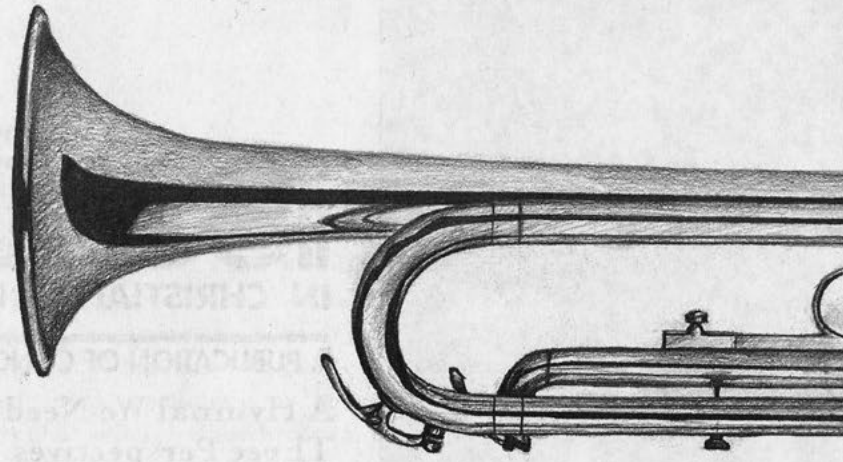


ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Spring 2003

Vol. 37, No. 1



A Hymnal We Need: Three Perspectives



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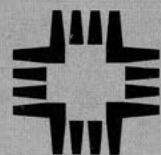
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reflections

"WHICH HYMNAL does your congregation use?" I have asked that question of fellow Lutherans hundreds of times, and their answers vary. The most frequent answers describe color or age. Many respond by naming the color of the cover of the hymnal: red, blue, or green. Others describe their congregation's hymnal by the age of the hymnal: the old one, or the new one. Even though most members of a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod congregation today refer to *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941) as the old hymnal, I remember my mother calling it the new hymnal because the old hymnal was a pre-1941 book.

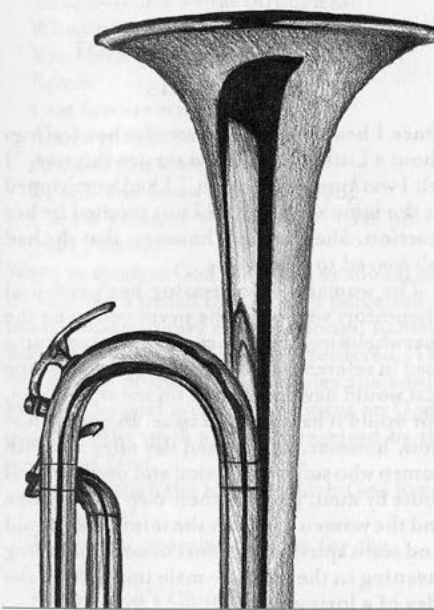
Humorist Garrison Keillor once remarked that Lutherans love to sing, and he said it is natural for them to sing in harmony. Today, discussions of music, liturgy, and contemporary worship among us Lutherans often reflect anything but harmony. Instead, we seem divided into camps often based on individual beliefs and preferences. As field testing of a new hymnal is taking place prior to publication in 2006, this edition of *Issues in Christian Education* examines key questions regarding the selection of music, liturgies, hymns, and the content of the proposed hymnal.

With all of the technology now available in our congregations, possibly the answer to what the new hymnal should include addresses the wrong question. As one pastor recently said, "We don't need a new hymnal in my congregation." He pointed out that the entire worship service is printed in each Sunday's bulletin. Personally, I do not enjoy worshipping when there is no music to read. Too often that causes me to become passive, a spectator instead of a participant, in worship of our God. At the opposite end of the continuum, some have suggested that we need several new hymnals, representing traditional hymnody and ethnic music, such as African-American, Hispanic or Asian, plus the best of contemporary music which is congregational in nature and representative of the theology of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Some have heard me suggest at times that the perfect hymnal would be one in which I personally was able to choose the hymns and liturgy. But I also add that there would be disappointment on the day after the final decisions were made, because I would have changed my mind. One area in which I would not have a change in heart would be the texts or melodies learned as a child. Our new hymnal must serve Christian brothers and sisters from the time they are in the cradle until they are placed in the grave. Nothing disturbs me more than discovering that the text of a hymn I memorized in my days in a Lutheran elementary school has been altered or the melody has been "improved" in a new hymnal.

Dr. Blersch summarizes the goals for a new hymnal well: "We need a hymnal that encourages the people of God to unite their voices in song by recognizing the best of the rich heritage of congregational music given us by our forefathers, as well as the best of the rich diversity of ethnic and cultural music of our own time." It is my prayer that God will bless the efforts of the synodical committee facing this nearly impossible task.

Orville C. Walz, President



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The New Hymnal

In 2006, we are told, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod will have a new hymnal and worship book. Two aspects of the context in which this new book—which should be at the heart and center of every congregation's worship—will be used should be noted.

First, by almost anyone's standards, worship in many Lutheran congregations is in serious disarray. Everyone does "what is right in their own eyes." Rather than understood as an end in itself, worship is mistakenly seen as a commodity to be shaped to the desires of "consumers" who often know little or nothing about the church, or as a tool to be used to achieve other (usually quantifiable) ends.

Second, as a result of our recent history, the LCMS presently has three hymnals in use in roughly the following percentages: *The Lutheran Hymnal* (now 61 years old)—40 percent; *Lutheran Book of Worship* (now 24 years old)—7 percent; *Lutheran Worship* (now 20 years old)—50 percent; other—3 percent. By contrast, recent hymnals of the ELCA and WELS have acceptance rates in the upper 90 percent.

Consequently, any attempt to gain acceptance by LCMS congregations for one hymnal will not be an easy task. The challenge may seem especially difficult at a time when a variety of "supplemental" material, much of it of questionable musical and theological worth, abounds in use in many congregations.

To its credit, the Commission on Worship has made available a continuous flow of information regarding the current state of the project. No one can plead ignorance of what the commission has been doing. Its agenda was clearly laid out in *Through the Church the Song Goes On: Preparing a Lutheran Hymnal for the 21st Century* (Concordia, 1999), in periodic bulletin inserts in *The Reporter*, through copious material on the Commission's web site, and in workshops, conferences, and in congregational testing. We may agree or disagree with the direction the Commission is going, but we cannot plead ignorance.

The major issues in shaping a new hymnal/worship book are scarcely new: questions of language, liturgical forms, selection of hymns, broader participation in leadership roles by both men and women, and lectionary matters, among others. How successfully these issues are addressed will largely determine its acceptance and use by congregations.

Two recurring tendencies in the LCMS stand in the way of a successful book. First is the unfortunate inclination to *go it alone*, to make decisions in an isolation of its own making, rather than in concert and conversation with other Lutherans and other Christians. The result in our most recent book was a host of idiosyncratic practices—textual, musical, and ritual—often justified with questionable theological and musical rationales.

So it is heartening to see, for example, serious consideration being given to the Revised Common Lectionary (used by virtually all Christians in North America); the acknowledgement that a Prayer of Thanksgiving (Eucharistic Prayer) is, after all, acceptable (we have had one in our books since 1969); and the inclusion of the complete Psalter. The inclusion of Divine Service II, First Setting, widely acknowledged as the best musical setting in *LW*, is encouraging, as is the inclusion of the Common Service. But it is certainly time to retire the musical setting so badly mangled for 60 years, no matter what misplaced affection has developed around it. But if the *Common Service* is to continue, why not include the texts of the historic Introits, Proper Offertories, and Communion? They have, after all, been available for almost 100 years.

The second tendency is to *tinker*—with words, translations, the liturgy, hymn stanzas, musical settings, with whatever lends itself to tinkering. [To check the "tinker quotient," count the number of times the designation "alt." or its equivalent appears in recent books.] Tinkering is often the result of capitulating to current, politically correct musical, sociological, and theological ideas. No generation is exempt. Textual tinkering with the hymns, "Ye watchers and ye holy ones" and "The church's one foundation," over the years offer perfect examples of theological political correctness in action.

Then there is the matter of the name. Why this frantic search for a new name with every new book? Pick a name and stay with it for future editions. It seems to have worked for *Hymns, Ancient and Modern* (since 1861) and *The English Hymnal* (since 1906), among others. But remember, this book is not just a hymnal, but a worship book as well.

Ultimately, there are two ways of shaping a new hymnal: 1) simply making a collection with something for everyone, or 2) forging a book faithful to our Lutheran heritage, building on the past, yet moving confidently and carefully into the future. Some would suggest that the first course is the way of the future. In reality it is courting disaster.

No matter what the shape of the new book, some will not like it. Better that the Commission on Worship proceeds into the new century with foresight, integrity, courage, and confidence with a book faithful to the heritage we share with all Lutherans, retaining and reclaiming what is consonant with the tradition, retiring that which is no longer useful, yet always remaining open to new expressions of the faith without being trapped in the ephemeral trendiness of our day.

That would be the course of faithfulness, honesty, and integrity. It is a course that just might help unify a church body sorely in need of it.

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The Importance of Pronouns

Once I heard a woman describe her feelings about a Lutheran worship service this way: "I felt I was *hymn-ed* to death." I had worshipped in the same service, and I was puzzled by her reaction. She clarified, however, that she had felt *him-ed* to death.

The woman was expressing her profound discomfort with what she perceived to be the overwhelming frequency of male pronouns used in reference to God. It was not something that would have registered on me at the time, nor would it have been an issue. In her profession, however, she worked day after day with women who suffered physical and psychological abuse by men, perhaps their own fathers. She and the women to whom she ministered could find scant spiritual comfort or soul-satisfying meaning in the God-as-male image or in the idea of a loving Father.

Such a dilemma may be hard for some in the church even to acknowledge. One does not, after all, question the Creator and the Redeemer as being God the Father and God the Son.

How sensitive and accommodating should the Church be about using inclusive gender language when publishing a hymnal? Efforts within our society in the last few decades to use gender inclusive or neutral language have not caused its collapse. Many women today appreciate the significance that language makes in how they are perceived and treated in business and other areas. Reports indicate that the Missouri Synod has lost nearly 500,000

baptized members in 30 years. Dare we brush off the 51 percent of the population who are female? If our daughters and granddaughters are leaving, or if we are not attracting women to our church, it is irresponsible not to take all possible reasons seriously.

Although we must avoid compromising central truths about God or the Christian faith for any reason, we can try to maximize our effectiveness among all people. Does it change anything doctrinally to say "human beings" instead of "men"? No. That sort of verbal substitution neither diminishes God nor undermines our perception of *him*. It isn't necessary to go through grammatically awkward contortions to eliminate every male pronoun. However, there are strategies that careful hymn writers, for example, can use to minimize them.

One such strategy is to address God so that the pronouns for God become "you" and "your." Another is to have God speak in the hymn. One text that I have written uses both strategies. The congregation addresses God in each verse, and God speaks in the refrain.

Though mountains slide into the sea,
And waters rush where fields should be,
Though monuments and nations fall,
Your holy city stands through all.
When nothing seems to stay the same,
You teach us your eternal name.

Refrain:

I AM forever WHO I AM
Above you, beneath you,
Around you and within you.
Be still and know that I am God.
("I AM Forever WHO I AM," CPH 98-3685, 2002)

When we speak to God in a hymn we should also try to avoid a pitfall that is often perceived in many contemporary religious songs, namely, making worship self- or "I-" centered. The use of the plural "we" includes the whole group. The goal is to keep the focus on God's praiseworthy work and gifts received by the people of God.

We hold high the banner which God has unfurled,
A colorful promise of hope for the world.
We are God's Church.
What Good News we inherit
Of life and salvation!
How can we but share it?

We can also increase our recognition of women in congregational worship by appropriately incorporating women's roles in hymn texts. In every verse of this hymn, for example, Mary gives witness to a significant truth about the Incarnation.

Winter night gives birth to day,
A newborn sleeps upon the hay.
Mary says, "Immanuel."
God's gift is wrapped in human clay.

Light of heaven, soil of earth,
Brought together by the birth.
In another hymn women are given credit for their eagerness to reach the Easter tomb.
A hollow tomb—a hallowed place,
Time for holy celebration.
God and earth anew embrace;
Here is total transformation.
Go, women, take the news and run;
Truly life has just begun!
Alleluia. Trust in God!

Do we unnecessarily leave women out or emphasize male imagery and male pronouns in our liturgy and hymns? When a new hymnal is being developed, this is an opportune time to take an objective, conscientious look at the kind of language that the church uses.

Language is imperfect, subtle and challenging, and it is always changing. How language works and what it conveys to the hearer is significant. If there are women who feel "*him-ed*" to death and marginalized by the Church, we ought to take them seriously. As the church concerned about the whole body of Christ within contemporary society, we cannot overlook the importance of little things like pronouns.

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A Hymnal: Shaper of Faith

The hymnal, *Lutheran Worship*, was introduced in my congregation in 1982 when I was in the second grade. Since then, all the LCMS churches in which I have regularly worshipped have used "the new hymnal." Yet if I ever worship in a church that uses *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941), which happens infrequently, I'm able to sing the service orders from page 5, page 15, or Matins almost from memory. Why? These were the services I sang for the first seven years of my life at Zion Lutheran Church in the tiny town of Pochahontas, Missouri. That which is impressed upon us in the earliest years of life is long remembered.

I also recall starting to learn *Lutheran Worship*. While I was aware of the occasional murmuring or reluctance to move away from *TLH* by a few church members, my classmates and I in the Lutheran grade school were soaking up the new material daily. After all, we got to buy our

very own copy to use in the classroom, and our teachers taught us how to sing the new songs of the liturgy. For us it was not a question of wanting or not wanting to change; it was about learning what we were taught.

Growing up using the two hymnals of our church has influenced and shaped the character of countless Lutherans. And now with the coming of a new hymnal for the Synod, perhaps most congregations, whether they currently use *TLH* or *LW*, will call this one book "our hymnal." It contains not only the textual but also the musical language of the church throughout the ages. Absorbing this theology helps to shape the worldview of the learner to coincide with the one true faith. The hymnal is a part of catechesis that begins with the youngest child.

"But there is so much in the hymnal that is too hard for a child to learn!" one might argue. Unfortunately, armed with this excuse, a great number of Lutheran Christians grow up without experiencing the theological molding of the hymnal and thus miss out on a vital part of faith formation. "Then when is the right time to start teaching a child the faith through the songs of the church's hymnal?" Besides Baptism, the best thing parents can do for their infant child in the context of the church is to worship with the child. The Word of God, sung and spoken, speaks even to infant children. In our Baptismal rite, we read Jesus' words, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." Although worshipping with children is certainly challenging at times, parents who consistently bring their infants to church help children to become accustomed to the sanctuary and what happens in worship. Relegating one's child to the nursery staff until one is two or three years (or older!) merely wastes years of opportunities for the child to become acclimated to the House of God. It has been known for some time that even babies in the womb "recognize" music; why not begin a child's journey of faith by allowing one to experience the music of the church from the earliest age?

At home and school, teachers and parents of pre-school-age children can sing hymns and songs from the hymnal that include easily-memorized refrains such as "Lift High

Continued on back cover



A Hymnal We Need: A Pastor's Perspective

D. RICHARD STUCKWISCH

THE REVEREND DR. STUCKWISCH HAS BEEN THE PASTOR OF EMMAUS LUTHERAN CHURCH IN SOUTH BEND, INDIANA, SINCE HIS ORDINATION IN MAY 1996. HE RECENTLY RECEIVED A PH.D. IN LITURGICAL STUDIES FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME. HIS DISSERTATION INVESTIGATED THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE LCMS IN THE INTER-LUTHERAN COMMISSION ON WORSHIP (IN THE 1960S AND '70S) AND THE SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLICATION OF *Lutheran Worship* (1982). PASTOR STUCKWISCH IS A 1988 GRADUATE OF CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY, NEBRASKA, AND A 1993 GRADUATE OF CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, FORT WAYNE. DON.R.STUCKWISCH.1@ND.EDU

THE LCMS LUTHERAN HYMNAL PROJECT (LHP) really began about the time that the *Hymnal Supplement 98* was being finished and published (in 1998). As a first step, in February 1998, the Synod's Commission on Worship hosted a meeting of various pastors and musicians, who came together from across the country to discuss a wide variety of questions and issues pertaining to the prospect of a new hymnal. In the months following that meeting, the Commission on Worship asked many of the same pastors and musicians (and others) to become five standing committees, which then began to meet in December 1998. These committees are responsible for the Liturgy, the Hymnody, the Lectionary, the Agenda, and the Language & Translations of the LHP, respectively. The LHP has involved the input and

contributions of numerous individuals, not only on the standing committees, but through many different working groups.¹ Attention has also been given to the needs and opinions of the church at large by means of an ongoing field-testing of proposed materials as they are developed. The LCMS Convention in the summer of 2001 officially approved a Synod-wide field-testing process in expectation of a new hymnal by 2007, pending the official approval of the proposed book by the 2004 Convention. The first major round of such field-testing on a broad and comprehensive basis began in the early summer of 2002. Since that time, the various committees and working groups of the LHP have been giving careful consideration to the many responses thus far received from pastors, musicians, and congregations across the LCMS.

A Lutheran Liturgical Theology

In order to evaluate the new hymnal as it is presently being developed, and to consider where it needs to be going, it is necessary to have a clear theological perspective. Our Lutheran perspective is determined by the Word of God and confessed in the Book of Concord. As such, it is an objective, historical, and churchly perspective. It begins with what God has said and done, and it continues with what God is saying and doing to this very day. And within this theological perspective, there is an important distinction between "the Liturgy" and Christian worship.

"Worship," properly speaking, is bound up entirely with *faith*; it is the confession of faith, and a good work or fruit of faith. Indeed, our Lutheran confessions describe faith itself as the highest and best worship of God (*Apology of the Augsburg Confession IV*, 49, 154), and apart from such faith there is no true worship possible (Hebrews II:1-6). So, then, what does faith do? It may best be described as a kind of active passivity, that is to say, an active trust and confidence in the Holy Triune God above all things, and an active receiving and believing of His Word (*Apology IV*, 310). Apart from that Word of God, there is no faith, and there is no true worship. Faith and worship depend entirely upon the Lord's speaking of His Word, and upon the Lord's giving of His gifts with

His Word. It is this divine speaking and giving of the Gospel-Word and Sacraments that our Lutheran Confessions understand to be "the Liturgy," that is, the Holy Ministry and Divine Service of the preaching and administration of the Gospel (*Apology XXIV*, 79-81). This Lutheran understanding of "the Liturgy" as the Lord's Ministry and Service unto His people differs greatly from the typical understanding of both Roman Catholics and Protestants. These others define "liturgy" as *the work of the people*. One may debate and disagree over the etymology of the word. However, an understanding of "the Liturgy" as the Lord's Ministry and Service is just as pivotal to a Lutheran theology and practice of worship as the doctrine of justification is to the identity and confession of the Lutheran Church. In short, "the Liturgy" is the Lord's speaking and giving of the Gospel, and "worship" is the church's faithful hearing and receiving of that Gospel-Liturgy.

Unfortunately, Lutherans have sometimes fallen into the trap of thinking and speaking about the Liturgy as though it were our human work, or as though it were a particular order of service in this or that book or bulletin. Such an approach has led to arguments over "styles" of worship, which are misguided and unhelpful on two counts. First, they falsely presuppose that the "style" of worship may be separated from the substance of the Liturgy (which is akin to separating faith from its proper object in the Gospel). Second, arguments over "styles" of worship inevitably focus upon the human words and works of the people, instead of focusing upon the divine words and works of the Lord. A much different attitude and approach must be taken if true faith and worship are to be served. It is necessary that everything begin with the Liturgy itself, that is to say, with the Divine Service of the Gospel as it is preached and the Holy Sacrament of the Altar as it is administered.²

Some Possible Goals of the New LCMS Hymnal

With a Lutheran liturgical theology in view, we may begin to consider the goals of the new LCMS hymnal, both in general and in particular. First and foremost, the new hymnal must be a faithful confession of the Word of God; it

must say the same thing that God has said to us. That goal is simply a given, but it should not go without saying, nor may it be taken for granted. Second, the hymnal is the place to preserve the rich and varied heritage of the church catholic—not as a museum of artifacts but as a treasury of gifts that continue to serve the church. Such gifts also represent our unity with those who have gone before us in Christ. Third, the hymnal is the place to include the most promising contributions of the present generation, of the church in our own day. Some of these new contributions will survive and continue to serve the church for many future generations; other new things will serve for a while, then fall by the wayside. Fourth, the new hymnal has the potential to encourage and facilitate a greater unity of practice among the congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. At present, those congregations are rather divided: between *TLH* and *LW* (and to a far lesser extent, *LBW*), and even between the vast majority who use one or more of these hymnals and those who have resorted to throw-away resources and other novelties (from a wide variety of sources). The new hymnal will hopefully be able to incorporate what is most beneficial and salutary from each of the present hymnals (and from the *HS98*), while also contributing some fresh new materials that will serve the entire church. If so, it will become a resource that may be held and used in common by all of our congregations (each in its own appropriate ways).

Now, to be precise, what we really mean by a "hymnal" in the LCMS is both a hymnal (a collection of hymns) and a service book (a collection of liturgical orders for the Divine Service and for daily prayer). Thus, most basically, the new hymnal needs to include both hymnody and orders of service. The hymnody should be chosen to meet a variety of particular needs. First and foremost, it should support the seasons of the church year. It should also provide hymns appropriate to morning and evening prayer. It should include the best hymns from throughout the history of the church, including the best of recent compositions. Finally, it should include hymns that address the various doctrinal emphases and other aspects of the

Christian faith and life. In short, the hymnody ought to be chosen for and geared toward the corporate liturgical life of the church.

As for the orders of service, the new hymnal first of all needs to provide for the Sunday morning Divine Service, which is the foundation, heart, and center of the church's faith and life. The new hymnal should also provide orders of service for daily prayer, meeting the varying needs and circumstances of congregations, schools, smaller groups within the church (such as meetings of boards and committees), and Christian families. Matins and Vespers, Morning and Evening Prayer, and simpler orders of Responsive Prayer for different times of the day have served well in the past and continue to do so. With respect to the Divine Service, it may be appropriate to provide a variety of musical settings, and perhaps some modest variations in the basic order and form of the Divine Service. In every case, it must always be governed and measured by the proclamation of the Word of God and the administration of the Holy Communion.

Especially as congregations have returned to the historic Christian (and Lutheran) practice of the Lord's Supper every Lord's Day, it does seem helpful and salutary to have more than one form and setting of the Divine Service, in order to avoid the monotony and mechanistic boredom that too easily beset the Old Adam when the same thing is always repeated in the same way, week after week after week. The appointed Lections and Propers, and the changing seasonal emphases of the church year, provide a continuous movement and rhythm of appropriate variety throughout the year. So may a limited variety of musical settings and forms of the Divine Service be used to reflect, support, and contribute to that seasonal and "proper" movement of the Liturgy from week to week. The variety needs to be limited, lest order be given over to chaos. What ought to predominate the Divine Service is not change and variation, but the constancy and steadfastness of the Word and Sacrament. Ideally, the new hymnal might include several settings of the Divine Service, which could serve (for example) to mark the several major divisions of the church year (namely, Christmas, Easter and Pentecost).³

A Pastor's Expectations of a Service Book and Hymnal

No pastor can easily or always give his full and careful attention to each and every detail of the Divine Service. Nor do most pastors have the time, the knowledge or expertise, or the resources to invest in a consideration of all the various factors involved in the Divine Service. What is more, it would hardly be wise or right for any individual pastor to make judgments and decisions concerning the Divine Service apart from the collective wisdom and experience of the church's past and present theology and practice. It is not simply a matter of personal limitations, but, more important, a matter of the church's identity and integrity as the one body of Christ in every time and place.

An officially agreed-upon service book and hymnal provides the pastor with a most valuable resource and means with which to remain within the received tradition of the entire church. Such a resource protects both pastor and people from their own idiosyncracies and prevents them from drifting into sectarian practices. It covers and makes up for personal weaknesses, while guarding against the temptation to make individual strengths the entire focus and concentration. Thus, it contributes a broad foundation and a much-needed balance to the liturgical life of a congregation. It also provides a sense of confidence, especially for those without the education or experience to know otherwise, that a congregation's liturgical practices are solidly orthodox.

A common service book and hymnal—rooted in historic Christian tradition and shared by an entire church body—also serves the unity of the church on earth. It is true that ceremonies and church usages that have neither been commanded nor forbidden by God (*adiaphora*) need not be uniform in every congregation of the church (*Formula of Concord X*). Nevertheless, the church has always recognized the great blessing that obtains when congregations of the same faith and confession also share the same or similar practices. The church in every age has likewise recognized that doctrine and doxology go hand in hand, in such a way that each one is always informing and shaping the other.

In point of fact, the way the church worships cannot be separated in practice from what the church actually believes, teaches, and confesses. As far as that goes, worship itself is a primary confession of the faith. Thus, an orthodox Lutheran pastor (and his congregation) will surely want to have and to use an orthodox Lutheran service book and hymnal in common with those with whom he is in churchly fellowship. He will happily rely upon the church's service book and hymnal, both to support and to express the shared confession.

To be sure, a pastor will not want to be straight-jacketed by the new hymnal. After all, there are any number of factors and details of the Divine Service that ought to be determined according to the particular circumstances and resources of a given congregation. Because a pastor's central and most definitive responsibility is the administration of the Divine Service, he is uniquely responsible for the particulars of that administration within his own congregation. Thus, he will depend upon the hymnal as a resource, as a rule and a guide, and as a measure of the parameters within which he may safely move. But he will neither want nor expect the hymnal to predetermine every jot and tittle of his pastoral practice and administration.

The pastors of the church will appreciate a limited variety of liturgical orders and settings, and a wide variety of hymnody. They will also appreciate the support and guidance of accompanying resources, which should provide not only the historical and theological undergirding of the hymns and orders of service, but also pastoral and practical suggestions for the use of those hymns and orders of service in the life of a congregation. Suggestions might well include appropriate ways of simplifying or elaborating upon the basic orders of service, as may be helpful or necessary on occasion. In the revisions of the Lectionary for the LHP, ample hymn suggestions for each Sunday and Feast of the church year have been well-received and greatly appreciated by the pastors who have field-tested those revisions. Pastors want that sort of guidance, which still allows them adequate room and flexibility to exercise their own pastoral discretion and oversight within their congregations.

Serving the Entire Church and Every Member with the New Hymnal

Obviously, it is important that a hymnal intended to serve the entire church ought to engage every member of the church in worship. The same concern is implicit in the very character of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, in which the baptized faithful of every age, race, language, and culture are one body in Christ Jesus. Clearly, a hymnal for English-speaking Lutherans in America will necessarily have to be in English. Otherwise, however, the hymnal should by no means cater to any particular "demographics." Rather, it must simultaneously embrace all cultures, while ultimately rising above every culture in its allegiance to the Word of God as the beginning and the end of all liturgical theology and practice. Thus, hymns must be chosen for their faithful confession of that Word of God, and their musical settings evaluated according to their unobtrusive support of that Word and confession. By similar criteria, the forms and musical settings of the Divine Service must be chosen and evaluated for their faithfulness in setting forth the divinely-given means of grace: the preaching and administration of the Gospel-Word and Sacraments.

The church must avoid the temptation to choose and shape liturgical resources and hymnody according to cultural and societal expectations, which drive to and from an entirely different heart and center than the Word of God in Christ. Ultimately, it is only that divine Word which is truly able to embrace and engage all generations and people of every race and culture. Not that the Word of God is "easy" to understand or instantly "accessible." Indeed, it can neither be understood nor grasped at all apart from the Spirit of God. The same difficulty is true for hymns and orders of service that are firmly and deeply rooted in the Word of God. But the Word itself is the very means and vehicle whereby the Holy Spirit is at work to open the ears, the hearts, and the lives of those who hear the Word. Beyond that, it is simply necessary for every Christian to be always growing in and through the Word, into the maturity of the faith.

Attempts to simplify or "dumb down" the church's liturgical practices, in an effort to make them palatable and accessible to the masses, are inevitably self-defeating efforts. The church dare not aim to unite everyone in the lowest common denominators of the human condition. Instead, through the preaching, teaching, and catechesis of the Word of God—also by the means of the Liturgy itself—the church raises every member in the unity of the Gospel. That point is not to say that every congregation (nor every occasion or circumstance within a given congregation) is capable of the same level of difficulty in musical or textual expressions of the Word of God. Certainly, it is necessary to accommodate the resources and abilities of the gathered community in each place. The new hymnal will hopefully facilitate those needs. But children, especially the very young who cannot yet read, as well as the elderly with waning eyesight, are best served (and engaged) in congregational worship by a solid consistency of expression from one week to the next.

In many ways, the church has been hindered by otherwise wonderful advances in literacy and desktop publishing capabilities, which have encouraged a multiplicity of text-heavy and constantly-changing orders of service. People have thus been asked (implausibly) to "confess" words they have never heard or seen before, and will probably never hear or see again. Even those who can read well are challenged to keep up with such approaches, while those who cannot read so quickly or well are effectively prevented from participation in congregation worship. Another alternative approach has been a shift to a performance-heavy model, in which the congregation as a whole is largely passive while various individuals or small groups do the bulk of the speaking and singing. While this model appeals to the entertainment mentality of the United States, it fails to engage the entire congregation in worship. By contrast, the steady pattern and practice of the historic liturgy, especially when it is used consistently and well, powerfully draw even the very young into its participation.

Theologically speaking, the real key to engaging every member of the church in worship is for every particular order and form of

the Divine Service to build upon and grow out of the actual Liturgy of the Gospel itself. To that end, everything must stem from the Lord's own speaking of His Word and His giving of His gifts. Likewise, then, musical settings of the Divine Service (and hymns) must be chosen to support and accentuate the Gospel-Liturgy of the Word and Sacrament, without getting in the way or distracting from it. That is precisely the point and purpose of chanting, for example, in contrast to speaking and other forms of singing. Aside from its deep roots in Scripture and church history, chanting honors and lifts up the Word above everything else. Because many Americans have not been accustomed to chanting, but have grown up on a steady diet of highly emotional (and emotive) forms of music, or on the pulsating rhythms of rock and roll, it is sometimes difficult to understand and appreciate chanting. Where it thus becomes a genuine distraction from and/or an obstacle to the Word, pastoral discretion may need to diminish or do without this otherwise salutary practice. Ideally, though, a congregation should learn to appreciate the way that chanting elevates the Word and calls attention to that which is said by and from and to the Lord. In any case, whatever sort of music is used, it should neither dominate nor distract from that Word of the Lord. The music should not call attention to itself, but solely to the Word. Likewise, no music should be chosen or used to induce emotional responses in the people apart from the Word.

In sum, everything depends upon and centers in the Word of the Lord. Everything must properly begin from and return to that divine Word. Again and again, it must be that Word which determines the choices that are made. When and where that is the case, the Liturgy of the Gospel is served—for the benefit of the people—in such a way that faith is engendered, nurtured, and strengthened. And faith is then enabled to return its worship and praise by confessing the Word that has been heard, and by giving thanks for the gifts received in accordance with that Word.

On all of these counts, the LCMS Lutheran Hymnal Project scores very well. Clearly, it has set for itself the aim of faithfulness to the

Word of God. It has taken for its heart and center, and for its driving engine, the means of grace, which are the Lord's own preaching and administration of His Gospel-Word and Sacraments. The LHP has thus far confessed the church's faith in the Lord and His divine providence by thankfully receiving and faithfully preserving the heritage and salutary tradition of the church catholic, and of the historic Lutheran Church in particular. Along with that integrity and continuity with the past, there has also been a conscious and deliberate effort to offer new and additional forms and musical settings of the Liturgy, as well as new and additional hymn texts and tunes. Some of these new possibilities do not hold up as well as others under consistent use, but that is the purpose of field-testing and feedback from the congregations of the church. There is necessarily this process of sifting, selecting and weeding out. Hopefully, the Commission on Worship and the LHP will continue listening to the church they have been appointed to serve, while maintaining their ultimate allegiance and faithfulness to the Lord and His Word. With those priorities and parameters firmly in place, we may also hope for and look forward to supporting resources, which will help to explain the richness and substance of the new service book and hymnal when it is published; which will offer additional supporting and complementary resources along with it; and which will provide pastoral guidance in the practical use of all these things to the glory of God and to the benefit of our neighbors. And when all is said and done, we will no doubt be able to return thanks to our dear Lord God for these and all of His other gifts and graces. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

Notes

- ¹ This author has had the privilege of serving on the Lectionary Committee of the LHP from the very beginning and on the Lord's Supper working group of the Liturgy Committee since 1999.
- ² Unless otherwise indicated, references to "the Liturgy" herein always have in mind the Holy Ministry and Divine Service of the Gospel-being-preached and the Sacrament-being-administered.
- ³ The LHP has been wise to preserve the familiar orders of the "Page-15" service from TLH and Divine Service II from LW. Two new settings of the Divine Service are anticipated.



A Hymnal We Need: A Musician's Perspective

JEFFREY BLERSCH

THE CREATION OF A NEW HYMNAL for The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is a task of gigantic proportions. After all, this one book will serve the entire church throughout the coming decades. This is one book which will serve many functions in the life of our church body: it will be a resource for individual and family devotions and prayer; it will provide orders of service; it will provide us with a resource for the song of the church.

Two points need to be made at the beginning. This article's focus on music should not be read to suggest that the theology contained in the hymnal is of little or no importance. Theology, of course, is of primary importance, for it shapes and defines our identity as a church body. But the purpose of this discussion is to explore what is needed musically from a hymnal. What is unique about singing

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together? What makes a piece of music congregational? What role does musical style play in the definition of our song? What resources do parish musicians need to help them play in a stylistic and musical manner? And, finally, what do these questions tell us about the hymnal we need at the beginning of the 21st century?

Second, I do not claim to have answers to the above questions that will be universally true. This article is literally *one* musician's perspective, based upon my experiences and reflection, on the role of congregational song and ways to encourage, enliven, and enrich it in the decades to come.

Purpose of Congregational Song

People sing for many different reasons: to uplift, to comfort, to mourn, to celebrate, to educate. People sing *together* for many of the same reasons, but the act of communal singing reminds us that we are not alone on our journey, that others are being uplifted, comforted, educated with us, that others are joining us in our celebration or in our mourning. The melding of many different voices into one song achieves a unity of purpose that gives greater meaning and significance to the reason we sing.

From ancient times, Christians have cherished the act of praising, praying, and proclaiming the Gospel together in song. The gift of music takes our individual voices and blends them together with those around us, with other Christians across the globe, and with those who are now sainted. In so doing, our many voices are made into one song of the church catholic. Dietrich Bonhoeffer states it this way: "It is the voice of the church that is heard in singing together. It is not I who sing, but the church. However, as a member of the church, I may share in its song."¹

Scripture relates many instances of the church universal being united in song. The Lord told Job that at the creation of the earth "the morning stars sang together, and all the angels shouted for joy."² 2 Chronicles records that at the dedication of the temple: "The trumpeters and the singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the Lord."³ St. Luke tells us that at the birth of Christ "Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God

and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest . . .'"⁴ St. John writes in Revelation that he heard "the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand . . . In a loud voice they sang 'Worthy is the lamb who was slain . . .'"⁵

Characteristics of Congregational Song

From the perspective of congregational song, a hymnal must therefore be a volume that allows our many voices to be united in one. It must contain songs and hymns that encourage active participation by every worshipper if the resulting song is to be one of the church collective.

The concept of unrehearsed, communal singing is somewhat anachronistic in today's culture. After all, except for the singing of the National Anthem and a few rousing choruses of "Happy Birthday," worship is perhaps the only place where singing together is a regular, communal activity. As early as the 1920s, music began to lose its communal associations as the growing popularity of the phonograph, the sound movie, and radio transformed music from a largely participatory activity to a largely spectator activity.⁶ The oral, active tradition of popular song was replaced by an aural, more passive tradition. No longer was it necessary to make music together in order to hear or experience it. Technology such as headphones made music even less communal by making it possible for individuals to exist in our own sound worlds.

It is unfortunate that this phenomenon has made its way into the church. Too often our congregations have become spectators rather than participants in the song. Think for a moment of song leaders armed with state of the art sound systems who take over the song of the church, thereby making it the song of a few. Or, think of an overzealous organist who, in an attempt to dazzle the congregation with his virtuosity, totally obliterates the pulse and tune of a hymn, leaving the congregation's voices silenced, unable to participate.

How, then, do we define which songs will effectively unite our voices by encouraging active and bold singing from everyone? How do we ensure that our song reflects the diversity of our church, thereby truly uniting our different voices into one song?

Many criteria may be established for determining what music is congregational in nature and what is not. To compile a new hymnal with approximately 600 of the best hymns from the literally thousands upon thousands which currently exist is an arduous task and one which requires strict and careful guidelines.

Role of Emotion

The role which emotion plays in church music is one of the critical issues in our field today. Unfortunately, many times it is used as a criterion by which we evaluate the effectiveness of congregational song. Some might claim that emotion gets in the way of the proclamation of the Gospel; therefore, church music must be devoid of any emotional association. Others might claim that the music used in worship provides a kind of emotional or spiritual high and thereby encourages worshippers in their faith. (I have heard this argument from proponents of both traditional and contemporary music.) While much could be said on this issue, it should be noted that a problem exists when either the seeming presence or lack of emotion in music is used as a criterion by which congregational song is evaluated.

Each of us favors various styles of music, and those which we tend to value as individuals are those which speak to us on an aesthetic and emotional level. While Christians agree on many values and ideals, the concept of aesthetics and how music impacts our emotions is one which remains imbedded in the individual. Our individual concept of aesthetics is shaped by many factors including our geographical location, environment, and education. Even more individualistic is our emotional response to various music, as it is quick to change based upon our current experiences and feelings.

Too often we equate the song of the church with the song of the individual church member. Congregational song is not geared toward the individual and individual reactions, but rather is a vehicle by which our voices are united in praise and proclamation. Music of quality will, without a doubt, produce emotional responses in its listeners, but those responses will vary greatly from individual to individual.

I can remember vividly seeing the tears stream down the cheek of a blind woman who normally did not participate in the singing of hymns, as she was able to sing all four stanzas of "How Great Thou Art" at the top of her lungs. The text coupled with the music of the hymn spoke to her. The argument could be made that that hymn is overly sentimental and is meant to arouse emotion. Perhaps. But, I can also remember seeing many sets of red cheeks and wet eyes after the singing of "Our God, Our Help in Ages Past." Style cannot predict emotion.

Neither the rousing of emotion nor the prevention of emotional reactions can be the goal of congregational song. In evaluating congregational song, then, we must strive to disassociate ourselves from any emotional attachment or reaction to music. I do not mean to suggest that music in worship be emotionless, but because emotion is an inevitable individual attribute, it cannot be used to evaluate song on the corporate level.

How, then, should one evaluate the congregational nature of a song? What I suggest is a listing of criteria based on musical absolutes rather than on vague statements or any one person's interpretation. While this is not an exhaustive list, standards such as the following could be used to determine whether or not a song or hymn is congregational in nature:

- The music must embody a strong pulse.
- The rhythms of the music should be regularly recurring, direct subdivisions of the pulse, with little or modest amounts of syncopation.
- The melodic rhythm should not be so active as to hinder enunciation of the text.
- The range of the pitches should be limited primarily to the octave, normally not going below B-flat nor higher than E.
- The pitches should move primarily by step or by consonant skips.

A song will become less congregational as any of the above characteristics are discarded. For example, the placement of the hymn, "Of The Father's Love Begotten," in the key of F as it is found in *The Lutheran Hymnal* creates a tessitura which is too high for effective congregational song. Likewise, the highly syncopated and melodically ornate lines of the majority of Christian pop songs, while perhaps interesting

to listen to, are soloistic rather than congregational in nature and are not effectively reproduced by a group of unrehearsed singers.

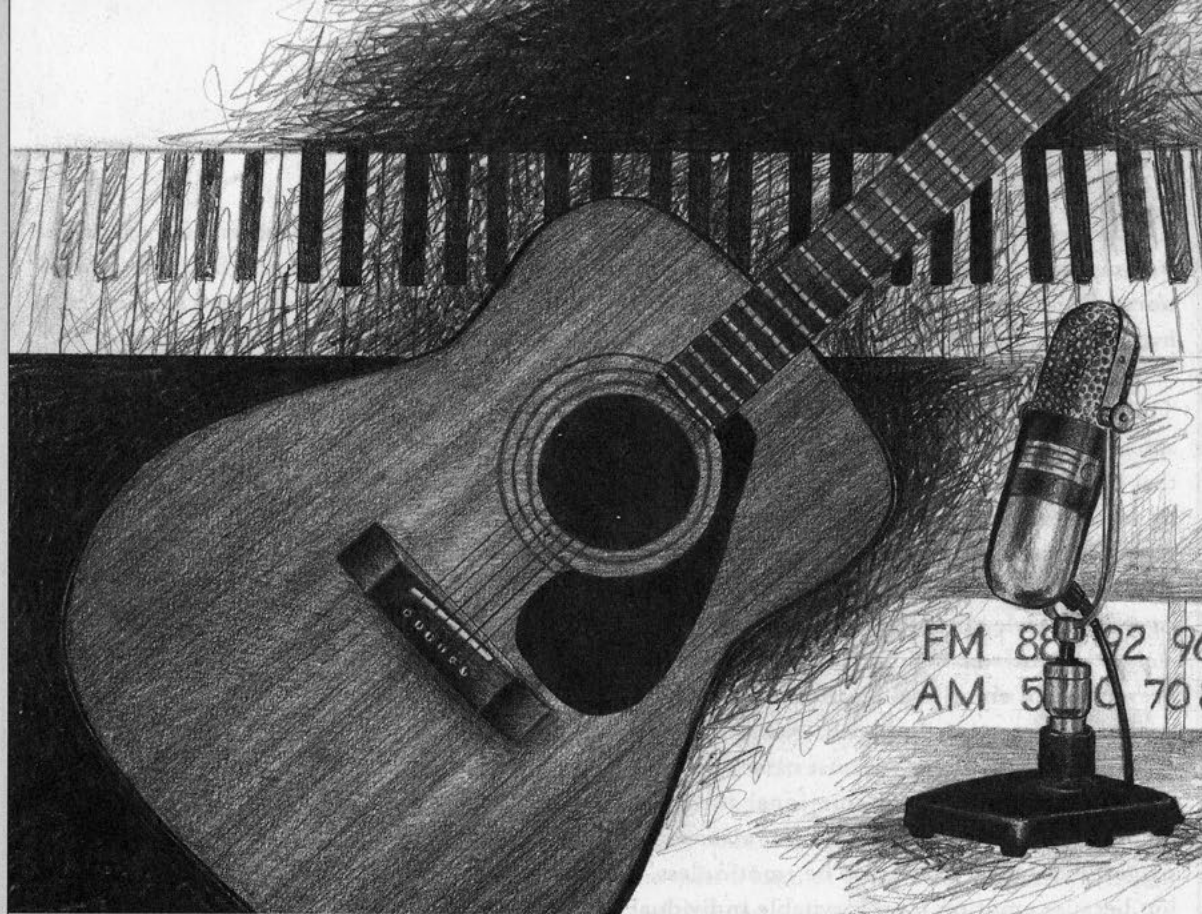
Diversity

To unite all people in song, to equally encourage the song of all members regardless of age, ethnicity, or education, requires a hymnal which speaks from multiple points of view. The ELCA document, "Principles for Worship: Music and The Christian Assembly," states that "worship is strengthened when music spans the generations and honors the faithfulness of people in a variety of locales. A rich and varied set of songs guards against a tendency to reflect a limited view of God, ourselves, and the church."⁷

The 20th century has witnessed a tremendous increase not only in number of musical styles, but also in our awareness of diverse musical styles, some of which are quite ancient. This multiplicity of styles has resulted in post-modern music whose primary characteristic is collage, a mixture of styles. An effective hymnal in our diverse age will likewise resemble a collage of musical styles. The need for a hymnal to embrace a culturally diverse repertoire is not rooted in a societal need to be politically correct, but rather to unite us in song with the global church, to recognize that other cultures have their own traditions of effective congregational song in which we may also participate.

As our church body reaches out to people of various backgrounds and ethnicities, it is crucial for the church to recognize the wonderful diversity of God's creation and draw on diverse musical expressions. In *Lutheran Worship*, the vast majority of the hymn tunes are of Anglo-American or Northern European origin. This is not to diminish the authenticity or effectiveness of any of these hymns, but it does speak toward the critical need for musical diversity within our church body. *Hymnal Supplement '98* has begun to address this issue, and our new hymnal will certainly carry it further.

The issue of culture, of course, begs the question, "What about popular culture?" Does the pop culture embody some of the same characteristics of an ethnic culture? If musical expression in congregational song should include the music of various ethnicities, should it not also include the various styles of current pop music?



Once again, the answer given to these questions is too often based on individual aesthetic beliefs and emotional responses rather than on musical facts that will determine whether or not a particular piece of music is congregational in nature and if it contributes to the praise of God and the proclamation of the Word.

Take, for instance, the argument that since the majority of people listen to music of popular styles on the radio during the week, that is the style of music that should be used in worship. This theory incorrectly suggests that congregational song is an aural rather than a participatory experience, and that the music is evaluated solely on individual preferences rather than on its ability to unite a diverse group of people in song. Furthermore, a musical mistake is made by not recognizing the vast diversity that exists within the broad category of popular music.

On the other hand, others might argue that Christian pop music has no place in worship, since its origin lies in an ever-changing culture of consumerism, and that the rhythms and instrumentation used suggest activities which are quite different from worship. While the former may be proven true, the latter leaves much to individual interpretation. The question remains: is it possible for music in a fresh, popular style to be congregational in nature and effective in worship?

The work of Roman Catholic composers such as Marty Haugen, Michael Joncas, and David Hass has answered, "Yes." Their music contains many elements of current popular music, but retains the congregational (almost folk-like) nature of the melodic line. The instrumentation of the accompaniment may be varied according to individual preferences and resources, but whether the music is accompanied by a single piano or by a full band, it is largely congregational in nature.

Peter Prochnow, founder and Executive Director of Lutheran Music Missions, has done some very interesting work in the area he calls hymn adaptations, the accompaniment of a traditional hymn in a non-traditional manner. His arrangements leave the melody and text of a traditional hymn unchanged, but the accompaniments may be played by a variety of instruments, electric or acoustic, and are noted in styles such as swing, rhythm and blues, Latin, and country/western, to name a few.⁸

Would all traditional hymns be effective in any musical style? Certainly not. The accompaniments of the hymns must still remain faithful to the thoughts of the text. But, to creatively adapt the accompaniment of a hymn does not reduce its congregational nature nor does it alter its theology since the text is not

changed. But the use of multiple styles helps encourage the song of the whole church and recognizes that we are but one small part of the larger picture.

It is incredibly sad that the marvelous diversity of musical styles with which we have been blessed has been used to divide us into various camps, often based on individual beliefs and preferences, rather than on a vision of the larger picture. Paul Westermeyer writes, "...style is not the critical ingredient. Deeper realities are. Christians have done Word and Sacrament for two thousand years in many styles, in many languages, and with many kinds of music."⁹

The debate about musical style in the church has been occurring for some time now, and, as our church body becomes more diverse and as the world of sound in which we live continues to expand, it is a debate that will likely continue. Perhaps, instead of thinking of the issue of musical style as a problem to solve, we should think of it as what Barry Johnson describes as a polarity to manage. Johnson describes a polarity as "a set of opposites which can't function well independently. Because the two sides of a polarity are interdependent, you can't choose one as a 'solution' while ignoring the other."¹⁰ Johnson suggests that both sides to a polarity have positive and negative attributes.

Paul Westermeyer, without using the theory of polarity management, describes the positive and negative attributes of congregational song which is counter-cultural, uninfluenced by current popular culture: "On the positive side, it indicates that the church's worship spans the centuries, has more meaning than any single generation can fathom, and challenges the culture itself. On the negative side, it can easily represent the failure of the church to serve or relate to the world around it."¹¹ He continues with the positive and negative attributes of congregational song which is continually changing and reactive to the current culture: "What is positive...is that it indicates how sensitive the church can be: periods of ferment spawn new hymns, music, and other literature...which become part of the church's treasured heritage. The negative side is that a too easy response turns the church into a reflection of the world and generates trivial hymns and music."¹²

Both sides of the polarity contain truths regarding congregational song. The extremists, according to Johnson, will accentuate the positive attributes of one side and the negative attributes of the other. But, a well-managed polarity is one in which the positive attributes of both are accentuated. A hymnal which will contribute to the unity of the church's song, therefore, should be diverse in style, but always congregational in nature, thus allowing us to better manage this musical polarity. It will allow us to unite high art with folk music, music in popular styles together with music from centuries ago into one purpose.

Musical Quality

Once a particular song has been identified as congregational, the evaluation of its effectiveness must be carried one step further: is it music and poetry of quality?

The marvelous thing about singing hymnody from previous generations and centuries is that, in so doing, we are joining our voices with the thousands upon thousands who have gone before us singing those same words. It is the voice of now-sainted Christians speaking to us across the boundaries of time and space. What we are singing, however, is not *all* that they sang, but it is the *best* of what they sang. These are songs which have endured through the centuries because of the poetic quality of their text and musical quality of their tunes. The creation of a new hymnal allows our generation the privilege of adding the best of our song to the song of past generations, forming a new core of song for the church.

What will our chapter in the story of the church's song look like? If we are to add to the song of the church eternal, we need music of quality and substance. We need music which is genuine, not cutesy or contrived, so that it will survive and endure. We need music which reflects the best of the melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic diversity inherent in the musical palette of the early 21st century. Paul Westermeyer reminds us that "the people's song is for the long haul, not the short run." He encourages us to "lobby for durable and high quality music for several generations of worshippers that young people can grow into rather than grow out of."¹³

Can It Be Done?

We need a hymnal that encourages the people of God to unite their voices in song by recognizing the best of the rich heritage of congregational music given us by our forefathers as well as the best of the rich diversity of ethnic and cultural music of our own time.

Perhaps we have reached the point where it is a next to impossible task to create one finite volume of quality congregational song that will equally encourage the song of all worshippers in all congregations of our Synod. Our Synod has been blessed with increasing diversity. Our musical options have expanded tremendously.

Perhaps it is time to consider the publication of several hymnals for use in our Synod: a more traditional hymnal in the style of the new Lutheran Hymnal Project, centered around a core of traditional hymnody and ethnic music; hymnals reflecting the culture of African-Americans, Hispanics, or Asians; hymnals which contain the best contemporary music which is congregational in nature and representative of the theology of the Lutheran Church.

With regard to the latter, perhaps current technology provides us with the means to produce an electronic version of a contemporary hymnal every four or five years. The frequent production of such a resource would help keep it current, and the electronic format would help make the collection more cost-effective for our congregations. As part of a project such as this, we as a church body could identify gifted Lutheran poets and match them with talented composers who write in a fresh, yet congregational style to create a body of contemporary songs and liturgical settings that is our own.

The production of a hymnal should also coincide with the publication of a musician's guide to the hymnal. While a scholarly companion to the hymnal is a useful tool to understanding the vast array of hymnody, a guide for organists which would include specific comments on appropriate tempo, phrasing, and registration suggestions for each hymn would be an enormous aid in practical performance issues. The same guide could also suggest some simple improvisation strategies for many hymns for those who wish to expand their skills in this area. Likewise, keyboard accompaniments

should be provided for ethnic and contemporary style music which are stylistically and musically effective. This would be an enormous aid to those musicians who are not comfortable improvising accompaniments in various styles. Parts for various wind and percussion instruments should also be provided along with guitar and bass.

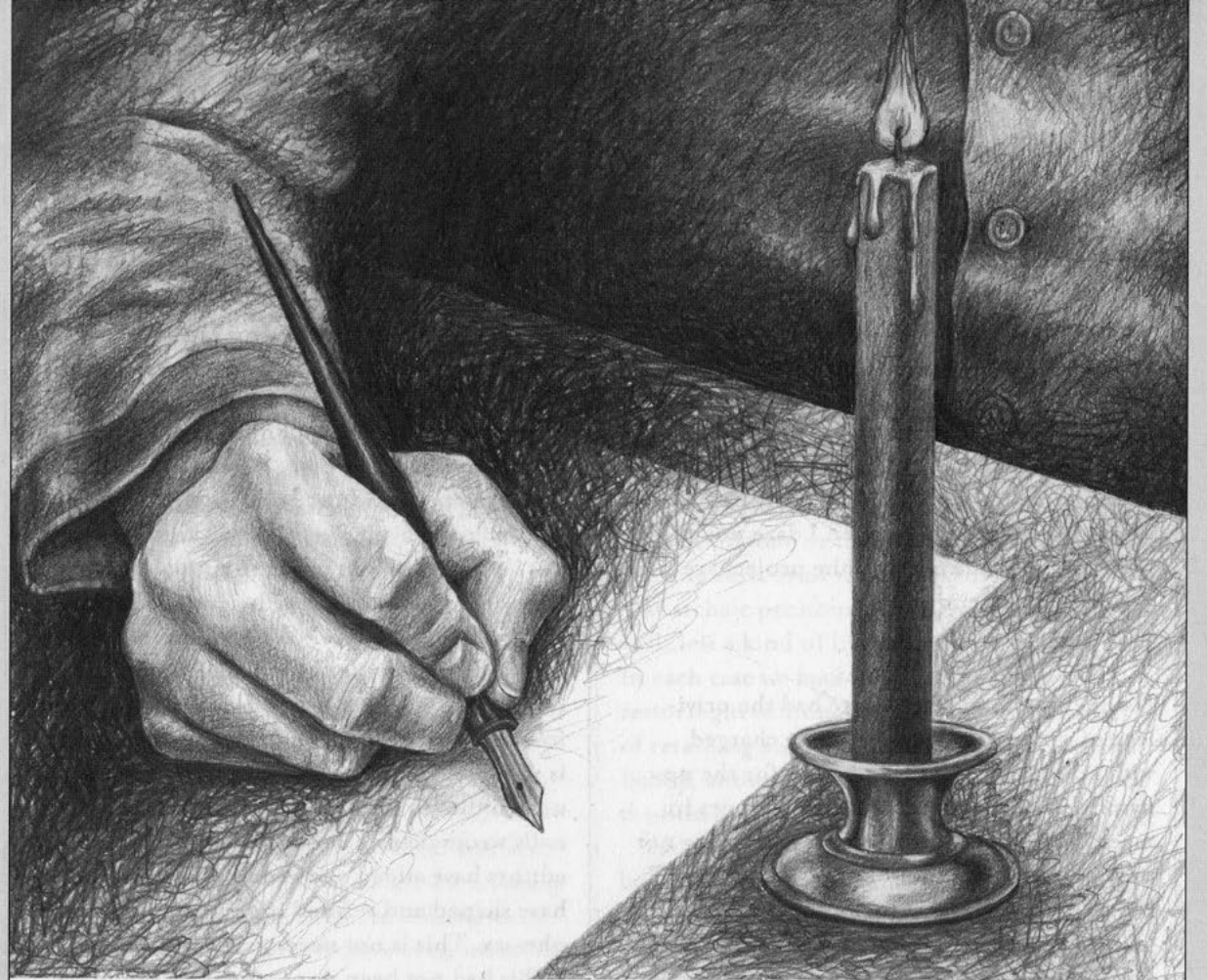
We need a hymnal which encourages the people of God to unite their voices in song by recognizing the best of the rich heritage of music given us by our forefathers as well as the best of the rich diversity of ethnic and cultural music of our own time. We need resources to help those serving in our parishes to effectively lead the song of the church in their own unique setting. Not everyone will find everything in the hymnal useful, but everyone should find the hymnal useful.

God has blessed His church throughout the ages with the marvelous gift of music, and He will certainly continue to do so in the years to come.

"All creation joins to praise you; Earth and sky Your works display. Art and music, gifts You lend us, We return to You today. Alleluia! Alleluia! God, Creator, source of life."¹⁴

Notes

- 1 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 68.
- 2 Job 38:7.
- 3 2 Chronicles 5:12-14.
- 4 Luke 2:13-14.
- 5 Revelation 5:11-12.
- 6 See Charles Hamm's discussion of the music of Tin Pan Alley in *Yesterdays: Popular Song in America*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 336-337.
- 7 Principles for Worship. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2002. www.renewingworship.org/publications/principles_for_worship/html.
- 8 For more information about Lutheran Music Missions or to download free, reproducible materials, visit their website at www.lutheranmusicmissions.com.
- 9 Paul Westermeyer, *The Church Musician*, revised edition (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 118.
- 10 Barry Johnson, *Polarity Management: Identifying and Managing Unsolvable Problems* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Polarity Management Associates, 1996), xviii.
- 11 Westermeyer, 84.
- 12 Westermeyer, 84-85.
- 13 Westermeyer, 78.
- 14 Carolyn Jennings, "Voices Raised to You," *Hymnal Supplement '98*, 895.



A New Hymnal: Language Considerations

JOSEPH HERL

NOT SO LONG AGO, I regularly attended a communion service conducted by a Lutheran pastor at a local nursing home. It was a moving experience. The residents who were present, mostly elderly women, were in various stages of alertness. Some were articulate in conversation and keen to observe the world around them;

others had lost most of the mental facility they had once possessed. Yet when the service began, they were all (except for the most seriously impaired) of one mind and one heart, reciting from memory the words they had learned over the course of many decades: "O most merciful God, I a poor, miserable sinner, confess unto Thee all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended thee . . ."

Fast forward 40 years. With what words will our people praise their God and receive His benefits? Will they sing with the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth"? Will they confess with Christians of all ages "I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth"? Will they even know how to respond when the pastor says, "The Lord be with you"?

I fear that the answer will be no, at least for many of our people. It is no secret that our churches are divided in their worship. It seems as though we have taken Melancthon's assertion that "it is not necessary for the unity of

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the Church that rites and ceremonies be everywhere the same" to be a requirement rather than an expression of freedom in the Gospel, with the result being endless confusion among our people, especially as they travel to other parishes. It is my dream that our new hymnal will be a book that counteracts this confusion, a book in which our churches can make visible the unity that is already theirs in name. To what extent this is likely to happen I dare not guess, but those of us involved in the project are striving toward this end.

Hymn Texts

For the past four years I have had the privilege of serving on the committee charged with selecting and editing hymns for the new hymnal. This has meant countless hours in meetings and on the telephone discussing not only which hymns should appear in the book, but also precisely what form each hymn should take. Our goal is to provide a cradle to grave encounter, as it were, so that a hymn learned one way as a child will not have to be relearned another way 30 years later. As far as the language of hymns is concerned, this means providing texts that fulfill three criteria that I call the ABC's of hymnal editors: accuracy, beauty, comfort. Hymn texts are *accurate* when they are true to Scripture, our confessions, and the intention of both author and singers. They are *beautiful* when they use poetry that is both well formed and expressive. They are *comfortable* when singers take them to heart, without being distracted by unfamiliar or confusing expressions or by language that is neither accurate nor beautiful.

In applying these principles of accuracy, beauty and comfort, our committee has not infrequently encountered conflicts among them. For example, it goes without saying that a hymn text should accurately reflect what we believe as Lutheran Christians. What should we do if a hymn is wonderful in most respects but conflicts with our teaching in a couple of lines? What if those lines are difficult to alter without hurting the poetry? What if the lines could possibly be given an orthodox interpretation, but most people probably would not do so? What if the lines are really orthodox, but there is a chance that some (or many) people

would interpret them in a heterodox manner? We have encountered all of these situations and have had to make a decision on each one. Some will agree with our decision; others will not.

Updating Language

One of the most difficult questions has been that of updated language. When *Lutheran Worship* was being prepared in the late 1970s and early 1980s, many hymnists, whether Lutheran or not, believed that in order to speak to contemporary Christians, the language of hymns should be updated to make it appear as though they had been written in the recent past. And so "Thine forever, God of love" became "Yours forever, God of love." This is nothing new. It is rare for hymns to appear in today's hymnals in the form in which the author originally wrote them, for over time various hymnal editors have added and removed stanzas and have shaped and refined individual words and phrases. This is not necessarily a bad thing. If this had not been done, today we would be singing "Hark, how all the welkin rings" rather than "Hark, the herald angels sing"!

Today, the pendulum has swung the other way, and most hymnal editors urge caution in updating hymns, preferring to allow hymn texts to reflect the age in which they were written. This is done partly for poetic reasons—it is difficult to alter poetry and still maintain its beauty and integrity—and partly to express the universality of the Church, as throughout all ages it calls upon the same God through the same Lord Jesus Christ, often with the same concerns.

Our committee has tended to follow the path of caution, preferring the original or traditional forms of texts to updated versions. In general, the more careful an author was to produce texts that are both accurate and beautiful, the more reluctant we have been to alter the author's language. We have thought long and hard before changing the texts of such poets as Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley, William Cowper, Reginald Heber, and Martin Franzmann, to name just a few.

There are nonetheless exceptions. If language is obsolete, that is, no longer understood, then we have changed it. Very few people today know that *welkin* means "the vault

of heaven; the skies," and so it makes sense to replace the word. If language is misleading, we have also tended to change it. Many people today find words such as "mankind" and "men" to be misleading when they refer to all people, including women and children. We have been sensitive to this concern and have altered the words whenever possible. Sometimes we could not do so without harming either the poetry or the sense, particularly when the words are used as part of a rhyme.

Other Challenges

Some hymns contain poetry that simply isn't very good. This is especially true of English versions of hymns originally in other languages. Translations are especially difficult to produce because there is always a tension between making a precise translation and writing excellent poetry, and translators are usually forced to prefer one of these, invariably to the detriment of the other. We have been somewhat more willing to alter translations than hymns originally written in English, improving them wherever we could. We admit, though, there is much work yet to be done in this regard, especially with hymns originally in German; and we would encourage those with more time and facility with language than we have to try their hand at it. To this end, the committee is making available the original versions of those hymns that we would most like to see newly translated, together with literal prose translations into English that can serve as a guide for translators.

Some of the most difficult decisions concern hymns whose language was updated in *Lutheran Worship*. If that hymnal were being produced today, many of these texts would appear with traditional language. But now many of our people have been singing the updated versions for more than two decades; some have never known the traditional versions. Do we restore the traditional versions, especially if they are better poetry, or is it more pastoral to retain the versions that have become familiar over the past two decades?

We have not adopted a blanket policy in this matter, but have considered each hymn on its own merits. We have relied greatly on the judgment of those whose ears are sensitive to good

poetry. With some hymns it scarcely seems to matter whether the text uses *thee* or *you*. With others it makes quite a difference. Fewer words rhyme with *you* than with *thee*, and one can hear the rhyme *you-true* only so many times before it becomes a cliché. Sometimes *you* seems out of place with other words in the text, or with the overall style of the language. For example, the use of old-fashioned words such as *abide*, *beseech*, and *yearn* or the poetic inversion of subject and verb or of noun and adjective suggests that archaic pronouns should be retained as well, lest a kind of literary identity crisis result. In each case we have weighed the benefits of restoring traditional language against those of retaining an updated version from *Lutheran Worship*, allowing the scales to fall to one side or the other.

Shaping the texts of our future hymnal has been an interesting and challenging task. In some cases it has meant tracing the entire history of a hymn from its origin (perhaps in a foreign language) through several publications, trying to guess what the editors of each had in mind when they changed a word or phrase. Our purpose has not been simply to reprint a historical form, but rather to establish the version that will best serve our people today and in the foreseeable future. Why is this important? Because hymns are the folk songs of the Christian Church. They express not only the faith of the author who wrote them, but of all who sing them. When we sing a hymn, we do not usually think how clever the author was or how great the author's faith must have been. Rather, if the hymn works as intended, we think, "This is just what I want to say, and I'm so glad someone has found such a wonderful way to say it!"

Note: Interested readers may view the texts of the first 451 hymns the committee is proposing for inclusion in the hymnal. They may be found on the Internet at <worship.lcms.org/hymns/hymnindex.htm>. Two different forms of the texts are available: one with only the texts themselves, the other with explanations included where texts have been changed. A link is provided where readers may comment on each hymn text.

Parts of this article have previously appeared on the Commission on Worship web site.

Testing the Claims of Church Growth

Rodney E. Zwonitzer. St. Louis:
Concordia Publishing House, 2002.

Advocates and opponents of the Church Growth Movement have been active in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod for some time. The author, a graduate of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and pastor of Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Dearborn, Michigan, examines the claims of LCMS writers who are proponents of the Church Growth Movement and LCMS authors who challenge its principles. Prior to becoming a pastor, Zwonitzer spent 13 years as a corporate marketing executive. As such he brings a unique perspective to the discussion of the Church Growth Movement, both as one who has had marketing experience in the secular world and as a parish pastor.

After an introduction, Dr. Zwonitzer uses the following format to discuss various topics, for example, "Barriers to the Gospel" (Chapter 3). He first states what he perceives to be claims of the Church Growth Movement point of view and then identifies a Confessional Lutheran point of view. In doing this he quotes extensively from writing of LCMS authors on each side of the issue. Thus, it would be helpful to the reader if he/she had read works cited prior to reading this book. On the Church Growth Movement side, he often refers to *Confessions of a Church Growth Enthusiast* by Pastor Kent Hunter and to the writings of Pastor David Luecke, especially *Apostolic Style and Lutheran Substance*. On the Confessional Lutheran point of view, he often refers to the Church Growth Study Committee of the LCMS report, "For the Sake of Christ's Commission"; an article by Dr. Kurt Marquart, "'Church Growth' as a Mission Paradigm: A Confessional Lutheran Assessment"; and the writings of Dr. Alvin Barry, especially "The Unchanging Feast: The Nature and Basis of Lutheran Worship." Zwonitzer then continues in each chapter by commenting on the various claims.

In general, the author challenges claims of the Church Growth Movement proponents. He points out where some of the practices promoted by the Church Growth Movement are in conflict with the theology of the Lutheran Church. Furthermore, it is his opinion that the Church Growth Movement has too many aspects of being market-driven rather than Gospel-driven.

Too often discussions of the role of the Church Growth Movement in the LCMS degenerate into more heat than light. It would be good for each side on this issue to learn more about the opposing side. One way this may be done is through reading what each has to say. This reviewer would recommend that all those involved in worship, both lay people and professional church workers, read the book. As a new LCMS hymnal is being prepared, both developers and reviewers of its contents would do well to heed Zwonitzer's analysis.

This book, especially if accompanied by thorough exposure to both sides of the issues and reasoned discussion between those with opposing views, could assist the LCMS to come to terms with the dichotomy that currently exists in the Synod.

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Let Those Who Have Ears to Hear

Kimberly Smith. Enumclaw,
Washington: Winepress Publishing,
2001.

As the author of this book notes in her introduction, "Music can make us feel energized. It can bore us. It can excite us and make us want to hop around in joy. It can make us feel melancholy, or it can inspire us to achieve our best." The power of music has been discussed for thousands of years. Plato, in the *Republic*, constructs a discourse that leads the "listener" to realize that certain types of music must be done away with because "They are useless even to women who are to make the best of themselves, let alone to men." Others are to be avoided by warriors because they will make them soft. Clearly, this belief in the power of music, of the specific notes and rhythms used, has been held by some for centuries.

Throughout this most interesting book the author builds a case that most Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) developed from a "pop music" model appeals to "our carnal flesh, called our flesh in Scripture, that makes it unacceptable, either as a representation of a Holy God, or as a method to impart spiritual truths to other believers." The author suggests that the reader test the music for oneself by turning on a favorite piece of CCM and standing up and "feeling" how the music wants to make one move. "Exaggerate the movements to better understand your response to the music. Do you feel pure in your spirit? Would you

want to move like this before a Holy God?" Smith states, "It's this appeal to the flesh, together with the good lyrics, that sends a mixed message to unbelievers and believers alike." The author adds, "Whether or not we actively participate in movement of some sort to such music, the fact remains that the many styles of CCM, with their underlying rhythms and beats, contribute to the feeding of our flesh, rather than help us learn to deny it."

If one were to take this a step further, it would seem that Smith would say that listening to "pop music" in any context is bad for the soul because we are not "denying our flesh." I am not certain that our Lord would go that far. Daniel Zager, in the Fall 2002 issue of *Lutheran Forum*, states: "Of course, a church can use Christian pop music. The all-important question is not 'May we do this?' but 'Is this a good choice?'" He continues: "Christian pop is used because of its musical sounds—sounds that come from the entertainment world around us, sounds that will never be a good match for theology that breathes and proclaims a completely different spirit from the entertainment world."

This does seem to make sense. It is not that "pop music" in and of itself is bad, but that it serves a different function in our everyday lives. Smith's book adds to the debate about the use of CCM in our churches. I am not certain, however, that this will become my argument of choice. Zager sums it up well: "Finally, we must remember Luther's perspective: that we praise God when we proclaim the Word of God through music—not merely by singing of God's praiseworthy attributes, such as his majesty or awesomeness, but by linking those attributes to his saving acts in Christ."

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**Why I Left the Contemporary
Christian Music Movement:
Confessions of a Former
Worship Leader**

Dan Lucarini. Auburn, Mass.:
Evangelical Press, 2002.

The author deals with a touchy subject facing today's Christian church: the use of contemporary Christian music in the worship service. Drawing from his own experience as a worship leader in several evangelical churches, and

as a former rock music performer, arranger, and composer, Lucarini questions the use of contemporary music in the worship service. His tone is not harsh and condemnatory; rather, Lucarini uses a tone that is firm and uncompromising, yet charitable. The concern that comes across throughout the book is that God should be the center of our worship and that He be glorified therein.

It is evident that Lucarini's expertise in the contemporary music arena reaches across theological boundaries. Since the contemporary Christian music movement has put forth its tendrils into many Christian denominations, this book has something to say to all, both the "Traditionals" and the "Contemporaries." Many churches have been deceived into using a so-called worldly worship style that uses contemporary Christian music in order to "reach the lost." According to the author, an over-emphasis on this contemporary musical style, especially rock music, has caused divisions in local congregations and beyond, and has shifted the worship emphasis from being Christocentric to being anthropocentric entertainment.

Lucarini was originally drawn to contemporary Christian music because it gratified his ego as a rock musician. He states that "the real motive for adopting CCM (contemporary Christian music) for praise and worship was not, as we were often told, to evangelize those from outside the church, but was rooted in a need to satisfy our own desires for our favorite music." He stresses that a music style that has such strong associations with the world's idols of sex and image should not be used during a worship service.

There are many in the contemporary Christian music movement who feel that music is amoral, with God accepting all musical styles and that no one should judge another's musical preferences or tastes. However, the author asserts that "Discipleship is not a self-esteem journey; growth means change, change always includes loss, and loss is always painful. You cannot keep your old habits and pleasures." Yet when many attempt to come into God's presence bringing their favorite secular music, dress, and language with them, is it time to confront and refute "acceptance" teaching so that biblical discernment might once again hold sway? Lucarini appeals time and again that God's Word be used as norm for all doctrine and practice in the church.

Bringing controversial music styles and performances into the worship of God in the name of winning "the lost" for Christ has also come at a cost. Dedicated "Traditionals" who cherished generations-old hymns and spiritual songs have been dismissed as being Pharisaical and legalistic for holding onto such antiquated forms of worship. These "Traditionals" feel forsaken by their church, and some have even left the fellowship of believers over the issue of bringing contemporary Christian music into the worship service.

Overall, Lucarini feels that contemporary Christian music's acceptance into the church has come out of an attitude of self-indulgence. Many have been deceived into believing that any style of music can be used in our worship services because God will accept it. From where does all this come? From Satan. Satan loves to see controversy in the church. Is there hope? Yes! Claiming the promise of I John 4:4, Lucarini reassures his readers: "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

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the Cross," "All Glory, Laud and Honor," "This is the Feast (Worthy is Christ)," and the "Alleluias" in "For All the Saints" and "Jesus Christ is Risen Today." Hymns that tell stories are also of great use: "From Heaven Above to Earth I Come," "As With Gladness Men of Old," "When Christ's Appearing Was Made Known," and "My Song is Love Unknown," for example. Hymns with concrete visual words can also be taught to young elementary children with success, especially if you make up actions to go along with the words. Children will also enjoy making up their own actions to hymns, with some direction from a parent or teacher. One first grade class I had a couple of years ago memorized the first verses to "A Mighty Fortress," "With High Delight," and "At the Lamb's High Feast" in this way. While "Jesus Loves Me" may be a perfectly acceptable song to sing, why limit our children to this, when the riches of the church's hymnody and liturgy can begin to be grasped?

Do the youngest children understand every single word they will sing? No. But there are things that we don't quite understand, theologically speaking, even as adults; some knowledge is too "wonderful" for us (Psalm 139:6). The Word of God contained in the liturgy and hymns is something we are constantly growing into.

As children enter grade school and begin to learn to read, the hymnal itself should be placed in their hands. At this point, the book becomes a veritable educational gold mine. Children learn the seasons of the church year by the order in which the hymns are placed. They can practice looking up hymns in the index, honing number and alphabetical order skills. They begin to learn where to look to find the melody of the hymn and then how to read it. Hymns are especially useful for learning to read music because the rhythms and intervals are often simple enough for young music readers to figure out (if they're taught how!). Older elementary students can begin learning to sing the alto, tenor, and bass lines, adding an element of interest for them. Children also learn where to look for the author and composer of the hymns, allowing them to place them in history. And, most importantly, as the children learn the liturgies and hymns in chapel, in a day school, Sunday school, and at home, they are continually being enabled to participate in the liturgy of the church on Sunday mornings.

But what about that question of difficulty? "It's a whole lot easier to teach a third grader 'Give Me Oil in My Lamp' with five additional verses describing various fuels and car models ('Give Me Gas in My Chevy,' etc.) than it is to

teach "This Joyful Eastertide." Perhaps. But the text of the latter will last much longer as spiritual nourishment than the former. The fact is, what is taught with enthusiasm and conviction will be learned and loved by the child with the same spirit in which it is taught. The converse is also true: what is taught as a chore or an exercise will be perceived as such by the child. So much is up to the teacher in deciding what a child will learn, love, and continue to use throughout life.

The Christian Church—and the Lutheran Church within it—is a culture all its own; the hymnal reinforces and promulgates this culture. If we do not teach the hymnal to our children, the cultural identity that comes with it will be lost as well. If parents, teachers, and pastors teach the great hymns and liturgies of the faith, they are empowering their children with a solid connection to the saints who have gone before and the entire Christian church on earth. They are enabling their children to face life from the perspective of redeemed children of God, who know their faith and are able to express it through song.

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