? This might be a good opportunity to retell the story of Matthew's call from chapter 9. Remember that Matthew was called to follow. He was not called to continue sinning, but called to join the community.

Similarly, one could imagine the response of the Canaanite woman from chapter 15 if she had heard these words of Jesus, or the response of those of Jesus' disciples who had seen his encounter with that woman. Hadn't Jesus learned anything? Was he back now to disparaging Gentiles? Again, perhaps this week you'll take another look at that story and see how Jesus treats Gentiles, at least ultimately. Jesus provides the woman with hope and provides her daughter with healing.

Yet another direction for preaching could be found in helping the congregation to imagine themselves not as the wronged party but as the party doing the wrong. In our lives and in our relationships there are times when we sin against one another. There are times when we are offered opportunities for repentance and reconciliation and we turn our backs. In those times we are, like Matthew, called to leave our tax booths and follow. SM-K

## Proper 19 September 14, 2008

Genesis 50:15–21

Psalms 103: [1–7] 8–13

Romans 14:1–12

Matthew 18:21–35

### First Reading

In this week's Gospel reading, Peter asks Jesus for some clarification on the issue of forgiveness: How often should I forgive? Jesus responds by telling Peter that he should forgive "not seven times, but I tell you, seventy-seven times" (Matt 18:22). Perhaps this is an echo of the report in Gen 4:23–24, where Lamech tells his wives that he had killed. He then brags/promises that "if Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech sev-

enty-sevenfold." Jesus puts up forgiveness as the value of the kingdom, as opposed to vengeance.

Jesus then tells a parable to further illustrate his teaching on forgiveness. It is the parable of the unforgiving slave who had been forgiven himself (of a much greater debt) by the king. By telling this parable at this time, Jesus ties our human struggles related to forgiveness to a theological truth about God's grace. God has already forgiven us; notice that the greater forgiveness by the king of the slave comes first in the story. This forgiveness, which we receive from God, can be and should be example and inspiration for us to forgive those around us. Also, the portrayal of the king's willingness to forgive a debt of 10,000 talents (one talent = 15 years' wages) provides illustration of the extremes of God's forgiveness and grace for us.

As he begins the process of closing his letter to the Romans, Paul applies this perspective on forgiveness and human relations to a diverse community of faith. The community of faith in Rome to whom Paul wrote had some different perspectives on ethics and practices of faith. Some believed that Christians should be vegetarian and some felt meat was acceptable (14:2). Some believed in Sabbath observation while some did not (v. 5). Paul put all of these issues in the perspective of judgment, where we all stand. We all stand under the judgment of God, and it is not for us to pass judgment on the piety or practices of sisters and brothers. Whatever we do, whether we eat meat or not or observe the Sabbath or not, we should do it as a way of honoring God. That is the "test" of a proper piety, and not any particular practice. As an interesting connection to the Gospel parable, Paul asks this rhetorical question: "Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be



upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand” (v. 4). It is not for one servant to stand in judgment over another servant, but for the lord of both to do so. This is also the point that Joseph makes in Gen 50:19—that it is God’s place to judge the behavior of others.

### **Pastoral Reflection**

This is one of those Gospel pericopes that, when read during worship, leaves the liturgical response “Praise to you, O Christ” or “Thanks be to God” sounding quite hollow or forced. Jesus closes the parable without much good news: “And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart” (Matt 18:34–35). So where is our proclamation of good news for this week?

For me, a key verse for good news from all of this conversation is Rom 14:4: “Who are you to pass judgment on the servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.” We know a great deal about the lack of forgiveness that can sometimes be found in human relations. We have all experienced it, and we have plenty of stories to share. But here in Romans Paul reminds us that the one before whom our standing really matters is the Lord. It is before the Lord that we will stand or fall. And, of course, we know the end of the story. We know that we will not fall before the Lord. We will stand before the Lord. Note the passive voice: “they will be upheld.” We will not stand by our own power but will be upheld by another.

Now for a little fun with numbers in the parable. The king forgives the first slave a debt of 10,000 talents. We know that one talent was about 15 years’ wages for a laborer. The federal minimum wage today is

\$5.85 per hour. Assume a 40-hour work week, and this brings you to \$234 per week. Assume 52 weeks of work in a year, and you have a yearly wage of \$12,168. If one talent is 15 years’ wages, a talent equals \$182,520. So the first slave, who is forgiven a debt of 10,000 talents, is forgiven a debt of \$1,825,200,000. That’s nearly \$2 billion! Then, that slave turns around and refuses to forgive a debt of 100 denarii. One denarius was about a day’s wage; using the same calculations, the debt he refused to forgive was about \$4,680. The Lord who upholds us has already forgiven much more than we can ever imagine. SM-K

## **Proper 20**

### **September 21, 2008**

Jonah 3:10–4:11

Psalms 145:1–8

Philippians 1:21–30

Matthew 20:1–16

### **First Reading**

Jonah’s complaint against God for the grace shown to Nineveh is put in familiar words. Jonah quotes what seems to have been a covenantal formula identifying God. “I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing” (4:2). Words very similar to these are found first in God’s own mouth at the making of the Sinai covenant in Exod 34:6. Those words are then used by Moses as part of the argument with God about why God should relent from punishing the people for their disobedience in Num 14:18. Those same words then come back as part of the rededication liturgy in Neh 9:17; they are used in three different psalms (86, 103, and 145); they are also found in the prophet Joel’s call

for repentance in those familiar words from Ash Wednesday liturgies in Joel 2:13.

In each of these occurrences, the phrasing is seen as a positive, something worthy of praise. Jonah takes those same words and turns them into a complaint. In essence, Jonah accuses God of being soft on sin. God's reply is to say "Yes, I am. It's the basis of my identity in this covenant. I choose to be soft on sin. I choose to celebrate life and repentance."

God provides Jonah with the object lesson of the bush that grows overnight and then is killed to help Jonah understand that God's intention is always for repentance and life. God celebrates that the people of Nineveh have turned from their evil ways. God is free to choose to celebrate that repentance and to be "soft on sin."

That same freedom of choice reserved to God is emphasized by the parable that Jesus tells in Matt 20:1-16. Here we have day laborers hired at different times of the day: some at 5:00, some at 3:00, some at noon, some at 9:00, and some early in the morning. At the end of the day when the pay is handed out, the landowner (God) chooses to pay each one the same usual daily wage. God is free to be generous, to be gracious. God is free to celebrate that those who came to work only very late in the day came at all. God is free to forget what time each of us came.

Incidentally, the Greek behind the phrase "Are you envious because I am generous?" in v. 15 is literally "Is your eye evil because I am good?" When we look with envy on others, we look with evil eyes.

### **Pastoral Reflection**

When thinking about preaching many of Jesus' parables, I begin by considering them as stories with a variety of characters and a variety of perspectives. How would the story sound different or be told differently from

the perspective of each of the characters? This can be a very effective way of finding different layers of meaning in the story.

From the perspective of the landowner, this is a story about freedom and perhaps about charity. I as the landowner should be free to do with my money whatever I want. If I want to generously pay people what they haven't really earned, that's my business. If I feel bad for those who are still waiting for work late in the day or who, for whatever reason, couldn't get themselves to the pickup spot early in the morning, I should be free to give them my money.

From the perspective of a neighboring landowner, this story could be one of dangerous precedents and/or one of foolish business practices. As a neighboring landowner I might just laugh and say, "This fool will be out of business in a week with pay scales like that." Or I might be very upset by the standard that my neighbor is setting and the expectations he might be setting up in the laborers.

As for those who worked all day, we hear their perspective quite well in the story itself. I too would grumble against the landowner (v. 11) and feel like I had been robbed.

The perspective where we hear good news most clearly and where Jesus places us is in the shoes of those who worked only a little bit that day. We are latecomers to the party. We have not been working in the fields through the hot sun. And yet we are compensated. We are given what is not our due. God is not a God of justice. God is a God of grace. Thanks be to God! SM-K

## Proper 21 September 28, 2008

Ezekiel 18:1–4, 25–32

Psalm 25:1–9

Philippians 2:1–13

Matthew 21:23–32

### First Reading

The Gospel reading for this week is the first of Jesus' increasingly pointed controversies with temple authorities as he sat and taught in the temple. He has just triumphantly entered Jerusalem and cleansed the temple of moneychangers. Now he settles in to teach. Jesus' opponents settle in to trap him.

The question of the chief priests and elders in Matt 21:23 is not as repetitive as it first sounds: "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" The first question uses the word *ποιῶ* to refer to the authority in question. The question might be more clearly translated: "Of what sort/class of authority is the authority by which you do these things?" The questioners presume that Jesus has some authority. They want to know what sort of authority it is and from whom it came.

Jesus' response is vague. He confounds the issue by posing a question back that they must refuse to answer for fear of the crowd. Jesus is essentially drawing a parallel between himself and the nature of his authority and the nature of John's authority. If the chief priests and elders were willing to say that John's authority was from God, they would see Jesus' authority in the same way. Because they did not see John's authority as from God, they would not see Jesus' authority in that way, either.

Jesus then ups the ante on his questioners and poses a hypothetical scenario about two sons. One proclaims faithfulness but acts otherwise. Another lacks the verbal

proclamation but does the will of the father. His questioners and Jesus agree that the preferred response is the one who does the will of the father rather than the one who simply says the right thing. This is all tied back to the conversation about John and about authority because, according to Jesus, the chief priests and the elders proclaim the right kind of faithfulness with their mouths. However, their inability to rightly recognize the authority of John (or, incidentally, of Jesus) makes them like the disobedient son.

All of this conversation about authority leads us very nicely to Paul's quotation in Philippians 2 of a preexisting early Christian hymn. There we see that Christ Jesus saw authority properly exercised in emptying himself, taking the form of a slave. He exercised authority by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Following that, we are promised that the name of Jesus will elicit a faithful response in verses 10–11 "so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

### Pastoral Reflection

We are followers of one with authority. We are followers of one who took that authority and emptied himself. We often hear that and proclaim that authority as a prescriptive phenomenon. Jesus emptied himself and "did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited," so you should empty yourself and you should humble yourself.

That is all true, in some circumstances. Preachers need to know the people and the situation in which they are preaching. Maybe a message of humility and proper perspective on authority is needed. But in another context, maybe there's a bit too much humility and a bit too much authority coming from outside.

## Preaching Helps

But what is true for all of us is that this hymn that Paul quotes and the authority of which Jesus speaks are not first and foremost about us but about Jesus Christ—about Christ's authority and emptying and

humility. Maybe it's time to take a break from saying "Jesus humbled himself and so you should, too" and instead say "Jesus humbled himself FOR YOU." SM-K

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