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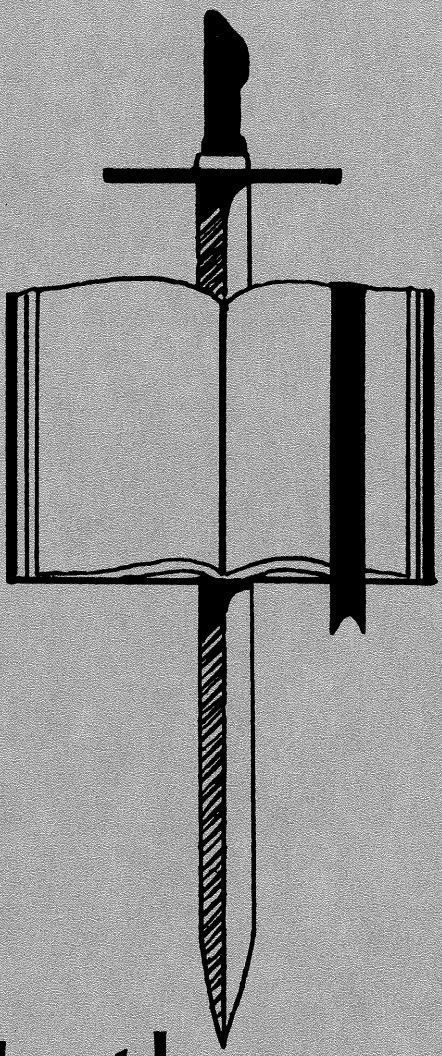

Lutheran Synod Quarterly

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

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FOREWORD

In this issue of the Quarterly we are happy to share with our readers the 21st annual Reformation Lectures, which were delivered at Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, Minnesota, on October 26-27, 1988. These lectures are jointly sponsored by Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary.

The lectures centered around the theme LUTHER, THE MUSICIAN. The lecturer was Pastor Kurt Eggert, Director of the WELS Hymnal Project. In these lectures Pastor Eggert aptly describes the musical life and times of Martin Luther and shows the tremendous contribution which the reformer made to the church, giving the Lutheran church the reputation of "the singing church." We trust that these lectures will lead us to a renewed appreciation of the rich legacy which Luther left to the church.

The reactors were Dr. Alfred Fremder, Coordinator of Musical and Cultural Activities, Chaplain, and Associate Professor of Practical Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri; and Professor Bruce Backer, Instructor of Music at Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota. Their thought-provoking reactions are included in this issue.

Our readers will also appreciate two brief but timely articles by Pastor David Jay Webber, which succinctly describe the underlying differences in doctrine between Lutheranism and Romanism on the one hand and between Lutheranism and Protestantism on the other. These articles were written in response to questions from church members who were interested in these differences.

--WWP

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LUTHER, THE MUSICIAN

by

Kurt J. Eggert

Bethany Lutheran College
Mankato, Minnesota

October 26-27

LECTURE I

THE MUSICAL LIFE AND TIMES OF MARTIN LUTHER

Imagine what it would be like if we could bridge the centuries and bring Martin Luther to spend a day or week with us in our world and time. Would he not be stunned to see and experience whizzing autos and super-highways, a city ablaze with electric lights and neon signs, a jet airliner, skyscrapers, robots working on an assembly line, radio music from Germany, TV pictures in color of a Lutheran church service in Africa or Olympic Games from Korea, baseball, a modern farm, typewriters, telephones, microwave dinners, a modern bathroom, computers, a rocket launch, men landing and walking on the moon! Would he not be struck speechless? It seems easier to imagine being able to go back five centuries in time and to spend a day with Luther in Wittenberg. We can, of course, actually still walk where Luther walked, perhaps listen to a choir in the Castle church, or struggle our way to the Wartburg or visit the Luther house. But it is not the same. The streets may still be crooked and narrow, the houses much like those of old, but actually their world and life is in the here and now with us in the 20th century. We cannot experience the world of Luther without that still mythical time machine. But if we intend to focus on the musical facet of the great reformer's life and work, it may help a little to look back in time and try to understand something of his life and times. We have no videos to show of Luther, no photographs or tape recordings. But we can dip liberally into the words and observations of those who have devoted years to research in order to bring Luther and his world nearer to us.

Luther was born into a time of expanding horizons, a time of exploration and discovery. We often say, "The world is getting smaller." In Luther's day the world was getting bigger -- and rounder. Luther was nine years old when Columbus, sailing west to get to the East, touched land on Samona Island, near Cuba. In so doing he discovered the "brave new world," America, though he never set foot on the mainland. When Luther stood before the imperial Diet at Worms, Magellan was on his way around the world and had found the way from the Atlantic to the Pacific through the straits at the tip of South America. By the time Luther proposed marriage to Katherin von Bora (or was it the other way around?), Cortez had subdued Montezuma and claimed Mexico for Spain. Before Luther died in 1546, Pizarro had conquered the Incas in Peru, Cortez had discovered California, and De Soto had explored Florida and the Mississippi as far as the Ohio. And immense wealth in silver and gold flowed into Europe from the new world.

But America was only one gem in the crown of the Renaissance -- the movement that bridged medievil and modern times and affected all of Europe from the 14th to the mid-17th century. During the medieval centuries the church controlled the life and thinking of society. With the Renaissance the preoccupation with the things of God, with death and the next life turned to concern with this life and with man himself. People began to agree that "the proper study of mankind is man." Self-consciousness and individual expression became important. Culturally, there were brilliant new accomplishments in scholarships, literature, and the arts. In their thirst for learning, they looked back to classical antiquity and the ideals of Greek and Roman culture. Humanism became a prevailing philosophy, replacing the scholasticism

of the former centuries. Biblical humanism motivated research of biblical texts, new translations and personal study and interpretation of the Scriptures. There was also, however, a new interest in the languages of the people and a new vernacular literature in both secular and religious fields was produced. Socially, the Renaissance saw the rise of the middle class of merchants, business men, and trades people. The growth of wealth produced a new aristocracy, which made its power felt by the rest of society and enjoyed and fostered music and the arts. Riedel notes, "For many centuries music had been composed for the church and the court. Music-making by and for the middle-class city dweller -- craftsman, guildsman, businessman -- was something new."[1] This new simpler and secular music, along with the traditional music of the Roman church, was important source material for Luther when he set about the creation of a new kind of hymnody for the Lutheran congregation.

Politically, 16th-century Europe was caught in a continuing three-way tug of war between the papacy, the rising nation-states, and the elected rulers of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. The motivation that drove all three were the usual greed for power and the need for money. The result was a constant intrigue and sometimes open hostility and war. The individual rulers of the nation-states were the eventual winners in this triangle, but after the papacy capitulated and the Empire became a powerless political symbol, the three kings of France, England, and Spain engaged in constant warfare between themselves. Germany was not an equal partner in this situation, because there was no centralized power in Germany. It was a patchwork of duchies, marks, electoral states, and free cities which were all accountable only to themselves and to the Emperor whose main powerbase was in Germany. Each generally tried

to extend his power and lands at the expense of his neighbor. Charles V. Emperor in Luther's time, was the last emperor to be crowned by the pope. Thereafter the political power of both pope and emperor declined as that of the kings increased. In 1806, in the time of Napoleon, the Holy Roman Empire in Germany was finally and formally abolished.

The Renaissance in Germany came about a hundred years after it had first emerged in Italy in the 14th century. The Reformation in Germany was played out against the backdrop of the Renaissance. The two movements impinged on each other, but the Reformation was not a child of the Renaissance. It was not a case of cause and effect, although the Renaissance provided some of the tools and means as well as the opportunity for recovering the Gospel and reforming the church. But we need to narrow our field and focus on Germany, Electoral Saxony, and the City of Wittenberg and the towns around. This was the world of Martin Luther and here we can see some of the influences that prepared both Luther the Reformer and Luther the Musician.

Martin Luther was born in Eisleben, but he lived most of his life in the larger town or city of Wittenberg, population about 3,000. A city in those days was considered large with a population of 4,000. Wittenberg was a university town. The Elector, Frederick the Wise, had founded it in 1502 and it was his pride and joy. It also became the center of the Reformation when all the members of the faculty were drawn to stand doctrinally with Luther. One usual feature of the cities was the steeple or tower skyline which marked not only the "town" churches but the churches attached to the various monasteries or to the university, if there was one. Wittenberg's principal churches were the town church, St. Mary's, and the Castle church, which belonged to the university. Most of the

houses in Luther's day were still the low, one-story type, roofed with thatch, although a number of tiled homes in Wittenberg revealed the comparative wealth of their owners. At the center of the town was the market-square to which the people from surrounding villages would bring their produce and other items for sale. Once a year there was a fair, which brought merchants from other cities and even other countries. Wittenberg, like most German cities, was located alongside a river, the Elbe, which served as alternate traffic route to the market. Schwiebert has a colorful description of the annual fair in larger cities:

> The various national costumes of the merchants from all over Europe and the somber robes of the university men, students, monks, and church dignitaries mingled with distinctive peasant garb to compose the kaleidescopic picture presented by the crowded market.
>
> Here silks, woolens, and spices from the Orient, fine leathers, paper, pottery, and every imaginable commodity were for sale. On such occasions the streets were full of pack animals, oxcarts, and other vehicles, which moved slowly, heavily laden with wares from distant lands. Add to the picture the mendicants begging in the crowd, the omnipresent pickpockets and thieves, the bankers busily working out rates of exchange, the emporiums of the booksellers and printers, to recapture the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the annual market or fair.[2]

After visiting the Kurkreis, a group of villages clustered around Wittenberg, Luther was moved to say, "We are living on the frontier of civilization!" Though he was speaking particularly of the ignorance and lack of culture among the peasants, the level of living conditions and lack of

sanitation only strengthened his observation. The famous humanist philosopher Erasmus in his book The Inns has one of his characters, William, describe the lack of sanitation and the inhospitality shown to travelers in German inns:

> "In the stove room (where the guests are all gathered) you take off your boots and put on slippers. If you like, you change your shirt; you hang your clothes, wet with rain, against the stove; and you sit by it yourself in order to get dry. There is water ready if you care to wash your hands, but it is generally so dirty that you have to seek more water to wash off that ablution."
>
> William explains that "very often between eighty and a hundred persons are assembled in the same stove-room, footmen, horsemen, tradesmen, and sick people." After explaining, "one is combing his hair, another wiping the perspiration from his face, another cleaning his winter shoes or boots, he finally pictures them seated at the evening meal, which occurs around nine o'clock or ten o'clock in the evening:
>
> "Well, after all are seated, the grim servant comes out and counts the company. By and by he returns and sets before each guest a wooden dish and a spoon of the same kind of silver; then a glass and a little piece of bread. Each one polishes his utensils in a leisurely way while the porridge is cooking. And thus they sit not uncommonly for upward of an hour."
>
> William also complains about the lack of cleanliness for the bedroom. He adds that there "you get, just as at dinner; linen washed six months ago, perhaps."[3]

If life in the towns and smaller cities was commonly austere, life in the villages for the peasants was truly miserable. The peasants who worked the land were still part of medieval feudalism, which was disintegrating but not yet replaced by a rising capitalism. It may be worthwhile to probe a little further into the situation of the peasants, who made up about 85 percent of the population.

Around the year 1100 feudalism was still workable and respectable. The peasant worked at the direction of the lord of the manor. In return, the lord took care of his necessities and gave him protection. The lords of the manors were relatively independent and the manor was typically self-sufficient. Everything needed was grown and crafted on the estate. By 1600 things had deteriorated considerably. The peasants were bound to the soil and could not rise above their condition. Often there were so many services to perform on the lord's land that they had to till their own tiny plots by moonlight. Sometimes they were encouraged with whips. The lords were intent on extending their lands or income and without concern for their workers' poverty or physical suffering. In Luther's day their lot was growing steadily worse and there was no hope or opportunity for betterment. Gradually they became the laughing stock of the merchants and burghers. Schwiebert sums up their condition in these words:

> In poetry, play, and song the peasant was pictured as stupid, obscene, nasty, scheming, stubborn, gluttonous, hard-drinking and little above the level of an animal.[4]

The result of this general ridicule was that the peasants themselves had little self-respect. They accepted the judgment but harbored a deep and

bitter resentment against all they considered to be their tormentors.

Most of the people lived in the villages which were generally built four or five miles apart. Their average population was about seventy-five. The houses of that time had thatch-top roofs, although some of the wealthier people in the cities had tiled roofs. Only the larger cities were walled. The streets were very narrow and most houses were built up to the street, some with upper stories protruding over the lower. A few houses boasted windows of glass, but most made do with oiled paper, linen, or pigskin.

There were good schools in the cities, designed to prepare students for the university. These Latin schools were taught by Catholic teachers. The city council usually picked one of the schools as the "town school" and supported or assisted in maintaining it. A few schools were controlled by the guilds. Bainton gives us an excellent description of a typical Latin school:

> The schools were not tender, but neither were they brutal. The object was to impart a spoken knowledge of the Latin tongue. The boys did not resent this because Latin was useful -- the language of the Church, of law, diplomacy, international relations, scholarships, and travel. The teaching was by drill punctuated with the rod. One scholar, called a lupus or wolf, was appointed to spy on the others and report lapses into German. The poorest scholar in the class every noon was given a donkey mask, hence called the asinus, which he wore until he caught another talking German. Demerits were accumulated and accounted for by birching

at the end of the week. Thus one might have fifteen strokes on a single day.[5]

The motivation for learning, therefore, was a combination of fear and shame. If Luther's reaction is typical of student reactions of that day, the method was uncomfortable but effective.

The school which Luther entered at about age five at Mansfeld was a Trivialschule in which the medieval trivium of Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric was pursued on three levels, beginning with the kindergarten and continuing until the student was ready for entrance into the university. Music and Religion were not officially part of the trivium, but many hours were spent teaching both, often simultaneously. Because of their involvement in daily devotions and services, the students were taught the elements of the Catholic church service and they memorized many prayers, psalms, and parts of the Vulgate Bible, which was in Latin. Each week the Epistle and Gospel for the coming Sunday were explained and the students were taught the hymns, versicles and responses, and psalms. We remember that all of this was in Latin. The boys also had to learn how to calculate the days and seasons of the church year. In a time when there were so many saints' days and special services, this was not an easy task. In music they were trained how to sing the psalms and learned by heart the Sanctus, the Benedictus, the Agnus Dei and the Magnificat. They attended the masses and took part in the processions on holy days.

Each town in which Luther went to school was full of churches and monasteries. "Everywhere it was the same: steeples, spires, cloisters, monks of the various orders, collections of relics, ringing of bells, proclaiming of indulgences, religious processions, cures at shrines. Everything taught impinged in some way on religion."[6]

We have a four-part composition from Luther's own hand. Where did he get the knowledge of that craft, with its somewhat complex rules of counterpart? That was a result of his school days in Mansfeld, Magdeburg, and Eisenbach. And later, in his life as an Augustinian monk, all of this was reinforced. There he was awakened at one or two in the morning by the ringing of the cloister bell, calling him to the first seven daily services of the community. There were daily services of the community. There were actually eight services, each with a unique character and accent, but the first two, Matins and Lauds, were combined. At 6 a.m. there was Prime, which looked forward to a day of work with prayers for God's help. The services at 9, 12, and 3 o'clock (called Terce, Sext, None) were brief and had the general character of petition. At the end of the work day there was Vespers with praise and thanksgiving for the day and its end. The Breviary held the huge amount of liturgical material needed for all the services. The English translation, double column, runs 3000 pages with 40 pages of general rubrics. The whole psalter - 150 pages - was chanted during the course of each week -- Luther knew the whole psalter by heart. This intimate knowledge of the psalter and all the material of the hour services, together with the various musical scales or modes, as they were called, certainly was valuable knowledge when Luther came to revising or reforming the liturgy for the Mass. The Lutheran Reformation retained the use of Matins and Vespers as congregational services along with the religious communities at universities and cathedrals. Bugenhagen in his church orders for north Germany and Denmark provided for daily Matins and Vespers in the principal churches where there were choirs and schools and Vespers for the whole congregation on Saturdays, Sundays, and days before great festivals. These gradually fell into disuse,

especially after the 30-Years War (1618-1648) which almost totally disorganized societal and religious life.

Martin Luther grew up in the time when unaccompanied choral music reached full bloom. He loved the Latin motets and settings of the Ordinary of the Mass (the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus and Agnus Dei). As we listen to an eight-voice motet, perhaps with two choirs singing antiphonally and together, the degree of complexity, sophistication and beauty of this church music is amazing. Until around the year 1000 there were only single-strand melodies or chants. Harmony had not yet been discovered. Nor was there any good way to write the music so as to tell the singers the pitch of the various notes, the duration, and how many syllables of the text were to be sung on one note. First they had to discover the sound of a melody with notes a fifth higher or a fourth below moving in parallel. Soon there was music of 3 and 4 strands with resultant harmony. Likely this was an accidental discovery perhaps as more than one note was sounded on a primitive organ -- Who knows?

The development of the organ to its present high status was not an easy road. Instruments were banned in the Eastern Church and there is little mention in the Western Church in early centuries. There was a tenth-century organ in the Winchester Cathedral in England with two manuals of twenty keys each. It took two persons to play it and seventy to operate it. Similar instruments were built by monks in Germany. Most were one octave and were played by pulling slides which opened the air passages to the pipes. About the year 1000 pipe organs of this type were found in Germany in Erfurt and Magdeburg cathedrals. Magdeburg had the first organ with a keyboard. There were 16 keys, each 3-5 inches wide and played with

the fist. An organ in the Halberstadt Cathedral built in 1361 was the most famous of its time. It had three manuals and twenty-two keys. Wind was supplied by ten men operating twenty bellows. The largest pipe was 31 feet long. Black keys were introduced in the 14th century, completing the chromatic octave of 12 notes. Pedals were also introduced at this time. By the time Martin Luther was old enough to take notice of such things, the organ had a keyboard similar to ours and had a system of stops making it possible to select sets of pipes to be used. In Luther's lifetime the organ began to be a valuable asset to worship, though it was not used to accompany the congregation in singing hymns.

The development of music notation was laborious. By the eighth century a neumatic system was in general use. The neumes were a series of dots, curves, and dashes which were placed so as to indicate by relative distance above words whether the melody was going up or down. This system indicated neither pitch nor duration accurately. One really had to learn the melody by hearing someone sing it. Then the neumes were helpful in recalling it. By the tenth century there are the beginnings of our modern system. A red line was drawn which represented the pitch of F. The neumes placed relatively above or below the line helped give a better idea of the pitch. Later a second line in yellow was placed above the red to indicate the pitch C. With two reference points it was easier to read. Much experimentation followed, but by 1050, when a monk named Guido of Arezzo came on the scene, a four-line staff was standard, using both lines and spaces. Guido designated a Latin letter for each line and space. You can see today's staff emerging. Plainsong is still printed and sung from a four-line staff. Today we have an 11-line staff. That's too big to

be handy, so the middle line is left out and we have the treble clef above and bass clef below. Letters represent the diatonic scale. This, together with different kinds of notes to indicate precise duration, make it possible to read music without first hearing it.

The musical modes or scales that were in use in Luther's day in church music were in contrast to the two modes we use commonly today, major and minor. Luther was well-versed in the use of the modes and even introduced a new church mode into use -- the Ionian.

Another factor important to the musical success of the Reformation was the great love of the Germans for singing. They were not attracted to the Gregorian plain chant and the church was not able to keep the Germans strictly in line, liturgically speaking, and they were granted some privileges. One was the singing of hymns or certain hymns in the mass and that in the vernacular. An example is the singing of the Leisen, hymns which were expansions of the Greek Kyrie Eleison (hence "Leisen"). On occasion this singing was of considerable proportions. Koch states:

> On the festival of the Ascension of Mary...the people would first sing the Kyrie Eleison hundred times, then the Christe, Eleison one hundred times and then repeat the Kyrie Eleison a hundred times.[7]

To make these Kyries more interesting or meaningful, German texts were added to the melodies. These were the first German hymns sung by the congregation in the mass. One of the most popular Leisen was the twelfth-century Easter hymn (TLH 187) "Christ is Arisen." The practice of singing German hymns in the performance of the Mystery Plays, which were theatrical accounts of the events in

the Gospels, also helped bring the German hymns into the church service. Liemohn quotes Hirscher, a priest who made the observation about the Germans and their hymns:

> In Germany a passing stranger often sees the peasantry at mass, singing with all their hearts their beautiful German hymns. It misleads, however. They are not attending to the Mass, but consoling themselves by spiritual songs while the Mass goes on without their assistance.[8]

Hymns were sung at Matins and Vespers and at other occasions such as on pilgrimages, at baptisms, processions, etc. There is no doubt the early Christians sang hymns as a congregation but after the Edict of Toleration permitted them to meet freely in the Empire, the increasing formality and complexity of the developing liturgies encouraged more and more participation by the clergy and less by the congregation. Finally, there was no singing by the congregation permitted in the Mass.

As we look back at the times and life of Luther, we can hardly miss the observation that a number of factors were preparing Germany and western Europe for the Reformation, and that a number of influences in the life and training of Luther were preparing him personally for his role in the Reformation.

There was social ferment and some eagerness for change, even though Germany was still basically a medieval society. The peasants were being pressed for more and more services while less and less was provided for them. Increasingly, they managed to make their way into the towns and cities. The middle class of merchants and craft people was becoming more independent and influential, while the power of the guilds and local lords decreased.

The centralization of power in the hands of the more important princes and kings was making the control of the church and papacy less absolute. All classes shared a lack of respect for the church because of the pressure of the popes for money and because of their personal moral and spiritual degeneracy and preoccupation with worldly power, wealth, and pleasure.

In Luther's personal life, there were important influences that helped the cause of reformation. The friendship and power of Luther's prince, Elector Frederick of Saxony, prevented the emperor Charles V from arresting Luther and dealing with him as the Council of Constance had with Hess a century earlier. The pope was also deterred from pressing the Elector too far in regard to Luther because he could not afford to alienate him or to lose further influence with the Germans. Another personal plus for Luther was his early classical education with its study of language, philosophy, and music. His brilliant religious writings, Bible translations, and involvement in debate were possible not only because of his native talent but also because of his thorough education. His years in the monastery with its constant worship were invaluable in his later reformation of liturgy and music. His intimate knowledge of the sophisticated choral music of his day was invaluable in raising his musical sights, and his love of German folk music helped him to empathize with the peasants. Perhaps the single most important item in Luther's life and work, outside the spiritual, was the printing press. Without the development of that invention, it would be hard to imagine how Luther's books, pamphlets, hymns, and other writings could have been spread across Germany and beyond. And the availability of printed Bibles meant that thousands of people were able to read for themselves from God's Word. Additional

positive influences could be mentioned. The Germans' extraordinary love for singing was not an unimportant factor in getting the hymns of Luther learned and sung. Still another factor was the growing influence of the University of Wittenberg and the spreading acceptance of the philosophy of biblical humanism. That helped pave the way for study of Hebrew and Greek and of the Bible texts. But the most powerful factor on Luther's side was the hunger of thousands for the truth and for the consolation of a loving and forgiving God in Christ. It was not the melodies of Luther's hymns nor the fact that they were in German, it was rather the power of the Holy Spirit, working through that Gospel with which Luther's hymns were packed tight, that moved their hearts and will to stand with Luther against pope, prince, and devil.

As Christians, we read the signs of God's involvement and blessing. God is the Giver and he it is who makes all things work for good for his people. We can recognize the hand of God as it works in history to accomplish his purposes. Luther was God's servant and in God's sight it was the right place and the right time. God blessed and it was done.

ENDNOTES

1 Johannes Riedel, The Lutheran Chorale (Augsburg Publishing House, 1967) p. 33.

2 E. G. Schwiebert, Luther and His Times (St. Louis, Concordia, 1950) pp. 94-95.

3 The Inns, Landmarks in History, p. 50. Quoted in Schwiebert, pp. 92-93.

4 E. G. Schwiebert, Luther and His Times, p. 558.

5 Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand (Pierce and Smith, 1950) published as Mentor Book (Abingdon Press, Nashville, Tennessee, 1963) p. 18.

6 Bainton, p. 20.

7 Eduard Emil Koch, Geschichte des Kirchenlieds und Kirchengesangs. (Stuttgart, 1866). Quoted in Edwin Liemohn, The Singing Church (The Wartburg Press, Columbus, Ohio, 1959) p. 33.

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LECTURE II

MUSIC, HYMNODY, LITURGY AND WORSHIP

Martin Luther was, to put it much too blandly, a music lover. "Next to the Word of God," he said, "the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world! The riches of music are so excellent and so precious, that words fail me whenever I attempt to discuss and describe them."[1] Actually, words seldom failed Luther on any topic and certainly not when he was on the subject of music. He was consistently eloquent, whether writing a careful foreword to some musical publication, or speaking on the spur of the moment in one of his table talks.

But Luther himself did feel inadequate when discoursing on music because "I am so completely overwhelmed by the quantity and greatness of its excellence and virtues that I can find neither beginning nor end, nor adequate words and expressions to say what I ought." Because Luther was so intense and enthusiastic in his feeling about music, we might take his seemingly extravagant claims about it with a large grain of salt. This, I think, would be a mistake. Perhaps not all of us would be ready to say a precise Amen to his statement that next to the Word of God the art of music is the greatest treasure in the world. But for Luther it was a firm and considered conviction. He had a rather carefully thought-out musical philosophy which was rooted in his theology. Though without the training of a professional musician of his time, he had considerable knowledge and enough skill to write a four-voice motet in

the contrapuntal style of his day. He also played the lute, was an excellent singer, and showed surprising discrimination as a music critic.

In this essay we propose to sketch what Luther thought about music, did with music, and accomplished for music. We intend to let him speak for himself. For convenience' sake, most of the quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from a translation by Walter E. Buszin.[1]

MUSIC

Most of us do not think very hard about music. We listen to what we like and simply avoid what we dislike. Most of us are exposed to a remarkable spectrum of musical sounds, the likes of which Luther could not imagine. But we do not think much about it. Even in our hymn singing we seem to be conditioned to sing without much thought, interest, curiosity, appreciation, or reaction, unless, of course, the hymn is unfamiliar or "heavy," in which case the reaction is usually negative. Luther thought about music, reacted strongly to it, and was articulate about it.

Music as God's wondrous gift of creation

Luther thought of music as a truly wonderful, mysterious and powerful gift of God's creative hand. In a preface to a collection of part-songs published in 1538, Luther wrote the following:

> I most heartily desire that music, that divine and precious gift, be praised and extolled before all people....Experience proves that, next to the Word of God, only music deserves being extolled as a mistress and governess of the feelings of

the human heart....A greater praise than this we cannot imagine.[2]

In the same year Luther wrote in a foreword to a musical collection published by Georg Rhau:

> I truly desire that all Christians would love and regard as worthy the lovely gift of music, which is a precious, worthy, and costly treasure given mankind by God... It controls our thoughts, minds, hearts, and spirits....Our dear fathers and prophets did not desire without reason that music be always used in the churches. Hence we have so many songs and psalms.[3]

In a letter written to the noted Catholic composer, Ludwig Senfl, Luther discloses his thought about the power of music:

> There are, without doubt, in the human heart many seedgrains of virtue which are stirred up by music. All those with whom this is not the case I regard as blockheads and senseless stones. For we know that to the devils music is something altogether hateful and unbearable. I am not ashamed to confess publicly that next to theology there is no art which is the equal of music. For it alone, after theology, can do what otherwise only theology can accomplish, namely, quiet and cheer up the soul of man, which is clear evidence that the devil, the originator of depressing worries and troubled thoughts, flees from the voice of music just as he flees from the words of theology. For this very reason the prophets cultivated no art so much as music in that they attached their theology not to geometry, nor to arithmetic, not to astronomy, but to music, speaking the truth through psalms and hymns.[4]

This power of music to affect the emotions, particularly when coupled with the Word -- to dispel depression, ward off temptation and make the heart joyful -- was for Luther a strong reason to champion its use in Christian worship, whether in simple melodies of congregational hymns or in the artistic music of the choirs.

As Christians of the twentieth century, viewing Luther from the distance of five hundred years, we may sense a gulf between us in the attitude toward music that is more than a matter of time. Not that we disagree in substance with Luther, but his wide-eyed wonder at the nature and power of music, his amazement at the wisdom of the God who created and gave such a gift to man, and his delight and dependence on music and its power, all may seem to us to be a little overblown, a little naive. But whose is the deficiency? If Luther were here today and could experience the marvelously expanded world of musical sound and composition that has evolved since his day, he might well knit his brow and shake his head at our casual attitude. With luck he would not add in his usual unreserved way, "A person...who does not regard music as a marvelous creation of God, must be a clodhopper indeed and does not deserve to be called a human being; he should be permitted to hear nothing but the braying of asses and the grunting of hogs."[5]

Music as art

Luther lived in the golden age of unaccompanied choral music. The Netherlands school of composers had brought the art of multi-voiced choral singing to a high point. Luther greatly admired these vocal motets which were based on Gregorian chant melodies and elaborately embellished by the various voices. We might expect that he who marveled at

the song of the finch, the gift of speech, the ability to express thoughts and emotions of the heart in a song, would certainly wax eloquent at hearing the choral church music of his day. And so he does:

> This precious gift [music] has been bestowed on men alone to remind them that they are created to praise and magnify the Lord. But when natural music is sharpened and polished by art, then one begins to see with amazement the great and perfect wisdom of God in his wonderful work of music, where one voice takes a simple part and around it sing three, four, or five other voices, leaping, springing round about, marvelously gracing the simple part, like a folk dance in heaven with friendly bows, embracing, and hearty swinging of partners. He who does not find this an inexpressible miracle of the Lord is truly a clod.[6]

Although Luther did not consider himself a composer, he had enough knowledge of the choral art of his day to compose a four-voice motet which demonstrates his understanding of the complex rules of sixteenth century counterpoint [Non moriar, sed vivam -- "I shall not die, but live"]. History confirms his judgment that Josquin Depres, Pierre de la Rue and Ludwig Senfl were the best composers of his time. Of Depres he writes, "Josquin is a master of the notes, which must express what he desires; on the other hand, other choral composers must do what the notes dictate."[7]

Unlike some of the other Protestant reformers, Luther did not reject the composers of the Roman Catholic Church or their music because of their

Roman associations. He borrowed freely from their music and though he was quick to reject or change the texts, he valued the music. In connection with a collection of burial hymns which appeared in 1542, he said,

> To set a good example, we have made some selections from beautiful music and hymns used in the papacy, in vigils, masses of the dead, and at burials, and have published some of this volume....However, we have changed the texts and have not retained those used in the papacy....The songs and the music are precious; it would be a pity, indeed, should they perish.[8]

In 1530, while at the Coburg, Luther wrote to his friend, Ludwig Senfl:

> Grace and peace in Christ! Although my name is so thoroughly hated and despised, dear Ludwig, that I must fear you will receive and read my letter hardly with safety, my love for music, with which I perceive God has adorned and talented you, has conquered all my fears. My love for music leads me also to hope that my letter will not endanger you in any way, for who, even in Turkey, would find fault with anyone who loves music and praises the artist? I, at least, love your Bavarian dukes, even though they certainly dislike me. I honor them above all others because they cultivate and honor music....My heart overflows with fondness for music, which has refreshed me so often and freed me from great burdens. I return to you with the request that, should you possess a copy of the song, "I Lie and Sleep Enwrapped by Peace," you have it copied out and sent to me....I hope that the end of my life is near, for the world hates

me and does not care to tolerate me any longer; on the other hand, I have had my fill of this world and despise it. Therefore, may my good and faithful Shepherd take my soul out of this world. For this very reason I am singing this song oftener and should like a many-voiced arrangement of it....The Lord Jesus be with you into eternity. Amen. Pardon my boldness and verbosity. Extend to your entire chorus my respectful greetings.[9]

Luther consistently championed choral music. He repeatedly urged the dukes and princes to support choirs and composers, and considered training in part-singing to be a part of a well-rounded education and a necessity for teachers and ministers. With regard to the latter point, he wrote in his preface to the Geistliches Gesangbuechlein (a choir hymnal of five Latin and 32 German hymns, arranged in four and five parts by Johann Walther and published in 1535):

> Together with several others I have collected a number of spiritual songs.... in order that through these the Word of God and Christian doctrine may be preached, taught, and put into practice....I desire this particularly in the interest of the young people, who should and must receive an education in music as well as in the other arts if we are to wean them away from carnal and lascivious songs and interest them in what is good and wholesome. Only thus will they learn, as they should, to appreciate and love what is intrinsically good....Unfortunately the world has become lax towards the real needs of its youth and has forgotten to train and educate its sons and daughters along proper lines. The welfare of our youth should be

our chief concern. God grant us His grace. Amen.[10]

The purpose and use of music

In spite of Luther's deep love and admiration for music, it was his theology which was the source of his convictions about the purpose and use of music. His consciousness of music as a wonderful gift of God's creation led him to the natural conclusion that music was a gift to be received with thankfulness and appreciation, a gift which should be used to the glory of God and the good of man. Secondly, nothing therefore seemed more natural to him than that music should be coupled with the Word. Almost always when Luther speaks about "music" he means music and a Christian text. Though Luther enjoyed good secular music and poetry and was fond of the German folk songs and of the music and song that accompanied dancing, he felt that music fulfilled its natural and highest purpose and use when it was used to carry and express the truths of God's Word. Thirdly, it was primarily the gospel which should be both the inspiration and the content of that song. For Luther, music and the gospel were a wedding made in heaven. The gospel is the good news that brings faith, hope, and joy. Music has the power to light up that message, give life to the words, impress it on the human heart and express the joy it brings. What more ideal combination for Christian worship! What better way to conserve and spread the gospel!

In his preface to his last hymnal, published by Valentin Bapst in 1545, Luther says:

> God has made our hearts and spirit happy through his dear Son, whom He has delivered up that we might be redeemed from sin, death, and the devil. He who believes this

> cannot but be happy; he must cheerfully sing and talk about this, that others might hear it and come to Christ.[11]

What has been said above will make no waves in the Lutheran church today, nor for that matter, in a number of mainline Protestant churches. It was not so in the sixteenth century. Among the Protestant reformers, Luther stood out in a crowd. Almost single-handedly he carried the banner for music as the strong ally of the gospel in worship. In Zurich, Switzerland, where Ulrich Zwingli was firming up his position of leadership, Latin choral song was banned in 1526 and the singing of German psalms and hymns the next year. There was no organ in his church. In Geneva, John Calvin also banished instrumental music and tolerated only the singing of inspired psalms in worship. Why did the Swiss reformers and the radical leaders of the evangelical cause fail to follow Luther in the use of music in worship?

It was not in most cases a dislike of music that prompted their action. Zwingli was a master of six musical instruments. Calvin was also a composer of considerable ability. Before he lost his head and became a wild-eyed revolutionary (after which he really lost his head), he had written a complete German mass. It was not a difference in aesthetics but in theology that left Luther standing alone. In some cases unscriptural notions coupled with impatient zeal to "cleanse" the churches of "popish excess" were responsible. Andreas Carlstadt, a colleague of Luther at Wittenberg, whipped up the emotions of the people with statements such as: "Images in churches are wrong." "Organs belong only to theatrical exhibitions and princes' palaces." "Painted idols standing on altars are even more harmful and devilish."[12]

Zwingli's order of service in Zurich at first reflected a conservative approach. But, pressured by the Anabaptists, he led his followers into the churches and there "whitewashed the paintings and decorations, carted away the statues, costly vestments, and splendidly bound service books, and closed the organs in token that no music of any kind would resound in the churches again; the people were to give ear to the Word of God alone."[13] Zwingli insisted that nothing should distract the congregation from total attention to the Word, prayer, and contemplation.

John Calvin, of all the Protestant reformers, stands in clearest contrast to Luther's musical convictions. In his law-bound church-state in Geneva, Calvin charted a stern course of obedience and sanctity. "While Luther emphasized the consolations of grace, Calvin dwelt upon the demands of grace. And while the one found the Bible to be a 'book of comfort,' therein the joy and peace of the Gospel is laid, the other saw it as 'the holy Law and Word of God,' which commands his obedience."[14] Calvin's liturgical model and ideal was the "ancient church" (by which he meant the pre-papacy Christian church) and a minimum of ceremony and external forms. He sternly excluded from the worship the use of organs, part-singing and all songs except "psalms from the Bible and psalms only." His theological basis for these actions was his conviction that things like instrumental music, choir singing and rich ornamentation were part of the Old Testament dispensation, which was terminated by Christ. In his sermon on 1 Samuel 18, he says:

> It would be a too ridiculous and inept imitation of papistry to decorate the churches and to believe oneself to be offering God a more noble service in using organs. ....All praises, coming from heart and mouth,

> and in the vulgar tongue....Instrumental music was tolerated in the time of the Law because the people were then in infancy.[15]

In his commentary on Psalm 149, he speaks similarly: "The musical instruments...were peculiar to this infancy of the church, nor should we foolishly imitate a practice which was intended only for God's ancient people."[16]

Incidentally, the influence of Calvin in regard to organs was responsible for the wholesale dismantling of pipe organs in England and Scotland, including the organs of Westminster Abbey. In Massachusetts around 1720 Cotton Mather set the tone and practice for the Calvinistic churches of the New World when he said, "Because the holy God rejects all He does not command in His worship, He now therefore in effect says to us, I will not hear the melody of thy organs."[17]

Luther's answer to all of this was that there are no ceremonial laws in the New Testament that bind our Christian freedom in forms of worship. The only constraint is Christian love. Following Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 3:21, "All things are yours," Luther paved the way for a splendid outpouring of gospel-inspired congregational hymnody and the development of choral and instrumental music based on the chorale. Two centuries later this culminated in the mighty choral and instrumental works of Johann Sebastian Bach.

In was ironic that Calvin, on the other hand, in his effort to restore primitive Christian worship and rid the church of what he conceived to be Catholic aping of Old Testament practices, thereby instituted a whole new set of ceremonial laws for the New Testament church. In so doing, he rendered

the development of church music, except for psalm singing, sterile in the Reformed churches for the next two hundred years.

There is one more factor which influenced the non-Lutheran reformers in their opposition to the use of music for worship. That factor was the fear of the power of music over man's emotions. Both Zwingli and Calvin were wary of any delight and enjoyment in music. In a sermon on the Book of Job, Calvin wrote,

> Music of itself cannot be condemned; but forasmuch as the world almost abuses it, we ought to be so much the more circumspect....The Spirit of God condemns... the vanities that are committed in music ...because men delight too much in them: and when they set their delight and pleasure in these base earthly things, they think not a whit upon God.[18]

This nagging concern about the power of music to bring delight and enjoyment to man, to the detriment of earnest and serious worship, spooks about in the whole history of the New Testament church. St. Augustine, for instance, voices his concern in his Confessions (X,33). This seems to have disturbed Luther somewhat, but he overcomes it with a blithe conclusion:

> St. Augustine was afflicted with scruples of conscience whenever he discovered that he had derived pleasure from music and had been made happy thereby; he was of the opinion that such joy is unrighteous and sinful. He was a fine pious man; however, if he were living today, he would hold with us.[19]

We sum up this section of Luther's thoughts regarding the purpose and use of music in his own words:

> I am not of the opinion, as are the heterodox, that because of the Gospel all arts should be rejected violently and vanish, but I desire that all arts, particularly music, be employed in the service of Him who has given and created them.[20]

HYMNODY

What has been said in the foregoing does not by any means exhaust what Luther thought about music. His more philosophical observations about "order" and "freedom" in music and their relationship to law and gospel and to the Christian man who is at once saint and sinner could be explored. Or one might discuss Luther's medieval views about the ethical properties of the various musical modes or scales then in use. Luther thought about such things. But his real concern and goal was not to develop a philosophy of church music. He had more important things on his mind. His real concern was the gospel and its proclamation. Furthermore, Luther was by nature a doer, and what Luther did with music is our next concern.

Luther and hymnody

Luther was practically the "inventor" of evangelical hymnody. There were hymns written before Luther, of course. Paul speaks of "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" (Col. 3:16), although we do not know precisely how they differed from each other. There were Greek hymns from the first centuries of the church and a large number of Latin hymns from later centuries available to the medieval church.

Their use in the mass was normally denied the worshipers. There were also pre-Reformation hymns, written by the Bohemian followers of John Huss. And there were spiritual folk songs, pilgrimage songs and songs sung at vigils and other occasions.

But Luther and his followers produced a new kind of evangelical hymn, filled with God's Word and gospel, in the vernacular, and intended for congregational use in the Sunday worship as well as for other occasions. This new song came to be called the "Lutheran chorale." Luther himself ultimately provided 36 church hymns and tunes. This he accomplished by making metrical versions of psalms, translating and adapting Latin hymns, reworking the spiritualizing folk songs or composing texts and melodies himself. Although it may be true that perhaps only four hymns were entirely his original work, his revisions and improvement of existing materials resulted in most cases in substantially new and original hymns.

Luther's motivation in writing hymns was certainly not that of the artist who seeks personal expression or an inner yearning to "create." In 1524 Luther wrote to Spalatin, secretary to Frederick the Wise, the following: "I am willing to make German psalms for the people...in order that the Word of God be conserved among the people through singing also."[21] He also felt that the laity should take an active part in the worship service. He based this not only on the practice of the apostolic church, but on the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9). Hymns were one way in which the congregation could actively participate in the service.

The history of Lutheran hymnody is the history of the hymnals. Luther's first church hymn, "Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice," was written

in 1523 and published as a single sheet. The first hymnal, the Achtliederbuch, was published in 1524. It contained eight hymns, of which four were by Luther. The same year two hymnals were published in Erfurt with triple the number of hymns, 18 by Luther. These hymnals were designed mostly for learning and not for congregational singing. In 1925 Luther and his able composer friend and co-worker, Johann Walther, published a choir hymnal with four- and five-part arrangements of 37 hymns, the Geistliche Gesangbuechlein. Twenty-four of these hymns are by Luther. Within Luther's life-time nearly a hundred hymnals were published. Before the impetus of Lutheran hymnody was spent in Germany, the number of hymns approximated 75,000.

The mastery of congregational hymn singing was gradual. People did a great deal of learning outside the service. Luther's hymns were very popular and were sung at home, in the fields, in the market-place, on the way to work and at group gatherings of various kinds. In the churches the singing was led by the choir (not accompanied by the organ). As hymnals were made available to the congregations, the hymns were often sung antiphonally. The stanzas were divided among the congregation, choir and organ. This is a practice which only recently has become fairly popular in Lutheran churches after a long period of neglect.

LITURGY

The second notable thing that Luther did with music was to reform the Sunday liturgy and make it available to the common man. This liturgical reform was accomplished in two stages. By 1523 it was obvious to Luther that some changes had to be made in the order of the mass. Over the years the mass had become a meritorious work, performed by the

priests on behalf of the people. It was no longer, therefore, tolerable to have some of the scriptural abuses which the evangelicals were attacking in their lectures and tracts continue to be included Sunday after Sunday in the worship.

The second urgent reform was to restore the proclamation of the Word to the service. The sermon had for the most part been dropped from the service; and when it was included, the exposition of the Word of God was largely replaced with stories on the lives of saints, legends, fables and discourses on "blue ducks," as Luther puts it. Luther remedied these abuses, returning the Holy Communion to its original function as a sacrament of forgiveness and arranging for the regular preaching of God's Word. Luther simply eliminated from the mass that section of prayers and commemorations which stressed the idea of sacrifice and saint-worship (the Offertory and Canon). These changes he incorporated in a small pamphlet titled Formula Missae et Communionis. As for the rest of the service, he left it unchanged except for the addition of German hymns to the service. The service remained in Latin.

It became increasingly clear to Luther that, for the sake of the common people who could not understand Latin, it was necessary to prepare a German mass or order of service. By this time others had begun to write such services or to substitute German in the service in a piecemeal fashion. Luther would gladly have adopted the work of others, but he felt that none of the German services that had been prepared were suitable. Luther pointed out that the characteristics and word accents of German and Latin were not compatible, and it would not do simply to paste the German words onto the notes of the Latin chants. Also, the text itself needed to

be more than a literal translation of the Latin. It should be truly German in its expression, not a "monkey's imitation." Luther set to work in the fall of 1525. He must have worked furiously, for by the beginning of November he had virtually finished the work. The next three weeks he worked with his musical advisor, Johann Walther, in refining the chant settings for the pastor's part, especially the chants for all the Epistles and Gospels for the church year. On November 29 the service was immediately given a trial use in the Stadtkirche in Wittenberg. Shortly it gained a wide use in Saxony and beyond, although it was to be used only in the congregations where the majority could no longer understand Latin.

In general the German order followed the traditional mass order. It was somewhat simplified, however. In place of the traditional Introit, a hymn or German Psalm (for which Luther supplied the chant) is used. Then follows the Greek Kyrie Eleison in three-fold instead of usual nine-fold fashion. The Collect is chanted in monotone, followed by the Epistle, also chanted. After the Epistle a German hymn replaced the traditional Gradual. The Gospel is also chanted, followed by the singing of the Nicene Creed by the whole congregation according to the hymn version. "We All Believe in One True God." Following the sermon is a public paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer. This is an addition which was not popular and later was dropped. Immediately after the Lord's Prayer comes an admonition for those who want to partake of the Sacrament, and then the Words of Institution are chanted by the pastor in the same Tone (5) as the Gospel. During the Distribution which follows, a German hymn and the new German Sanctus ("Isaiah, Mighty Seer") are to be sung by congregation and choir. The communicants were to receive both bread and wine. Luther preferred to have the consecration

and distribution of the bread before the wine was consecrated and distributed. The Agnus Dei was sung toward the end of the distribution. A brief collect of thanksgiving and the Benediction closed the service.

It was a bold stroke on the part of Luther to give the parts of the Ordinary of the mass to the congregation by providing metrical hymn versions of the Creed and the Sanctus. Apparently Luther did not have German hymnic materials available at the time or he might have appointed a hymn version also for the Gloria. His idea was followed, however. In a few years Nikolaus Decius furnished a metrical Gloria ("All Glory Be to God on High") and a hymn for the Agnus Dei ("Lamb of God Most Holy").

Not all of Luther's ideas, however, survived. The paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer was largely replaced by the simple text given by Jesus. The introit-psalm also was not popular, probably because of the difficulty in adapting Luther's chant models to the various psalms. Luther's preference for separating the distribution of the bread and the wine also failed to find general support. Nevertheless, the German order of service became the basis for Lutheran worship in a large number of congregations, especially where there was no choir. In congregations which tended to follow the earlier Formula Missae, German liturgical hymns such as the German Sanctus and Creed were often used, as well as other German hymns.

WHAT LUTHER ACCOMPLISHED FOR MUSIC

First of all, Luther has taught us to see music as God's creation, given to us the better to praise God and "proclaim the wonders he has done."

In contrast to those who were suspicious or uncertain as to the proper role of music in Christian worship, he demonstrated through his own hymnody the positive worth of enlisting music as the strong ally of the Word. He has shown us how powerful music can be in conserving God's truth by singing it into our hearts and how ideally suited it is to express the response of Christian faith. He has taught us to appreciate the power of music to give wings to our heart's Easter jubilation and to strengthen those who mourn the loss of loved ones.

Through music Luther led the priesthood of believers into an active part in the congregational worship, urging and enabling them to bring their sacrifice of thanksgiving, praise, and proclamation. Luther has also shown us how the simple unison melody of the congregational hymn can intertwine with the artistic music of choir, organ, and instruments to join in a common, concerted praise of God's name. He has elevated the conception of the work and worth of the church musician and pointed the way to his proper function of serving the cause of the gospel and leading God's people in worship. Luther also insistently calls us to remember the necessity of musical training for our youth, opening their eyes to the value of God's precious gift and enabling them to take their place in the corporate worship.

By his personal musical work and example, and by the firm principles he espoused so eloquently, Luther also inspired others to follow in his footsteps and to cherish and develop their musical talents. The result has been a rich production of church music and hymnody, which has brought to the Lutheran church the honor of being called "the singing church."

All this and more Luther has done for us and

the cause of music as God's gifted and blessed "music man." Whether we have appropriated all that Luther has taught us is another matter. But we have all been blessed through Luther and his music, more than we realize or appreciate or deserve. How gracious is the Lord our God!

> Dear Christian, one and all, rejoice,
> With exultation springing,
> And with united heart and voice
> And holy rapture singing,
> Proclaim the wonders God hath done,
> How His right arm the victr'y won;
> Right dearly it hath cost Him.

**This is a revision of a lecture delivered originally to the students and faculty of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary on November 10, 1983, the 500th anniversary of Luther's birth, and was printed in the Wisconsin Theological Quarterly, Spring 1986.*

ENDNOTES

1 Foreword to Georg Rhau's Collection, Symphoniae iucundae, Quoted in Walter E. Buszin's essay, entitled "Luther on Music," published in the January 1946 issue of the Musical Quarterly, G. Schirmer publisher. In the following footnotes, the name W. E. Buszin will indicate quotation from this work.

2 Luther's Saemmtliche Schriften, St. Louis Edition, XIV, 428-31 (W. E. Buszin)

3 Anton, Karl, Luther und die Musik (Zwickau, 1928) pp. 50-53 (W. E. Buszin)

4 St. L., XXIa, 1574 (W. E. Buszin)

5 Karl, op. cit., 50-53 (W. E. Buszin)

6 Ibid.

7 Roland Bainton, Here I Stand (Mentor Book, the New American Library) p. 269. Quotation and translation by Roland Bainton.

8 M. Johann Mathesius, Dr. Martin Luthers Leban (St. Louis, 1883) p. 227f. (W. E. Buszin)

9 St. L., XXIa, 1574.

10 Karl, op. cit., pp. 50-53.

11 St. L., X, 1430-33.

12 E. G. Schwiebert, Luther and His Times (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950) p. 536.

13 Bard Thompson, Liturgies of the Western Church

14 Ibid., p. 194.

15 Robert M. Stevenson, Patterns of Protestant Church Music (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1953) p. 14.

16 Ibid., p. 15.

17 Ibid., p. 17.

18 Ibid., p. 17.

19 Luther's Works, Erlangen, LXII, 1539 (W. E. Buszin)

20 St. L., X, 1422ff.

21 Wilhelm de Wette, Luthers Briefe, II, 590 (W. E. Buszin)

LECTURE III

THE GHOST OF LUTHER

In describing the peasants of the early fifteenth century, Roland Bainton writes:

> For them the woods and winds and water were peopled by elves, gnomes, fairies, mermen and mermaids, sprites and witches. Sinister spirits could release storms, floods, and pestilence, and would seduce mankind to sin and melancholia. Luther's mother believed that they played such minor pranks as stealing eggs, milk, and butter; and Luther himself was never emancipated from such beliefs. "Many regions are inhabited," said he, "by devils. Prussia is full of them, and Lapland of witches. In my native country on the top of a high mountain called the Pubelsberg is a lake into which if a stone be thrown a tempest will arise over the whole region because the waters are the abode of captive demons."[1]

Be that as it may, there is nothing sinister or superstitious intended by the use of the word ghost in the title of this essay. The simple meaning is the musical influence of Luther through the last five centuries.

Many events and trends in history tend to occur in cycles and follow the pendulum pattern. Economic prosperity and depression swing back and forth with some regularity. Political philosophies and national elections alternate, though not predictably. In the world of fashion, men are advised

to hold on to their string ties and also ties of record width, waiting for their new cycle of popularity. And all people are encouraged to save their junk, since most of it will surface again as antiques with unbelievable price tags. However, not everything works like a pendulum. Some things simply evolve or unfold. The history of music is one of many examples. Considering only western music and beginning with the first century, we have fairly continuous forward development from single strand melody to electronically produced music and non-musical sound.

Our particular interest is in the music in the church and specifically, the musical influence of Martin Luther. The history of music in the church is somewhat distinctive in that it generally reflects the religious strengths or weaknesses of its era. When the people of Germany in the time of Rationalism no longer believed in the virgin birth or the actual resurrection of Christ, Luther's hymns which stressed those doctrines, e.g., "Savior of the Nations, Come" (TLH 95) and "Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands" (TLH 195), were no longer sung. He who does not believe in the resurrection will have little interest in Luther's Easter hymn.

The ghost of Luther has been banished many times over the course of 450 years, but we can sense his spirit still moving among those who sing his hymns and use the liturgy which he cleansed and reformed. There the centrality of Christ's atonement and justification by God's grace through faith in Christ are being proclaimed. And through those means the Holy Spirit strengthens and recreates his Church.

Disintegration and Restoration

Most Lutheran Christians have heard that the liturgy we use on Sunday morning is the old, historic liturgy which Luther cleansed and revised. They assume that the Lutheran church has worshiped according to this liturgy from Luther's time to the present day. The truth of the matter is, of course, that during the past 450 years Lutheran worship as Luther knew it disintegrated past recognition and that it took till 1941 before we had the Lutheran liturgy in relative fullness in The Lutheran Hymnal. The story is worth retelling.

During the sixteenth century the writing of Lutheran chorales and the preparation of church orders continued to grow. Luther wished to lay down no rules for the liturgies but that the cities and provinces would prepare their own orders according to their needs. At least 135 different orders of worship were prepared, some in German, some in Latin, and most in a mixture of Latin and German. German hymns continued to be written and published at an accelerating pace, and in spite of setbacks, it was a fruitful century for the Lutherans. The next century, the 17th, brought the beginning of what would become the disintegration of the Lutheran church, and most of all, of church life in Germany. The differences between the Protestants and the Catholics erupted into the bitter and devastating Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). Most of Europe was involved, but the battleground was Germany. Though the war brought compromise or perhaps some advantage to the Protestants, Germany was virtually destroyed. Only 6,000,000 of its former population of 16,000,000 remained. Society and particularly church life and worship were completely disorganized. Efforts were made to rebuild the religious programs and worship. But worship and church life

became legalistic and the spirit of Luther's day was gone.

The inevitable reaction came in a movement known as Pietism. The leader was Philip Jacob Spener. He published his proposals for reform, stressing personal faith, love, and Christian living. He supported private devotional assemblies in his home twice a week. Their success was at the expense of the church and congregational assembly, however. Growing subjectivism and emotionalism affected the worship of the church. Reed summarizes the movement as follows:

> The struggle for personal consciousness of conversion and regeneration led to an underevaluation of the means of grace. The historical and the formal in liturgical worship gave way to expressions of individual ideas and emotions. The liturgy and the church year were too objective and constraining. The formal common prayer of the church gradually disappeared under a flood of extempore utterances by ministers and laymen. Hymns based on the objective facts of redemption were discarded for others expressive of immediate, personal experience. New and emotional tunes displaced the more vigorous chorales. Operatic arias and sentimental solos supplanted the impersonal polyphonic chorus music of the choir. Orthodoxy, though cold and intellectual, had respected objectivity and preserved formal dignity and reference. Pietism with its intensely personal limitations, neither understood nor long used...the church's liturgical system.[2]

The most important musical figure in the pietist movement was Johann Freylinghausen. He published

a hymnal which eventually included a collection of 1600 hymns and over 600 melodies. Most of the melodies were arranged in even-noted style. The organists, who by this time were accompanying the congregational singing, kept themselves busy by playing interludes between the lines of the hymns.

The emphasis on the individual resulted in hymnals designed to meet every possible individual need. In 1716 a German pastor made a collection of songs for 147 different professions. Twenty years later a Saxon pastor published a songbook which was advertised as a "universal songbook in which songs were to be found for christenings, marriages, and other family events, others appropriate for difficult lawsuits, lameness, deafness, or for the affliction of having too many children, and for noblemen, ministers, officials, lawyers, bakers, fishermen, teamsters, merchants' apprentices, and many other professions," and requested songs for "clowns, tight-rope walkers, magicians, thieves, and rogues."[3]

It is remarkable that Johann Sebastian Bach lived and worked in this time when there was little interest in baroque church music and in "well regulated" liturgical music for the services. Even the musician sons of Bach looked upon their father's music as from an out-of-date, by-gone era. No doubt the ghost of Luther took up extended residence in the balcony of St. Thomas Church in Leipzig, where Bach was the music director. At St. Thomas the "old ways" were still in vogue, and Epistle and Gospel were still read in Latin. It was the musical genius of Bach and his faithful devotion to the Scriptures and to Lutheran doctrine and liturgical practice, that enabled him to bring the era of the Baroque to a tremendous climax with his chorale-based organ preludes and figues, cantatas, passions and Mass in B Minor.

Pietism with its emotional excesses and contempt of learning could not but pave the way for another reaction. Unfortunately, the swing of the pendulum was not toward return to the gospel and true Lutheranism nor in the direction of respect for the Christian traditions of worship. Rather, it invited another movement which was even more destructive. That movement was Rationalism. It was a child of humanism with its emphasis on the supremacy of the human mind and will. "The knowledge of God and pursuit of virtue did not require divine revelation but could be obtained by rational reflection. Christianity was regarded as superior to other religions because of its greater reasonableness."[4] Moral aspects in the life of Jesus were emphasized and theories of atonement and forgiveness rejected. "In the matter of justification, Rationalism moved toward Catholicism; on the doctrine of the sacraments it approximated the Reformed. In the theological field its logical development was Unitarianism; in the political field, the French Revolution."[5]

In the area of worship Rationalism rejected both historic forms and their content. "The Service was mutilated beyond recognition. The church building became a mere place of assembly, and the pulpit a lecture platform from which the minister gave moral instructions. The Sacrament was reduced to an empty form and was observed in Reformed fashion four times a year. Hymns were modernized to meet current ideology. Sturdy churchly music was displaced by frivolous compositions which encouraged the exhibition of personal skill."[6] Agendas and private liturgies were produced which would be humorous if they were not so tragic. One such agenda includes the following exhortation in the order for public confession: "Let us do as the Apostles did, and not come to the altar to receive a sacrament, but to bring our sacrament thither,

that is, the obligation to hold fast his teachings, which bring us so much happiness, and always and everywhere to show public spirit, as He did."[7] A form of distribution was the following: "Eat this bread; may the spirit of devotion rest upon you with all its blessings. Drink a little wine; moral power does not reside in this wine, but in you, in the teachings of God, and in God."[8] In an Order for Baptism in 1843, the address contains the following: "Water, the best means for cleansing the body, is the most fitting emblem of soul-purity. May thy heart remain pure and thy life unspotted, thou still innocent angel!"[9]

This movement, which could not possibly double as an excuse for biblical religion, was the culmination of two centuries of devastating assault on the Lutheran church worship and life. It is also worth noting that the Lutheran church was transplanted to America during just this time of spiritual bankruptcy. Is it not amazing that attendance at one of our churches today could persuade the visitor that nothing has changed since Luther's day! Something happened to bring us to our present situation. The ghost of Luther visited Claus Harms, archdeacon of St. Michael's Church in Kiel, Germany. As they were approaching the date of the 300th anniversary of the Reformation in 1817, Claus decided on a bold move. He would reissue Luther's Ninety-Five Theses and, with them, ninety-five theses of his own. Citation of several of the theses will give us an idea of their content and also of their considerable effect on the country:

Thesis 1: When our Master and Lord Jesus Christ says, "Repent," he wills that men shall be conformed to his doctrine, but he does not conform the doctrine of men, as is now done, in accordance with the altered spirit of the times. (II Timothy 4:3)

Thesis 27: According to the old faith, God created man; according to the new faith, man creates God, and when he has finished with him he says, Aha!

Thesis 32: The so-called religion of reason is without reason, or without religion, or without both.

Thesis 43: When reason touches religion it casts the pearls away, and plays with the empty shells, the empty words.

Thesis 78: If at the Colloquy at Marburg, 1529, the body and the blood of Christ was in the bread and wine, it is still so in 1817.[10]

Apparently the ghost of Luther also stopped at the castle of the Prussian king, Frederick William III, who wanted to combine the Lutheran and the Reformed churches in his kingdom. He appointed one named Eylert to prepare a new agenda, but he failed to satisfy the king. The king said, "You have fallen into the error of all who have written new liturgies and agenda. You have forsaken the historic ground...All the liturgies and agenda which have appeared in our time seem to have been shot out of a pistol...If anything at all is to come out of this matter we must return to Father Luther."[11]

The result was that the king himself, as well as others, studied the more than 135 church orders which had been drawn up by the various Lutheran cities and provinces. These contained the detailed liturgies and worship practices. This study became the basis for a reconstruction of Lutheran liturgy and worship. At the beginning of this restoration, there was virtually no difference between the

Lutheran and Reformed order of service. The only participation by the congregation in addition to hymn singing was the praying of the Lord's Prayer! "And instead of hymns of faith and salvation, they were obliged to sing rhymed sermons on the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, the delights of reunion, the dignity of man, the duty of self-improvement, the nurture of the body, and the care of animals and flowers."[12] A contemporary account of the hymn singing as late as the middle of the nineteenth century describes it this way: "Each syllable is sung without distinction for a period of about four beats. On the last syllable of the melodic phrase there follows a long fermata lasting eight to twelve beats, the last part of which is incorporated in a more or less intricate organ interlude. So all the melodies follow one line after the other in this repetitious manner, whether sad or joyous, mournful or exultant, all performed in a creeping, dragging fashion. The hymns of Luther have long had their wings clipped and have put on the straight-jacket of 4/4 time. And so it came about that the more inflexible the singing of the chorale was, the more solemn it was thought to be."[13]

The confessional revival called for by Claus Harms in 1817 was accomplished by a number of dedicated people in Europe and the United States. The aims were to restore the liturgies of the sixteenth-century Reformation, to restore the unaltered texts of the Reformation hymns, and with it the original forms of the chorale melodies. The source and basis was to be the "common consent of the pure Lutheran liturgies of the sixteenth century, and when there was not entire agreement between them, the consent of the largest number of greatest weight." The effort in this country culminated in the text of the Common Service of 1888. Liturgical settings and hymns were added and

published in the Common Service Book. The date was 1917, the 400th anniversary of the Reformation.

Luther Today

The ghostly fingerprints of Martin Luther are scattered about in various areas of our life today and are not restricted to music or religion. We, however, must restrict our discussion to music or religion and we must further restrict it to music in and for the church.

When we stop to think of it, every time we come upon a singing congregation, whether Lutheran, Roman Catholic, or Protestant, we can note the influence of Luther. After all, both Catholic and Reformed churches rejected congregational hymn singing in the Sunday service or mass, though for different reasons. Both espouse and practice it today. The most popular Roman Catholic hymnal in the United States even includes "A Mighty Fortress!"

And when the Roman church adopted the use of the vernacular in the mass after about 1400 years of prescribed Latin, that was the work of Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council, but they were walking in the footsteps of Martin Luther and his concern for the people's participation in worship.

When we give high priority in our congregations to personal Bible reading and group Bible study, we are echoing Luther's number one concern, namely, knowing God's word and gospel.

When we turn on Sunday morning to page five or fifteen in The Lutheran Hymnal, or to the "Bugenhagen liturgy" in the new Hymnal Supplement of the ELS or the Lutheran Hymnary, or to the Divine

Service of Lutheran Worship, then we are demonstrating Luther's attitude toward the historic liturgies of the church: Retain from the past that which is good; drop what is false or contrary to the spirit of the gospel; change or add that which is deemed worthy and edifying.

When Roman Catholic churches urge more frequent and better sermons from their priests, we remember that this was one of Luther's major criticisms of the church of his day and his constant concern for the fledgling evangelical church.

When Lutheran choirs sing in the services and sing Christ-centered music which is in tune with the church year, then we may know that Luther is rejoicing that his favorite gift of God is serving the gospel and praising God.

When we see the Reformed churches using crosses and Christian symbolism, painting and sculpture, candles and tapestries, stained glass and choirs, handbells and organs, then we know that Luther's principle that music and all arts should be used in the service of Him who created and gave them has overcome denominational roots and worship philosophies and made a 180 degree turn back toward Luther.

And when new hymnals are made or revised, and the search is made for the best of Christian texts and music from Lutheran and other sources, then we may be sure that the ghost of Luther is nodding in encouragement.

We have noted a number of music-related and worship-related situations where Luther's words or example comes to mind and where his influence may be felt. More could be cited. It is important that we communicate with Luther in this way,

because worship is the heartbeat of the Christian life. It is also the motivational power center for all congregational programs and activities, be it missions or personal evangelism or stewardship or education or labors of neighborly love.

Problems and Principles

As we approach the 471st anniversary of the Reformation, we ought to take a reading of our corporate worship life and decide whether our compass needs adjustment or whether we do. I have long used a set of four principles of Lutheran worship to do this:

1) Lutheran worship is scriptural and gospel-centered.
2) Lutheran worship is congregational.
3) Lutheran worship is liturgical.
4) Lutheran worship is appreciative of the arts.

The special genius of Lutheranism is the balance of these four components. We in the WELS are especially interested in seeing to it that the new hymnal will reflect these four points in a balanced way. A brief look may either assure us or motivate us for corrective action.

1) Scriptural -- This is always and ever the first concern, that our liturgies, hymns, and prayers clearly state or reflect God's Word, truth and grace in Christ Jesus. Without that there is no saving faith or acceptable worship. We can be thankful that there seem to be no doctrinal divisions that threaten that basic gift among us.

2) Congregational -- Luther's accent on the priesthood of all believers was one of the motives for his action in providing a German service and hymns for his people. Our worship provides for a

wealth of congregational participation in listening, singing, praying and praising, and in the celebration of the sacrament.

3) Liturgical -- There are today quite a few who question the necessity or the positive value of liturgical worship, either of our present liturgies or others. Some desire more variety in worship forms or more contemporary liturgies, and some want simply to keep what we have. Real study and discussion of what constitutes liturgical worship is needed, at least in our synod.

4) Appreciative of Music and the Arts -- The reformers, other than Luther, reacted negatively to the use of music and the arts in worship. Luther's position was that music was created by God first of all so that man might worship and praise God. He did not share the worry that music might give him more pleasure than was good for him and would distract him from worship. The joy in the Gospel, Luther believed, was naturally expressed in music, and the pleasure derived from music and singing was a fringe benefit, so to speak, of the music. There is a difference, however, between entertaining ourselves and worshiping. Appreciation for music and the other arts has slowly grown over the years, but in our synod, at least, it seems to be greatly undervalued and its real purpose in worship not well understood.

We are living in an exciting time of increasing interest in worship and in the midst of an explosion in hymn writing and other worship resources. Not since the Reformation era have so many hymns been written and so many hymnals published. In a sense, however, the wealth of materials makes the choosing of hymns and preparation of a new hymnal more difficult. We need to keep a good and careful balance of church year hymns and topical hymns and a representation of the various types of hymnody

available to the church today. In Lutheran hymnals the single most important representation should be the chorale. The chorales provide the doctrinal meat and potatoes for our hymnal meal. It is true that many are strongly didactic and some of the older melodies are modal. Many are proclaimed to be "unsingable." And many are unsung. But what happens if the chorales continue to be lauded and praised, but not sung? We can possess our hymnal heritage only if we learn and use it. Most all the hymns in our hymnal can be learned with reasonable effort. If Luther were here, we could ask him how it was that the relatively uneducated peasants learned to sing the Lutheran hymns. Without question they learned and sang enthusiastically. And they sang the Gospel into each other's hearts in the process. Most of the chorales will richly reward the effort to learn and to use them.

Many problems and decisions face those who are producing our new hymnal. One of the knottiest is the matter of how best to provide for increasing numbers of people from the black or Hispanic communities or for those who are from other denominational backgrounds or of no religious background. What kind of hymnody should be selected? For that matter, what about the people who come to church and want to worship God but do not want to learn anything new in hymns or liturgy or wish to have their musical taste elevated? What do we owe them? I'm sure Luther would have some thoughts and some words on this matter also, but we will have to answer these questions with pastoral care and in the light of Lutheran heritage principles.

All in all, our church has much to be thankful for. Our God has opened his hands so richly in blessing that we cannot even number our gifts. In view of that goodness and grace, our problems

should be viewed only as challenges and our efforts as all joy! And if the ghost of Luther could appear to add a parting word of wisdom, it would likely be "LISTEN TO THE WORD, SING WITH JOY, PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL, AND PRAISE GOD!"

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ENDNOTES

1. Roland Bainton, Here I Stand (Mentor Book, the New American Library) p. 19.
2. Luther D. Reed, The Lutheran Liturgy (Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia, 1959) p. 146.
3. Edwin Liemohn, The Chorale Through 400 Years (Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia, 1953) p. 66.
4. Luther D. Reed, The Lutheran Liturgy (Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia, 1959) p. 146.
5. Ibid., p. 148
6. Ibid., p. 148
7. Ibid., p. 149
8. Ibid., p. 149
9. Ibid., p. 149
10. Ibid., p. 152
11. Ibid., p. 152
12. John Julian, A Dictionary of Hymnody, London, 1907, p. 417
13. Source unavailable, but see Liemohn, p. 115

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General Remarks:

Alfred Fremder, October 1988

I - The Musical Life and Times of Martin Luther

Musically, Martin Luther was certainly a product of his times, that is, he was schooled in and absorbed the music of the Roman Church while at the same time he was schooled in and absorbed the music and poetry of the Meistersinger tradition, especially its basic style and forms. It must be remembered that Ulrich Zwingli, no slouch in the field of the fine arts, and John Calvin, who was not as well-trained musically as either Luther or Zwingli, were both products of the same culture as Luther. Luther, however, responded far differently musically than did the other two reformers. The differing responses of all three hinged on differing theologies, a most important observation.

These different responses show up particularly in the area of worship. Luther's attitude toward the use of music in worship shines brighter when one considers how each of the three reformers understood the nature of music and worship.

Zwingli's strong humanist background prompted him to make a distinction between the material (physical) and the spiritual. Since God is spirit (Jn. 4), God wishes to be worshipped in spirit. Physical additions (as ceremonies) are not pleasing to God.[1] They are distractions. One must remember the example of Christ, who brought people to faith without liturgies and/or ceremonies.[2] Included in the physical is music. Although there was singing in Old Testament worship (2 Chron.

13-14), Zwingli questioned whether God had instituted it. We know that God was pleased with it. Zwingli interpreted Colossians 3:16 to mean that worshipers are not to sing with their voices, but with their hearts.[3] 1 Corinthians 14:15 permits singing, Zwingli admits, but only insofar as mouth and mind agree, and this agreement does not last long even in prayer and has still shorter duration in song.[4] Music, as a physical element, is apparently a distraction in our spiritual relationship with God in worship. Music is regarded by Zwingli as secular, a part of the physical world, not in itself displeasing to God, but without relationship to the Word.[5]

Musical worship forms, nowhere commanded according to Zwingli, give place to a form of worship that is commanded - prayer. We are commanded to pray, and in private (Mt. 6:6) The prototype of true worship, then, is private prayer.[6] If this premise of Zwingli is followed to its logical conclusion, corporate worship would be reduced to private prayer, to absolute silence. Because Zwingli conceded that corporate (public) worship is commanded in Scripture,[7] he effected a compromise. Absolute silence could be replaced by the silence in which Psalms and other Scripture are explained by trained exegetes.[8] All noise and distractions, including music, must go, especially babbling, vain repetition, etc.[9] Although Zwingli did not press his liturgical and musical views on all churches, in his own services all forms of music were to be banished as soon as the people could be prepared.[10] By 1524 - (Luther had already written 23 of his 37 hymns during 1523-1524.) - Zwingli's churches were without music of any kind, and this musical silence held in Zwingli's churches for three centuries.[11] Because of his intense training in

music and the other arts Zwingli loved music, but he was afraid to use it in worship.

John Calvin also feared the use of music in worship, but he allowed it - with severe restrictions, however. His fear in this regard did not stem from musical training or talent, but from his observation of the frivolous use of sacred texts by members of the French court, where Psalms were sung by "light-minded" people to ballad tunes and even those tunes borrowed from bawdy songs.[12] Although Calvin, like Luther, considered music to be a gift of God and a principal means of man's pleasure, music was too often blameworthy because people used it wrongly, that is, for bad purposes.[13]

Both textually and musically Calvin was governed by his emphasis on the SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD. Although he did not condemn other hymns, he chose to use only divinely inspired hymns - that is, Psalms and canticles of Scripture as the most perfect form for the child of God's expression of faith. In using only these Scriptural texts the worshiper could be certain that God had put the words in his mouth.[14] The accompanying music was to be grave, serious, and modest - the only fitting attitude before God's SOVEREIGNTY. His liturgy utilized several Psalms to be sung in each service, with every Psalm in the Psalter to be used in approximately half a year. He also provided for the singing of Biblical Canticles and the Ten Commandments.[15]

Although Louis Bourgeois, musical editor of Calvin's Genevan Psalter, adapted some popular songs for inclusion in the Genevan Psalter, in doing so he followed the restrictions of Calvin who insisted that Psalm tunes were to be modest, majestic, suitably grave in the presence of an

awesome God.[16] In Calvin's view, organs and other instruments were part of the Old Testament age, "shadows of the new, the "childish things" which mature Christians were to put away as outgrown.[17] 1 Corinthians 14:15, which admonishes Christians to pray only in a known tongue, was also seen by Calvin to condemn the use of instruments in the worship service. In Calvin's churches, as in Zwingli's, the organs were destroyed. Briefly, then, the worshipers in Calvin's churches sang metrical Psalms and canticles in unison with no accompaniment, there was no chanting, no organs, no instruments of any kind.

Calvin feared the improper use of music in worship and, accordingly, restricted its use. Zwingli feared the use of music in worship as a distracting element for he felt that the unmusical would be distracted by their own awkwardness, the musical by the beauty of the music.[18] Accordingly, he banished music from worship.

Luther, on the other hand, did not let fear strangle his theology. He had had enough of that in the Roman Church. He by God's grace marched to the beat of a different drummer. His theology, also in the use of music in worship, was not based on fear. He viewed the use of liturgy and music in worship through the eyes of the Gospel.

Luther certainly never denied that God is Spirit (Jn. 4). He added, however, in accord with his God-given understanding of Scripture, that it was God who chose to come to sinful mankind through the externals of written words and the elements of the Sacraments (water, bread, wine) connected with that Word. Moreover it was God who chose to become Incarnate, to enter the corporeal (physical) world.[19] The physical was not displeasing to God. Again Luther certainly never

denied that God is SOVEREIGN. But he added that we do not worship the unknown God, but the revealed God. And how did God choose to reveal Himself to us? God, the majestic Lord, chose to be also God the Father, God the Brother, God the Bridegroom[20] - warm, understandable physical and human concepts.

Luther agreed that God's Word was of prime importance. "Without the preaching of the Word," he wrote, "there should be no singing, or reading, or even assembly."[21] Scripture must dominate and mold the service.[22] Liturgical forms must be used only as a framework for the Gospel, which safeguards their proper use.[23] The Lord's Supper, Baptism, and the preaching of the Word are instituted by Christ and are the only externals binding on the Christian in his worship.[24] These essentials must always be clearly distinguished from added rites and ceremonies.[25] Scripture is silent concerning these additions, Luther maintained, in order to allow the Spirit freedom to act "according to his own understanding as the respective place, time, and persons may require it."[26] Scripturally, what is not forbidden is allowed. Our Lutheran Confessions (FC SD X 25), in discussing even the changing of external ceremonies and rites, lays down the following Scriptural guidelines: "These are the factors we must consider: 'That God may not be angered, love may not be injured, the enemies of the Word of God be not strengthened, nor the weak in faith offended.'" Under these conditions the Christian is completely free in liturgical matters - to the glory of God alone and the edification of God's people.

Luther knew that worship is God's battleground, for worship implies a struggle between faith and unbelief.[27] This battle is essentially God's work. Through Word and Sacrament God battles to reclaim Satan's captives.[28] Worship is also the work of

redeemed humanity, the expression of the Christian's faith.[29] Faith brings forth the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. The rhythm is always from the work of God to the response of man, from the gift of all benefits, and especially salvation by grace through faith in our blessed Savior the Lord Jesus, to the response of God-given faith.

From all this it would seem evident that music in worship does not supplant the Word, the Gospel of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5). Music serves the Word, spotlights the Word, underlines the Word. Music in worship must never - NEVER - distract from the Word, must not take center stage. The material principle of Lutheran theology, the Gospel, takes the holds center stage.

In writing about the order of Divine Worship, Luther stresses the all-importance of the Word:

> The important thing is this, that everything be done so that the Word prevails... It is better to abandon everything else except the Word. And there is no better practice or exercise than the Word; and the whole Scriptures show that this should have free course among the Christians; and Christ Himself, also, says, Luke 10, ... One thing is needful, namely that Mary sit at the feet of Christ and hear His Word daily. This is the best part, which she has chosen, and will never be taken away. It is an eternal Word; all the rest must pass away no matter how much work it gives Martha to do.[30]

The Word - the Gospel - is center stage for Luther (and for us). There is no doubt about it. What about music? What is its place in worship? It is a servant of the Word, a privileged work indeed.

Luther maintained that "music is a fair and glorious gift of God" to be used "in the service of Him who gave and created it." Luther certainly concurred with the Psalmist: "I will sing unto the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me." (Ps. 13:6) Luther wrote:

> For God has cheered our hearts and minds through His dear Son, whom He gave for us to redeem us from sin, death, and the devil. He who believes this earnestly cannot be quiet about it. But he must gladly and willingly sing and speak about it so that others also may come and hear it.[31]

Music, then, is an instrument of praise, a returning of that precious gift to God who gave it. It is interesting to note that besides that use of music, Martin Luther advocated that music be used to draw people into the church service. He said:

> If it would help matters along, I would have all the bells pealing, and all the organs playing, and have everything rung that can make a sound.[32]

Luther was intent on winsomely drawing people into the church, into the orbit of the Word, to hear the good news of redemption in Christ, enlarging the field on which the seed would be sown. He knew better than to think that people would be brought to faith by hearing bells and even magnificent, powerful organ music. He knew, as do you and I, that it is the Word alone through which the Holy Spirit by grace works faith in the hearts of people and strengthens them in that faith. He knew, as do you and I, that "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded through one rise from the dead." (Lk. 16:31)

And it is certainly far more difficult to rise from the dead than to produce magnificent organ music.

In contemplating the thoughts of Luther on music, particularly on music in worship, we cannot help but exclaim: "How broad, how free, how winsome, how thoroughly Scriptural!" Luther loved music intensely; he did not place it above God, but below God as a humble servant of the Word - a joyful and free servant of the Gospel. Praise God for this heritage, this theological perception - yes, praise God from whom also this blessing flows!

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End Notes

1. Garside, Zwingli and the Arts, 37.
2. Ibid., 38.
3. Ibid., 44.
4. Ibid., 49.
5. Ibid., 68.
6. Ibid., 41ff.
7. Ibid., 42.
8. Ibid., 46.
9. Ibid., 50.
10. Ibid., 50ff.
11. Ibid., 55.

12. Hunter, The Teaching of Calvin: A Modern Interpretation, 273.

13. Stevenson, Patterns of Protestant Church Music, 22ff.

14. Hunter, op cit., 281ff

15. Blume, Protestant Church Music, 531.

16. Ibid., 518.

17. Hunter, op. cit., 286.

18. Garside, op. cit., 49.

19. Stevenson, op. cit., 21.

20. Nettl, Luther and Music, 108-112.

21. Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 53, 11.

22. Vajta, Luther on Worship: An Interpretation, 67.

23. Ibid., 176.

24. Ibid., 172.

25. Ibid., 20.

26. Luther, op. cit., 37.

27. Vajta, op. cit., 141-146.

28. Ibid., 23.

29. Ibid., 141.

30. Luther, Works of Martin Luther, Vol. VI, 63-64.

31. Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 53, 333.

32. Ibid., 62.

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From Corinth to Wittenberg: Providing Equipment for Congregational Song

Bruce R. Backer, October 1988

The preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ arouses praise and thanks among the congregation of believers who hear it, believe it, and rejoice in it. This happened also in Corinth in the middle of the first century. While the congregation was being instructed in the Way, several members of the congregation got up and offered praise and thanks to God. They did it in a special way called glossolalia, or speaking in tongues. They entered a state of ecstacy, and in that condition began to wail in meaningless neutral syllables. This performance may have included bodily motion. It cannot be considered unknown or uncommon. Some Old Testament prophets were given to ecstatic utterance. After God gave Peter special revelation in the home of Cornelius, Acts 10, all who heard the message spoke in tongues and praised God. Furthermore, ecstacy was common in the cantorial prayer of the synagog, in Greek religious rites, and in Near Eastern religions. Singing on neutral syllables was promoted by Phil of Alexandria, a contemporary of Jesus. He asserted that words are a part of this sinful world. God is a spirit, he stated, and the tainted creation, in this case words, should not be offered to God. He is worthy of something far better, in this case, neutral syllables. There is little reason to doubt that this influence made its way up to Corinth and perhaps also to other Christian congregations.

The praise of God of course has two dimensions, the vertical and the horizontal. God is to be

praised, but as believers praise Him, their praise must also reach out to the brothers and sisters in Christ and cause them to grow in faith and knowledge. Glossolalia lacked the horizontal dimension. Saint Paul gives good advice. He recognizes this form of praise as a gift of the Holy Spirit. However, it is a gift that will have to be reshaped for use in the congregation. First, let one at a time get up and speak in tongues. Second, let the speaker-in-tongues bring a friend with him who will be able to interpret this praise to the congregation so that all present may grow in faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Third, it is possible that Saint Paul's final rubric, let all things be done decently and in order, applies to this situation. That is, if a member is going to speak in tongues, let him not interrupt the teaching and preaching process. Devise a way to have orderly worship.

The biblical witness reveals to us that there were other ways of praising God. Paul's letter to Philippi and his first letter to Timothy reveal creedlike hymns which were no doubt in use. But we have no knowledge of the melodies with which they were sung. However, glossolalia was an exciting phenomenon, and unless tempered consistently and put into its place by the advice of Saint Paul, promised to lead the praise of the Christian Church into directions where the great praise-teacher of the Church, the Psalter, had never pointed. Otto Ursprung, author of Die Katholische Kirchenmusik, a volume of the Ernst Bücken series, Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft, Potsdam 1929, considers these years in the history of the Church as watershed years. With the advice given the Corinthian congregation and with the exhortation and prayer contained in the letters to Colossae and Philippi, 3:16 and 5:19-20

respectively, the Christian Church was set on a straight course in which, according to the model of the Psalter, the high praise of God would build the faith and life of the worshiping congregation.

Ursprung sees the exhortation and prayer of Saint Paul upon the background of the Corinthian phenomenon. Let us hear the text which is translated best in the Authorized Version:

> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

It is very possible that with these words Saint Paul is going to war with Philo, and it is most certainly true that he is making a strong case for the use of congregational song in the dispensation of the Gospel. The indwelling of the word of Christ is to happen AS the readers of the pauline epistles go about the business of singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, with all wisdom (loosely translated: use your head!). This prayer set the course for the Church. The Lord of the Church heard and answered this exhortation and prayer with the phenomenon we know as the history of western music. As he is wont to do, he used the historical process of answering the prayer.

The congregation at worship will need memorable tunes if the word of Christ is to dwell in them richly through their singing. The Roman civilization had the disposition to carry this out: a penchant for order and discipline. From the third to the eighth century church musicians created a treasury of melody that would perceptibly

affect western music into the twentieth century. Consider two small though significant parts of this treasury: psalm tones and hymns. How mightily the praise of God was carried aloft by the Holy Christian Church throughout the Holy Christian Church when these exquisitely crafted jewels were applied to the Psalter! Through the Gregorian psalm tones the Psalter permeated the cultures in which they thrived and taught the people of God its distinctive lesson: to fear, love, and trust in God above all things. Another part of this treasury is the corpus of hymnody coming from this time. Let two examples suffice: Veni Creator Spritus and Veni Redemptor gentium. Tunes like these placed discipline upon the melodic line. Instead of an endless line of ecstatic melody, worshipers heard a melody of four carefully crafted and memorable phrases. Were these tunes really memorable? There is little doubt that the Veni Creator was the most often sung hymn at least until the Thirty Years War.

The congregation at worship will have to be able to sing the same syllable at the same time if indeed they are going to minister the word of Christ to one another. Furthermore, if these hymns are really full of nutrition for the Church, there should be a way of accurately perpetuating them. So the Lord of the Church placed the strict discipline of mathematics upon rather freely moving melodies, governed until this time by the stress and non-stress of poetic meters. A unit of time was divided into two halves, four fourths, eight eighths, sixteen sixteenths, and so on; into two dotted halves, six quarters, twelve or eighteen eighths, depending upon the prolation. By 1230 Franco of Cologne had devised a comprehensive system by which all music could be notated perfectly on a horizontal plane and at the same time

fit voices together vertically.

The Lord of the Church foresaw the assembling of hundreds of Christians for worship at the same time. Another component was needed in music that we take for granted: a harmonic underpinning and, more than that, one that has thrust. So he gave one of the halmarks of western civilization to the Church to fill the need: the V I cadence. Composers began to use it during the first half of the fifteenth century and by the time of Luther it was part of the common musical vocabulary. This cadence and the concomitant push toward it is omnipresent in our hymnal, because it is based upon what many theorists call "common practice." The laws of physics had been applied to music to glorify God and to strengthen the faith and life of the Body of Christ.

How will the Lord give the Church a means whereby it can gather melody, rhythm, and harmony, fill a large space with sound, and excite believers to the high praise of God. Enter the pipe organ. Although it was not used as an accompanimental instrument during the sixteenth century, it took up this role during the seventeenth and never gave it up. See what happens today! The organ, a union of wood, lead, tin, aluminum, brass, copper, glass, plastics, cloth, leather, vinyl, the forces of electricity and of wind, combined in it according to universal laws of mathematics and physics, a microcosm of God's creation, leads the royal priesthood in the high worship of God to his glory and to strengthen the faith and life of his Body, the Holy Christian Church.

There is a fulness of time in western music history. It is the Lutheran Reformation. It is easy to see that all the components of music had been prepared so that the royal priesthood of

believers, the King's ministers, could unite in the high praise of God. Without entering the vast fields of choral and instrumental music that developed alongside congregational liturgical song, one is compelled to state that western music history developed under express direction of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, under whose feet the Father placed all things, and whom the Father appointed head over everything for the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills everything in every way, Ephesians 1.

We do well to marvel at the unique, the almost incomprehensible gift that God gave the Church to strengthen the community of believers and to spread the Good News around the world. Just look how long the Maker of heaven and earth labored with frail creatures to bring this great gift to life, almost a millenium and a half. Look at the diverse ingredients once more that God brought together to bring this gift to life: music, mathematics, and physics, together with the products of the earth.

We do well to marvel aloud about this great creation of God. Today people, Christians, like to listen to music. The reasons for this phenomenon are legion. One is the insecurity of this age. When one sings, he reveals himself. And since he is human, he also reveals his weaknesses. Heaven forbid! Who wants to reveal weakness in a culture that respects only strength?

When you sing, you will sing abour your weakness, but you will also boast about your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whom you cannot see, whom you cannot touch, whom you proclaim nevertheless as the only real way through this life and the only way to union with the Father world without end.

As we marvel about the precious gift of song, we need to encourage, to cajole, and to win the community of believers over to singing. There is only one way to do it: to witness how Jesus Christ has rescued each of us from our hopeless, helpless condition and has set our feet on solid ground. With the strength of faith we can face this violent world and sing: God is our Refuge and Strength, a very present help in trouble. May God set our hearts on fire to sing the great song of salvation.

"CATHOLIC" DOCTRINE AND THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that

> it is not from sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of devotion and reverence.[1]

This helps explain why Roman Catholics are expected to accept the official church dogmas of papal infallibility, purgatory, the sacrifice of the mass, and the immaculate conception and bodily assumption of Mary. These doctrines are not taught in the Holy Scriptures but are considered by the Roman hierarchy to be a part of the authoritative "tradition" which has gradually developed in the church since the time of the apostles.

Is such an understanding of the relationship between Scripture and tradition truly "catholic"? In other words, has the historic Christian church always taught that Scripture and tradition are of equal authority, or is this idea a relatively recent medieval innovation? This question can be answered by an examination of the writings of the leading Fathers of the ancient church.

According to St. Athanasius (c. 296-273), the great defender of Nicene orthodoxy, "the sacred and inspired Scriptures are fully sufficient for the proclamation of the truth."[2] St. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 310-386) writes in a similar vein:

> With regard to the divine and saving mysteries of the faith no doctrine, however trivial, may be taught without the backing of the Divine Scriptures; neither are we to be drawn aside by mere plausibility and artifices of speech. Do not give absolute credence even to me, who tell you these things, unless you receive the proof for the things I announce from the Divine Scriptures. For our saving faith derives its force, not from capricious reasonings, but from what may be proved out of the Holy Scriptures.[3]

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), the greatest Latin Father, also asks,

> What more can I teach you than what we read in the Apostle? For Holy Scripture sets a rule to our doctrine, so that we dare not "be wise more than we ought to be wise," but be wise as he says, "in soberness, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith."[4]

Regarding those who would teach doctrine in the church, St. Augustine proclaims:

> Let them show their church if they can, not by the speeches and mumblings of the Africans, not by the councils of their bishops, not by the writings of any of their champions, not by fraudulent signs and wonders, because we have been prepared and made cautious also against these things by the Word of the Lord; but [let them show their church] by a command of the Law, by the predictions of the Prophets, by songs from the Psalms, by the words of the Shepherd Himself, by the preaching and labors of the Evangelists; that is, by all the

canonical authorities of the sacred Books.[5]

And finally, St. Basil the Great (c. 329-379) makes his position on this question very clear as he defends the doctrine of the Holy Trinity:

> They are charging me with innovation, and base their charge on my confession of three hypostases [persons], and blame me for asserting one Goodness, one Power, one Godhead. In this they are not far from the truth, for I do assert this. Their complaint is that their custom does not accept this, and that Scripture does not agree. What is my reply? I do not consider it fair that the custom which obtains among them should be regarded as a law or rule of orthodoxy. If custom is to be taken as proof of what is right, then it is certainly competent for me to put forward on my side the custom which obtains here. If they reject this, we are clearly not bound to follow them. Therefore let God-inspired Scripture decide between us, and on whichever side be found doctrines in harmony with the Word of God, in favor of that side will the vote of truth be cast.[6]

At the time of the Reformation, Martin Luther was accused of heresy and "innovation" when he asserted, over against Rome, that "the Word of God shall establish articles of faith and no one else, not even an angel."[7] In reality, he was simply correcting a medieval innovation which contemporary Roman Catholicism still perpetuates. Luther's teaching on the unique authority of Holy Scripture in matters of Christian doctrine simply echoed the teaching of Athanasius, Cyril, Augustine, Basil, and other Fathers of the ancient

church. The current Roman Catholic understanding of the dual authority of Scripture and tradition is therefore not "catholic" in the true sense of that word, and neither are those distinctive Roman doctrines which have no real basis in the Holy Scriptures (or in the writings of the ancient, orthodox Fathers).

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Endnotes:

1 Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (1956), in The Documents of Vatican II (American Press, 1966), p. 117.

2 Against the Heathen, I:3.

3 Catechetical Lectures, IV:17.

4 On the Good Widowhood, 2.
The quotations are from Rom. 12:3.

5 On the Unity of the Church, 16.

6 Letter 189, 3.

7 Smalcald Aeticles II, II:15, in The Book of Concord, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Fortress Press, 1959, p. 295.

LUTHER AND CALVIN ON THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

Most church historians would agree that the two most influential theologians in sixteenth-century Europe were Martin Luther (1483-1546), the leader of the "Lutheran" Reformation, and John Calvin (1509-1564), the leader of the Protestant "Reformed" movement. The Presbyterians, Episcopalians (Anglicans), Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals, and most other Protestant groups emerged historically within the Reformed branch of Christendom and therefore share a common Calvinistic heritage in spite of their differences on certain points of doctrine.

Regarding the authority of Holy Scripture, Luther and the other Lutheran reformers taught that "the Word of God shall establish articles of faith and no one else, not even an angel."[1] Calvin and his associates also claimed that they desired "to follow Scripture alone as rule of faith and religion, without mixing with it any other thing which might be devised by the opinion of men apart from the Word of God..."[2] Why, then, have Protestants in the Reformed tradition and Lutherans never agreed in all their teachings? If both sides look to the same Scriptures as the only source of doctrine, why do they not hold to the same beliefs? The answer is that those who follow Luther's principles of interpretation and those who follow Calvin's principles of interpretation approach the Scriptures with different presuppositions and assumptions.

Martin Luther believed that the Holy Scriptures are to be interpreted according to their literal

sense (except when the context itself indicates a figurative interpretation), and that "Man is to render his reason captive and to submit to divine truth."[3] According to Luther

> The knowledge of lawyers and poets comes from reason and may, in turn, be understood and grasped by reason. But what Moses and the prophets teach does not stem from reason and the wisdom of men. Therefore he who presumes to comprehend Moses and the prophets with his reason and to measure and evaluate Scripture according to its agreement with reason will get away from the Bible entirely. From the very beginning all heretics owed their rise to the notion that what they had read in Scripture they were at liberty to explain according to the teachings of reason.[4]

Because "the foolishness of God is wiser than man" (1 Cor. 1:25), Luther was willing to believe whatever the Scriptures taught, even if it seemed to run contrary to his own human reason and experience. As a student of God's Word, Luther remembered what the Lord Himself had declared to His people: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts higher than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).

In contrast, John Calvin believed that "the Lord has instituted nothing that is at variance with reason."[5] According to Calvin

> Reason and faith are not opposed to each other. Hence we maintain that we must not admit anything, even in religious matters, which is contrary to right reason.[6]

Calvin may have looked to the Scriptures as a course of Christian doctrine, but he assumed beforehand that they would not teach him anything which did not agree with his preconceived standard of "reasonableness." Calvin used his own human reason and experience as a "screen" through which he filtered the statements of Holy Scripture. Whenever the literal sense of a passage ran contrary to his "reason," Calvin would automatically impose a figurative interpretation on that portion of God's Word or otherwise twist the meaning of the text until it became "reasonable."

This basic difference in methodology between Luther and Calvin is best illustrated by the way in which each interpreted Christ's words of institution in the Lord's Supper. Luther wrote:

> Let a hundred thousand devils, with all the fanatics, rush forward and say, "How can bread and wine be Christ's body and blood?" Still I know that all the spirits and scholars put together have less wisdom than the divine Majesty has in his little finger. Here we have Christ's word, "Take, eat; this is my body." "Drink of it, all of you, this is the new covenant in my blood," etc. Here we shall take our stand and see who dares to instruct Christ and alter what he has spoken.[7]

However, Calvin and his allies understood Christ's words in an entirely different manner. They declared:

> We repudiate as preposterous interpreters, those who in the solemn words of the Supper, "This is my body, this is my blood," urge a precisely literal sense, as they say. For we hold it to be

> indisputable that these words are to be accepted figuratively, so that bread and wine are called that which they signify.[8]

Calvin, on the basis of his rationalistic principles, thought that Luther was "preposterous" because he accepted Christ's sacred words at face value. Because Calvin could not comprehend how bread and wine could be the true body and blood of Christ, he simply would not believe it.

Today the various Protestant groups within the Reformed tradition continue to apply Calvin's rationalistic principles of biblical interpretation in several different ways. Most Protestants agree with Calvin that the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper only "signify" the body and blood of Christ, even though St. Paul writes that "whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:27). Most think that water baptism is only an outward symbol, even though St. Peter says that baptism is "for the remission of sins" and that it is a means through which we "receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Many think that infants and small children do not need God's forgiveness and should not be baptized, even though David confesses that he "was brought forth in iniquity" and was sinful from the time his mother conceived him (Psalm 51:5), and even though St. Peter tells us: "...the promise is to you and to your children..." (Acts 2:39) Many think that only some Christians have received the "baptism with the Holy Spirit," even though St. Paul writes that "by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13).

In contrast to all this, confessional Lutherans are willing to believe whatever the Scriptures

teach -- on the Lord's Supper, baptism, or anything else -- even if it seems to run contrary to their human reason and experience. They seek to remain faithful to Luther's biblical principle that "Man is to render his reason captive and to submit to divine truth."

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(All Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, New King James Version.)

Endnotes

1 Smalcald Articles II, II:15, in The Book of Concord, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Fortress Press, 1959), p. 295.

2 Genevan Confession, 1, in Calvin: Theological Treatises, translated and edited by J.K.S. Reid (Westminster Press, 1954), p. 26.

3 Sermon on Luke, 2:21, quoted in What Luther Says, edited by Ewald M. Plass (Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 1165.

4 Sermon on Luke 24:13-25, quoted in What Luther Says, p. 1163.

5 Geneva Catechism, in Calvin: Theological Treatises, p. 134.

6 Institutes of the Christian Religion I, VIII:2, quoted in P. E. Meyer, The Religious Bodies of America (Concordia Publishing House, 1954), p. 203.

7 Large Catechism V:12-13, in The Book of Concord, p. 448.

8 Consensus Tigurinus, quoted in Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, Volume III (Concordia Publishing House, 1953), p. 295.

ERRATA

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Page 32: 3rd line from top

"ehe presence" should be
"the presence"

Page 68: 3rd line from top

"grave" should be "grace"