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Theology and Church Music as Bearers
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Theology and Church Music as Bearers and Interpreters of the *Verbum Dei*

By WALTER E. BUSZIN

IN the very first issue of *Musik und Kirche*, published in January/February 1930, Christhard Mahrenholz stated in his foreword that no age or generation can afford simply to take for granted that a relationship exists between the church and her music. Mahrenholz emphasized at the time that the very nature of the problems involved demands that each generation study this question anew. In the January/February issue of *Musik und Kirche*, published by the Johannes Stauda Verlag in 1955, Mahrenholz repeated and re-emphasized verbatim what he had said 25 years before.¹ As a theologian, liturgiologist, and musicologist he was aware that the proper relationship is easily obliterated and destroyed unless steps are taken periodically and at the proper time to safeguard and re-establish it.

I

If theology and church music are to be in perfect agreement with each other and the one complement the other, the text-based music of the church must share the objectives and obligations of Christian theology. Notes and tones are added to texts not to weaken but to strengthen these texts as bearers and interpreters of their message. Music often employs signs and symbols to convey the deeper meaning of

what the text says. When no text is employed by the musician, the problem becomes more difficult, since the text is needed to clarify and state *in expressis verbis* what the composer has in mind. The text thus comes to the aid of the music, just as at other times the music reinforces the text. When a clash or rift develops between verbal theology and tonal music, we must realize that their conjoint character has been either impaired or destroyed. The textual and spiritual content of theology and of church music must be homogeneous and fitting, not only that each may serve its purpose well but also that their fusion may actually help increase their strength and insure their effectiveness. By combining texts with music the composer seeks to present and interpret the *Verbum Dei* clearly and unmistakably. The better he is equipped theologically and musically, the better should he, as an instrument of the Holy Ghost, be able to serve the church in performing the task of bringing people to Christ and establishing them in the Christian faith. When this is not the case, the composer will easily confuse people and create a chaotic condition. He will then not serve the Gospel well and may do more harm than good. He may gratify people musically, aesthetically, or emotionally, but that is not the great responsibility of church music.

It is imperative, therefore, that theology and church music be integrated as much as possible. Church music and theology must

¹ "Grussworte zum Beginn des 25. Jahrgangs von *Musik und Kirche*," eds. Walter Blankenburg, Christhard Mahrenholz, Günter Ramin, Wolfgang Reimann (Kassel: Johannes Stauda Verlag Januar / Februar 1955), p. 2.

give evidence of an understanding of their chief and common functions and must provide proof of their compatibility. Both must aim, we repeat, to serve the Christ and the *Verbum Dei*. Neither dares to become an expression of human vainglory. Both must help create the same atmosphere in the church service of worship. Should music be without a theological text and not even hint at a text, it is neutral. When such music is used in services of worship it must not militate against the theonomous character of the occasion by suggesting what is foreign, ungodly, or frivolous. Not only absolute music but even the accompaniment of a sacred text can thus either support the theonomous character of a worship service, or it can profane and degrade it. The efforts of theology will in that case be thwarted by music.

It is possible, even likely, that much theological literature and religious music of the past two centuries is unsatisfactory and inferior because theologians and church musicians have become unaware of the importance of their high calling and have departed from the fundamentals of Christian faith, order, and decency by resorting to what borders on blasphemy and mockery. It is possible, indeed even likely, that the bill of divorcement issued by some to theology and church music has not only resulted in a catastrophic separation of these God-given gifts but also brought dishonor on the bride of Christ and her Christocentric and doxological services of worship. Victorianism and romanticism of the 19th and 20th centuries have driven many members of the Christian church into the crypts and cubicles which blind their view and make them so shortsighted that they are unable to behold the vast pano-

rama afforded Christian people by a wholesome type of ecumenicity and a healthy type of Lutheranism, with Christ, the Son of God and Mary's Son, in the very center of each. Romanticism, with its stress on the feelings, emotions and moods of people, and its emphasis on the rights of the individual, has not only subjected many to the prejudices and selfish demands of uncharitable and unreasonable people, but it has also distorted the vision and outlook of many to such an extent that their views on religion and worship have become egocentric. They have become intolerant also in areas in which the *Verbum Dei* permits no intolerance. Accordingly the bearers and interpreters of the Word are disfigured and are robbed of the stamp and semblance given them by the infallible *Verbum Dei* and the church of Jesus Christ.

In the late 17th and early 18th centuries theology became in large part an expression of *pia desideria*, of pious desires, while church music became an expression of emotional effusion and effeminacy. Services of worship became nothing more than *collegia pietatis*; the virile *cantus firmus* type of church music, until then a symbol of the church, was dropped, and sweet music with pleasant texts took its place. Sugar-coated harmonies replaced virile unisons and counterpoint; polyphony, when used, became as thick and muddy as the theology of those years. Both theology and church music surrendered their theonomy and their ecclesiastical attachments to the spirit of sentiment and ego, and each insisted on self-centered rights and autonomy. Again the concomitant relationship of theology and church music was rent in twain, and their dependence upon and derivation from the *Verbum Dei*, if not eradicated entirely, became cloudy and indistinct.

The vexatious problems and difficulties which romanticism and other movements and agencies foisted on the church already began to appear long before the romantic era of the 19th century. They had made their influence felt more than 300 years ago, before Johann Sebastian Bach appeared on the scene. In fact, they already began to appear in the days of the Counter Reformation and during the time of the Thirty Years' War. Composers began to employ less worthy texts for the healthy texts of the Bible, the liturgies, and the hymns of the church. Though influenced, at times even to a rather considerable extent, by such developments, J. S. Bach fought against these tendencies and continued to base his choral works on Biblical, liturgical, and hymnic texts. Since other composers of great talent fell in line with these new tendencies, Bach was branded as an old fogy, even by his most talented sons. Nevertheless he remained a dutiful voice and servant of the *Verbum Dei* and helped to perpetuate the close relationship between theology and church music, whereas his contemporaries tended to widen the gulf and to create unwholesome cleavage. The one was imbued with the mind of the church, the others with the mind of ego, rationalism, and the theater.

Two centuries earlier Martin Luther had refused to go along with the Reformed demand that all texts used in the service of worship must be taken over from the Bible either literally or in an adapted form. Luther had likely taken for granted that the church and her composers would not do foolish things and that profound respect for the *Verbum Dei*, for sound theology, and noble church music would prevent composers from indulging in sentimentalism of an amorous type when singing to

the Christ. Nevertheless what Luther likely had not expected to happen did happen. The refusal of later generations to use the theologically sound texts of the Bible, hymns and liturgies naturally and logically led also to a relaxing of truthfulness and relevance in texts and music used in the church service. While the pastor would perhaps preach a sound sermon on the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, the organist would use the *vox humana*, tremolo, and chimes to play Robert Schumann's *Nachtstück in F Major*, the choir would present Mozart's *Ave Verum*, and the congregation would sing "Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior," the latter a hymn marked by questionable theology and sung to an abominable hymn tune. This sort of thing still happens in hundreds of churches, some of which are Lutheran. We thus see what the results are when church music is divorced from theology and when music is presented in churches to please men and not, to put it as Luther did, to "keep the Word of God in circulation among men."

II

There was a time when theology and church music were regarded as conjoined bearers and interpreters of the *Verbum Dei*. It is well known that Martin Luther stressed music as a gift of God "close to theology."² Practically all of Luther's remarks regarding music provided evidence of a distinctively theological approach to the problems involved. Not only as an ardent lover of music but perhaps even more as an experienced and cautious pro-

² *W[eimarer] A[usgabe], Tischreden*, No. 968, I, 490, 41. Cf. Walter E. Buszin, "Luther on Music," *The Musical Quarterly* (MQ), ed. Paul Henry Lang (New York: G. Schirmer, January 1946), p. 85.

fessor of theology, Martin Luther remarked in one of his table talks: "We should not ordain young men to the ministry unless in the schools they have attended previously they have studied and performed music adequately and well."³ Luther likely made this statement because he was aware of what will happen when the study of music does not accompany the study of theology. He knew that an unbalanced and prejudiced view of Christian worship will develop which will easily create a clergy-centered approach, aversion to church music, and a depreciatory attitude toward Christian hymnody and instrumental (chiefly organ) music. These tendencies and developments, he knew, would not redound to the greater glory of God and the edification of His people.

For Luther, no serious problem was involved in establishing and perpetuating an interrelationship among the *Verbum Dei*, Biblical theology, Christian hymnody, and church music. Alfred Dedo Müller insists that Luther's remarks regarding music are not tinged with a romantic type of musical zealotism.⁴ The great Reformer's ardent love for, and profound understanding of, music as a gift of God, Müller contends, cannot be divorced from his theology. In other words, because music is used in the service of God to convey and expound God's holy Word, therefore Luther was compelled to assert that music be placed next to theology, there to share the functions of Christian theology. For this reason too, concludes Müller, church music

has no autonomous rights of its own but must serve as an instrument of the Holy Ghost to propagate and establish the Word. That's why we ought to speak of the theonomy of church music, not of its autonomy. In view of the fact that it is a tool of the Holy Ghost, we may well speak also of the paracletic character of church music.

When the theonomous and paracletic character of *musica sacra* is maintained, this art, as great and independent as it may be otherwise, is kept from becoming a law to itself; its chief functions and objectives remain identified with those of theology, which too, when used properly and effectively, is a servant and instrument of the Holy Ghost for the upbuilding of the church of Jesus Christ. Both theology and church music are but means to an end. When used as an end and not as a means, theology, the queen of sciences, soon becomes only another science, and music, queen of the arts, soon becomes only another art.

Martin Luther's deep-rooted understanding and appreciation of church music was as theological as it was musical. His theology was as Christ-centered, soteriological, and eschatological as it was kerygmatic. Christian theology and church music should be proclaimed and heard, but at the same time both should be media of a message greater than themselves. Both should convey the message of redemption through Christ. When preached and taught, theology should convey and interpret the *Verbum Dei*; it should involve a searching of the Holy Scriptures because in them may be found the hope of eternal life and because they testify of the Christ.⁵ Music, like theology, should be heard in our services of worship as a medium which helps

³ *W. A., Tischreden*, No. 968, I, 490, 33—34. Cf. Buszin, p. 85.

⁴ Alfred Dedo Müller, *Musik als Problem lutherischer Gottesdienstgestaltung* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1947), p. 10.

to bring us the *Verbum Dei* and its blessed Gospel. Though in the service of worship instrumental music by itself cannot serve this purpose directly, its character and spirit should certainly conform to the atmosphere and spirit of the worship service and thus help to sustain its spiritual tenor.

When music is not thus used in the service of worship, it may hardly be said to be theonomous; instead it will be autonomous or anthropocentric. It is then out of place and destroys the unity of Christian worship. As music is heard by some, it may seem to them to be autonomous, notably when it is absolute instrumental music. Through the blessed assistance given by the Holy Spirit, however, the devout and attentive Christian, who listens not merely with the ears of his body but likewise with those of his Christian faith, also hears the inmost expression of true church music and thus becomes more fully aware of the theonomous character of *musica sacra*. He hears it as a gift given us by God also for the upbuilding of His church.

In the religious life of Christian people the mnemonic assistance furnished by music plays an important part in rendering valuable service to the *Verbum Dei*. Music offers better mnemonic aid than do rhymes and meters. Children will retain texts they have sung much better than texts they have learned and memorized by rote. The same applies to adults. The Lutheran Church of the 16th century was aware of this. Among the very first collections of music published by Georg Rhau, the famous Wittenberg publisher of Luther's day, were volumes of music written for children and young people. Children not only recited the Six Chief Parts of Martin

Luther's Small Catechism, they were taught also to sing them as an aid to retain these texts better. Though, in later years, texts once sung were often shelved, they could be recalled far more readily than texts which had been merely recited. Many people today know hymn texts from memory because they have sung them so often. The same applies to Bible texts and texts of the liturgies. People on their deathbed recall and appreciate most genuinely those texts which they have memorized and sung in earlier years. Pastoral considerations therefore should compel us to recognize the value of memorizing and singing texts in early childhood which will be better understood and also be of deeper spiritual value in the years of adulthood. The mnemonic help furnished us by music thus comes to the aid of theology and religious instruction; it reminds us that sacred music, like Christian theology, can render valuable service to the Word and, with the help of the Holy Comforter, enable the Word to achieve its purpose and reach its goal.

The intrinsic spiritual character of both theology and music is perceived and grasped not by natural man but only by the regenerate and devout Christian. Though he did not refer precisely to the problem presently under discussion, we think of the truth expressed by St. Paul 1 Cor. 2, 14: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." We think also of Christ's words, recorded Mark 8:18: "Having eyes, see ye not? And having ears, hear ye not? And do ye not remember?" Indeed, the Christian approach to the problems of church music is unique

⁵ John 5:39

and distinctive; it is at variance with the approach of egotistic man and also with that of the stage and concert world.

If Christian theology is regarded by Christian theologians as a *theologia crucis*, then church musicians ought to join the ranks of Christian theologians and regard church music not only as *ars musica* but more specifically as *musica crucis*. In view of the fact that Lutheran theologians rightly refer to the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ crucified and risen again as the cardinal doctrine of the Christian religion, the musicians as well as the theologians and laity of the church may well refer to text-accompanying or text-suggesting music which presents and interprets this doctrine as the cardinal music of the church. We think of the many passions written by Lutheran masters, beginning with the *Passion According to St. Matthew* by Johann Walther, the *Urkomponist* of the Lutheran Church, and extending through the passions written by Resinarius, Antonio Scandello, Lechner, Vulpius, Gesius, Mancinus, Demantius, and others, to the more famous passions of Heinrich Schütz, Johann Sebastian Bach, and in our own day, Kurt Thomas, Ernst Pepping, Hugo Distler, and others. We think of the *Auferstehungsbisitorien* by Antonio Scandello and Heinrich Schütz, of the Easter cantatas by J. S. Bach, and of other glorious compositions by master composers of the church who knew that the resurrection of our Lord testified to the fact that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ had accepted the work of atonement which His only begotten Son had completed on the cross of Calvary. We think, too, of the countless hymns which present and interpret the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord and of all the wonderful

music which relates itself to texts which refer to His birth, His ascension into heaven, and to other events of His redemptive life. The life and work of Jesus Christ is the great theme not only for the theologians, the preachers and teachers, but also for the musicians of the church.

Music played an important part in the church of Old Testament times, particularly in the days of David the king. However, even David was no more than a type, and the music of his day, beautiful as it may have been, was but a shadow of things to come. The music of the church of the King of kings of the New Testament dispensation is superior to it; it is more highly developed, it is fullgrown, ripe and rich. Of this too Martin Luther was aware, as may be seen from the foreword he wrote for Valentin Babst's *Gesangbuch* of 1545, in which he said in part: "The worship of the New Testament church is on a higher plane than that of the Old. — If any would not sing and talk of what Christ has wrought for us, he shows thereby that he does not really believe and that he belongs not into the New Testament, which is an era of joy, but into the Old, which produces not the spirit of joy, but of unhappiness and discontent."⁶ Alfred Dedo Müller discusses also this point and states that Christian music of our New Testament era belongs to, and yearns for, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.⁷ True Christian church music encourages us to surrender ourselves to the Christ and to proclaim His saving Gospel to others also through the medium of song. While speaking of the meaning and intent of writing Christian hymns, Martin Luther

⁶ *W. A.*, 35, 477, 4—12. Cf. Buszin, p. 83.

⁷ Müller, p. 83.

said: "This should be done that the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which through God's grace is now being proclaimed, might be set going and spread among men."⁸

Let us not overlook that the words just quoted were spoken by a theologian whom God had given prodigious insights. He repeatedly stressed the need for preaching sermons, but he also urged strongly that the arts, particularly music, be employed in the service of Christ and His blessed Gospel.⁹ The work of communicating the Gospel should emanate, therefore, not only from the pulpit, the cathedra, and the classroom but also from the organ and the choir loft. All unite to serve and disseminate the Word. The task of the organist, choirmaster, and cantor has in many respects the same purpose as that of the preacher, the missionary, the teacher of religion, and the professor of theology. Even for this reason great care should be exercised by congregations in selecting and appointing their choirmasters and organists. It is more important that the church musician have the mind of the church, possess the necessary liturgical knowledge, and give unquestioned evidence of a salutary approach to the problems of Christian (Lutheran) worship than that he be an organist and/or choirmaster of superior ability. Among Lutherans the custom of installing organists and choirmasters in a corporate service of worship is by no means of recent origin. The fact that the practice has not been perpetuated is attributable, at least in part, to two facts: 1. *The Lutheran Agenda* includes no such rite for church musicians, though it does include orders for the installation of teachers and a church council

and orders for the induction of women teachers, Sunday school officers, and teachers; 2. the work of the church musician has been entrusted by many parishes to teachers in their parochial schools. In the latter case the Rite of Installation took into account not only their work as teachers but also their work as musicians of the church. It should not be difficult to understand the seriousness of the situation when one considers that church musicians assist pastors in the conduct of the corporate worship services of the church and that their functions demand more than a technically adequate performance of duties. In Old Testament times not only the members of the priesthood but also the musicians of God's chosen race were recruited from the house of Aaron. This helps us better to understand our problem and it explains why Martin Luther attached music directly to theology. In the early centuries of the Lutheran Church's existence the musicians of the church were required to testify to their faith in the Holy Scriptures as the inspired Word of God; they were likewise required to subscribe to the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church, notably to the Formula of Concord, and were pledged to a conscientious performance of their duties as servants of God and of His church. Bearing in mind that the essential nature of the work of church musicians has not changed and that in their official capacity as church musicians they, too, teach, proclaim, and interpret the *Verbum Dei*, the church of today ought duly to install them as called servants of the church. Like the theologians of the church, they proclaim Christ, and theological texts are the most basic part of their church music. If this were clear, many congregations would

⁸ *W. A.*, 35, 474, 13—14. Cf. Buszin, p. 88.

⁹ *W. A.*, 35, 475, 2—5. Cf. Buszin, *loc. cit.*

likely be more careful in choosing a church musician and entrusting to him the music of their worship service.

We can, of course, think of theology and church music, the conjoined bearers and interpreters of the *Verbum Dei*, as being *vivae voces evangelii*—living voices of the Gospel. It would be tragic indeed if they were nothing more than mute beings and silent bodies. Both theology and church music, though heard and by no means aphonic, can be lifeless and dead. Indeed, they are lifeless and dead when their soul has fled and their heart has ceased to beat. They may be dressed in beautiful garments, their faces may be tinted so effectively that they appear to be alive, and their coffin may be costly and ornamental, but if inanimate, they are still nothing more than corpses; what is more, when lifeless, they soon give evidence of decay, a sorry replacement for the healthy blood of life and the sweet perfumes of clean and well-preserved bodies. Such is the case when theology and church music are dead. The beating heart of Christian theology and church music is, of course, Jesus Christ, whose Holy Spirit, as the Oil of gladness, preserves both theology and church music and enables them to be heard as *vivae voces evangelii*. A purely aesthetic approach will never succeed in enabling truly Christian music and art to reach their final goal. Our love for church music involves an aesthetic appreciation, but it must go beyond this point. It must rest primarily on what church music offers and conveys on the basis of the *Verbum Dei*.

While our theology and church music are identical in many respects, there exist also some differences. We shall restrict ourselves at this time to only one. Whereas

Christian theology can and should be so presented by the spoken voice that its centripetal character comes to the fore, Christian church music can well be so presented that its panoramic character is boldly emphasized. Like a mighty unisonous chorus and as a living, resounding voice of the Gospel, theology relates all fundamental Christian doctrine to the one great cardinal doctrine of justification through faith in Christ the Redeemer. Our theology is thus like a wheel, all spokes of which meet in its hub. This great gift, we believe, our theologians who teach in the classroom and preach from our pulpits can apply and transmit, often more successfully than can our musicians. It is, however, achieved also in music, although certainly not without the indispensable aid of theological texts. Though there is some similarity, the advantage enjoyed by the musician is unique. The musician can present several ideas simultaneously without sacrificing or obliterating one for the other. Within the same measure bars he can speak and sing of Christ's birth, death, resurrection, and second advent, as J. S. Bach does in the closing chorus of his *Christmas Oratorio*. In this chorus Bach, in music written for the Advent and Christmas seasons, has a glorious Easter text sung to the melody of "O Sacred Head Now Wounded," while trumpeters play fanfares which call attention to the coming of the King of kings on Judgment Day. While both the teacher of theology and the preacher must present their points one at a time, the musician can present several at one time in panoramic fashion, as can also a painter and sculptor. Music thus becomes a mosaic in sound. Verbal theology should therefore not be unduly exalted at the expense of

music and the other arts. When properly employed, all are theology, all seek to present and interpret the Word. All have been given us by God that they might serve the Word and keep clear its true meaning. We have great cause to rejoice that they share one another's abilities and virtues. But, at the same time, we have cause to rejoice that each also has certain functions of its own. These gifts remind us of 1 Cor. 12, where we are told that there are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit; differences of administrations but the same Lord; diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

Lutheran theologians of Germany have issued a terse statement which has become an axiom and which says, *Theologie ist Doxologie*, "theology is doxology." While Lutheran theology and church music are of necessity soteriological and kerygmatic in essence, both are also Trinitarian and doxological. The elements of praise, glorification, and thanksgiving play a conspicuous part both in our theology and in our music. The frequent and mighty Amen choruses written by Dietrich Buxtehude, J. S. Bach, and other master composers of the church help to substantiate what has just been said. Those who ridicule these Amen choruses show thereby that they are unaware of theological implications which need to be considered. The word "Amen" was to the early Christians not merely a word of confirmation and acceptance but rather a doxology in condensed form.¹⁰ Because this word "Amen," like the doxology itself, is so loaded with content and meaning and is tantamount almost to an oath, early Chris-

tians did not use it so indiscriminately as people do in our day. When the writers of chorales used it, they incorporated the word directly into the body of the hymn and did not append it at the end, sung and accompanied by a subdominant and a tonic chord. It was added to doxologies, however, to serve as a virile reaffirmation and summation of what had just been sung or spoken. The doxology itself was tantamount to a creed, with the element of glorification added. The doxology and its Amen are therefore more than statements of joyous exaltation; they are strong statements of faith and conviction. Small wonder that the doxology plays an important part in the glorious liturgies of the church; small wonder that doxologies play an important part in the Lutheran church service of worship and in its music; small wonder that theologians say, *Theologie ist Doxologie*, "theology is doxology."

Bearing these circumstances in mind, we begin to realize more than ever before why we stand as we sing our doxologies. We begin to appreciate more fully, too, the elaborate Amen choruses written by the masters. If we accept the dictionary definition and maintain that a doxology is a song of praise to Triune God and a confession of our faith in Him, we will find in the doxologies of Christendom another reason for insisting that theology and church music serve the same purpose as bearers and interpreters of the *Verbum Dei*. And if the two share each other's qualities and responsibilities, we shall become more aware of why Christian people should sing their theology and theologize their church music. Luther thought also of such developments among the children of God and said on October 4, 1530, in a letter addressed to

¹⁰ Cf. Gerhard Dellling, *Der Gottesdienst im Neuen Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1952), pp. 65-69.

Ludwig Senfl, the most noted German composer of his day: "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, nor to astronomy, but to music, speaking the truth through psalms and hymns."¹¹ We are not surprised to note, therefore, that Luther placed theology and music beside each other and did not keep them far apart. Bearing this intimate relationship in mind, we think of words spoken by Johann Walther, Martin Luther's counselor in musical matters, who said in his famous *Lob und Preis der löblichen Kunst Musica*: "Music, because of its character, and because of its own rich inheritance, belongs to sacred theology; indeed, it is so entwined and so sealed up with theology that anyone who desires, studies and learns theology, must also take up music with it, though he may not see, feel, or understand it."¹²

The doxological character of Biblical theology and of church music compels us to reflect at this time on another important matter. Doxologies are directed Godward; they are objective and Trinitarian in content and expression. These two important factors close the doors of doxological theology and church music to sentimentality, sensuousness, vainglory, and to striving for effects. People do not sentimentalize about the Holy Trinity. The very fact that much religious literature and church music give expression to the improprieties and weak-

nesses of the flesh referred to in the first part of our discussion indicates that their basic theology is not so fundamentally doxological and centered in the Triune God as some would have us believe. The problem before us is not a simple one, especially when we deal with the attempts at interpretation made by some in their theology and church music. To discuss these problems adequately is not the purpose of our essay. It is within our province, however, to call attention to the fact that their doxological character and influence have helped to make theology and church music wholesomely objective and God-centered in spirit, character, and expression. This applies particularly to much of the church music and theological literature written during the 16th century, that great century of the Lutheran Reformation whose superb theocentric and doxological music is unfortunately so little known in the anthropocentric age in which we live today. Personal and sentimental elements made their way into theology, church music, and Christian hymnody notably during the eras of pietism and rationalism, both of which were eras of decline for the church. In these years, too, as in our own, there was much overemphasis on sameness and drab simplicity, and the arts were rejected and driven out of the church into the secular world. The hymns of these eras lack the virility, straightforwardness, and confessional character of those written by former generations. Many of these are what the Germans call *Jesuslieder*. Both the texts and the tunes of these *Jesuslieder* often became so intimate, sensuous and sentimental that they are not well suited for corporate worship services of a doxological and God-centered character. Though there are ex-

¹¹ W. A. *Briefwechsel*, No. 1727, V, 639, 17—21. Cf. Buszin, p. 84.

¹² Walter E. Buszin, "Johann Walther, Composer, Pioneer, and Luther's Musical Consultant," *The Musical Heritage of the Church*, ed. Theo. Hoelty-Nickel (Valparaiso, Ind.: Valparaiso University Press, 1954, Valparaiso Church Music Series, No. 3), p. 110.

ceptions, the objective (nonindividualistic) hymn remains to the present day the ideal hymn for the Christian congregation, because it is indeed a stronger and healthier bearer for the *Verbum Dei*. Especially when doxological in content and character, the objective hymn, too, can console, strengthen, and inspire, as it establishes people in the Christian faith, testifies to theological truth, and exhorts to confession and prayer.

III

The church has a rich heritage in her theology and her music. On the Festival of the Reformation many restrict this heritage to her theological writings, the open Bible, religious liberty, and developments in the field of education. The rich cultural, liturgical, and musical heritage we have received through the Reformation is seldom, if ever, mentioned. When we thus ignore it, we fail to recognize the intimate relationship between theology and this heritage. We refer occasionally to the Lutheran Church as the Singing Church, but all too often render this distinction nothing more than lip service. Our failure to recognize church music as a blessing concomitant with theology often also reflects a lack of respect for one of God's most precious gifts to the church of Jesus Christ. Martin Luther expressed himself forcefully when he discussed situations of this kind. As late as 1538 he stated in a preface he wrote for a collection of part-songs based on the suffering and death of Jesus Christ: "Accustom yourself to see in this creation (i. e., in music) your Creator and to praise Him through it. . . . Use the gift of music to praise God and Him alone, since He has given us this gift. Diligently beware of corrupt hearts, which misuse this

beautiful natural gift and art, as do those lascivious and lewd poets, who use it for their insane amours. . . . These adulterers convert a gift of God into a spoil and with it honor the enemy of God who is also the adversary of nature and the foe of this lovely art."¹³

Without doing violence in any way to the principle of *sola Scriptura*, the Lutheran Church regards her confessional writings as bearers and interpreters of the *Verbum Dei*. Lutheran church music has much in common with the confessional symbols of the Lutheran Church, particularly as they are expressed in the worship heritage of her precious liturgies. These liturgies are thoroughly theological in character. They are confessions of the Christian faith of Lutheran people, and it is interesting indeed to note that the foremost Lutheran composers of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries based a large proportion of their music on the theologically rich texts of the Lutheran liturgies. Lutheran church music of the 16th and 17th centuries adopted the ecumenical character of these liturgies, and here too we are made aware of the intimate relationship which existed between the theology of the church and her worship music. In this connection we think also of the eminently good pre-Reformation chorales which Luther salvaged for the church and adopted for use in Lutheran worship. The Roman Catholic Church disapproved of their use in the Mass, precisely for the reason that they were in the language of the people. Some of these chorales had to be purged of false doctrine; Luther himself did much of this in order that the close relationship which existed between the the-

¹³ *W. A.*, 50, 373, 10—374, 5. Cf. Buszin, *MQ*, p. 82.

ological and confessional liturgies and the hymnodic music of the church be not broken. It is a source of great comfort to hear and sing the Lutheran liturgy and familiar chorales in churches in many parts of the world. Linguistic differences are in that case not serious handicaps; one may still participate in the service of worship in the language one knows or follow quietly in spirit.

What has been said of Christian hymns applies also to Lutheran choral music. When Georg Rhau, the music printer of Wittenberg, wanted to include in one of his collections of church music certain choral music which was beautiful but whose theology was off color, Johannes Bugenhagen disapproved¹⁴ and said in effect: "The music may be beautiful, but the doctrinal errors of its texts are not in agreement with orthodox theology and hence destroy the relationship which must exist between church music and the theology of the church." This explains, for instance, why Thomas Aquinas' *Lauda, Sion, Salvatorem*¹⁵ appears in Lutheran hymnals only in abbreviated form and why James Russell Lowell's "Once to Every Man and Nation," popular as it is otherwise,¹⁶ is absent from *The Lutheran Hym-*

nal, as is also the medieval *Stabat Mater dolorosa*, ascribed to Jacopone da Todi (d. 1306).¹⁷ It also helps us to understand the well-intentioned objections to the second stanza of the apostrophic hymn "Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones"¹⁸ and to the reference to "false sons within her pale" in Samuel J. Stone's "The Church's One Foundation,"¹⁹ even though both references are defensible. Christians want their hymns doctrinally pure. One finds Calvinism, millennialism, and other aberrations in not a few revival hymns, which some unfortunately call Gospel hymns. Also some Lutheran chorales of the era of Pietism are highly sentimental; however, their tunes are less primitive and on a higher plane than the tunes of American revivalistic hymnody. Both depart from the standards of healthy Lutheran orthodoxy, whose principle we find aptly expressed in Christian Scheidt's chorale text *Aus Gnaden soll ich selig werden*,²⁰ "By Grace I'm Saved, Grace Free and Boundless,"²¹ which closes with the words:

*Ich glaub', was Jesu Wort verspricht,
Ich fühl' es oder fühl es nicht.*

In these words Scheidt emphasizes that Christians are content to believe the promises expressed by Jesus in the *Verbum Dei*, whether they feel them emotionally or not.

¹⁴ Cf. Georg Rhau, *Musikdrucke aus den Jahren 1538 bis 1545*. Herausgegeben von Hans Albrecht. Band I: Balthasar Resinarius, *Responsorium Numero Octoginta*, Erster Band, herausgegeben von Inge-Maria Schroeder. Translation of *Vorwort* by Walter E. Buszin (Bärenreiter Verlag and Concordia Publishing House, 1955), p. XII.

¹⁵ Cf. Dom Matthew Britt, *The Hymns of the Breviary and Missal* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1922 and 1952), pp. 172—174.

¹⁶ Cf. *The Hymnal of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America*, 1940, No. 519, and *Service Book and Hymnal of the Lutheran Church in America*, No. 547.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Nos. 76 and 84 respectively. Cf. also Britt (n. 15, supra), pp. 275j-276.

¹⁸ *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), No. 475.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, No. 473.

²⁰ Cf. *Kirchengesangbuch für Ev. Luth. Gemeinden ungeänderter Augsburgischer Konfession* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n. d.), No. 234, stanza 10.

²¹ *The Lutheran Hymnal*, No. 373. The 10th stanza of this hymn is not included in this hymnal.

The expression of Christian faith is more than an emotional reaction; it is a glorification of God. This also implies that those who are relatively unemotional may yet possess a strong and virile faith and heartily glorify God. While emotions can play an important part in the life of the average Christian, to gratify them is neither the source nor the goal of the Christian faith. Sentimentalism, which is a low form of emotionalism, is so often self- and man-centered that orthodox Lutheranism in particular, but not exclusively, views it with disfavor and insists that Christian worship be theocentric, not anthropocentric. The chief concern of church music should therefore not be to please the emotions of men but to glorify God and convey to men the *Verbum Dei*. This explains why superb worship music does not seek to please men but to serve God; hence its modesty and lack of ostentation.

History records that heretics have repeatedly appropriated music and tunes written by Christian composers for worship purposes in order to disseminate their heterodoxy. The Gnostics of postapostolic times caused serious vexation among Christian people when they stole tunes of the church and altered their texts. The Arians resorted to the same practice, as did also anti-Trinitarians of later eras. Christ said that the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.²² Christian people, on the other hand, are often unaware of their own wealth and hence ignore the warning given by Christ in His Sermon on the Mount, in which He said: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your

pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn again and rend you."²³ The rich musical heritage of the church will not be liquidated easily by the foes of Christ and His Word if the church will treasure her musical heritage and make faithful use of her possessions in the realm of music while bringing Christ to people through the Gospel and through music which bespeaks the truth and spirit of the Gospel. The music of the church will not waste away if it helps to bear the burden of the theology of the church and, again together with Biblical theology, continues to serve as a truthful bearer and interpreter of the *Verbum Dei*. Both are living voices of the Gospel, both are doxological, and both are kerygmatic.

It was not accidental that the era of Orthodoxy of the Lutheran Church was also the culmination of the golden era of Lutheran church music. In that era theology and church music were regarded as cobearers of the *Verbum Dei*. In that era the pipe organ too came into its own, and the pipe organs built in Lutheran churches between A. D. 1600 and 1750 serve today as models for expert organ builders in Christian lands. Indeed, our generation can learn from its forefathers of the 17th and 18th centuries. We can learn from them to hold fast not only the *Verbum Dei* itself but also its noble and mighty bearers: sound theology and church music of integrity. Let our motive be that no man take our crown, the *Verbum Dei*, with its priceless pearls and costly jewels, our precious theology and our glorious worship music.

St. Louis, Mo.

²² Luke 16:8.

²³ Matt. 7:6.