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## God Is My Strength and My Song: History and Practice of Old Testament Canticles

Andrew Gerike

### I. Introduction

At the first Good Shepherd Institute Conference in 2000, the late Ronald Feuerhahn offered a definition for the word *canticles*. “Canticles,” he said, “are songs that we don’t notice.”<sup>1</sup> Over the years, the daily offices of Matins, Vespers, Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Compline have put the New Testament canticles on our lips. They have ingrained Mary’s *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46–55), Zechariah’s *Benedictus* (Luke 1:68–79), and Simeon’s *Nunc Dimittis* (Luke 2:29–32) on our hearts. The last of these garners additional staying power in our memories from its regular use in the Divine Service. If we include with the New Testament canticles the *Te Deum Laudamus*, we find these canticles to be quite familiar friends in the liturgy, as well as dear aids to our own piety—and rightly so. The spiritual songs, that is, the spirit-inspired songs of the New Testament, deserve pride of place in our worship.

Feuerhahn’s definition certainly holds true to this day for the Old Testament canticles as well. We do not notice them. We easily pronounce the Latin names of the New Testament canticles. In our Lutheran circles, we tend to call Simeon’s song by its Latin name. Those who would welcome the increased use of Latin in church and who use the One-Year Lectionary have even grown accustomed to announcing the “-gesimas” (the Sundays of pre-Lent) and the historic names for the Sundays in Advent and Lent. But our lack of familiarity with *Cantemus Domino*, *Exultavit Cor Meum*, *Confitebor Tibi*, and others continues to allow the Old Testament canticles to go by in our hymnal unnoticed. May the next ten years of *Lutheran Service Book* (2006) see a change in this regard.

### II. History

When the term *canticle* is used for an Old Testament text, it designates a biblical song or prayer *outside the Psalter*, which is used liturgically. The number of Old Testament canticles varies throughout history and between different liturgical rites.

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald R. Feuerhahn, “Healing in the Canticles of the Old and New Testaments,” in *Christ’s Gifts for Healing the Soul: Toward a Lutheran Identity in the New Millennium* (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2001), 25.

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*The Eastern Church*

In the Byzantine Church, eight Old Testament canticles comprise the majority of the nine “odes” that are sung at Matins.<sup>2</sup> This collection of odes is even printed after the Book of Psalms in some editions of the Septuagint.<sup>3</sup> While we should not grant the Septuagint the reverence that is due only to the inspired Hebrew text, the inclusion of Old Testament canticles in that location does demonstrate an early awareness of their importance for the church. This awareness led early generations of Christians to put these canticles on par with the first hymnal of the people of God. I suppose you could think of it as an early church hymnal supplement.

*The Medieval Western Church*

In the Western Church, seven traditional Old Testament canticles came into prominence in the Roman breviary, and each was sung on a particular day of the week at the morning office of Lauds, where it served as one of the psalms.<sup>4</sup> In the Holy Rule of St. Benedict, which proved influential for much of Western monasticism, St. Benedict refers to the singing of “the canticle from the Prophets, each for its proper day,” when he sets down his instruction for the singing of the psalms at Lauds.<sup>5</sup> The traditional Latin name for each canticle comes from the opening words of the canticle in Latin.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ode 1: The (First) Song of Moses—Exodus 15:1–19; ode 2: The (Second) Song of Moses—Deuteronomy 32:1–43; ode 3: The Prayer of Hannah—1 Samuel 2:1–10; ode 4: The Prayer of Habakkuk—Habakkuk 3:1–19; ode 5: The Prayer of Isaiah—Isaiah 26:9–20; ode 6: The Prayer of Jonah—Jonah 2:2–9; ode 7: The Prayer of the Three Holy Children—Daniel 3:26–56 (Apocrypha); ode 8: The Song of the Three Holy Children—Daniel 3:57–88 (Apocrypha); ode 9: The Song of Mary the God-Bearer—Luke 1:46–55 and the Song of Zechariah—Luke 1:68–79.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., the odes appear after the Psalter in the blue Rahlfs edition of the Septuagint, the edition most pastors have on their bookshelves: Alfred Rahlfs and Robert Hanhart, eds., *Septuaginta: Id Est Vetus Testamentum Graece Iuxta LXX Interpretes* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Sunday and Festivals: *Benedicite Omnia Opera*—Apocryphal Daniel 3:57–88. Monday: *Confitebor Tibi*—Isaiah 12:1–6. Tuesday: *Ego Dixi*—Isaiah 38:10–20. Wednesday: *Exultavit Cor Meum*—1 Samuel 2:1–10. Thursday: *Cantemus Domino*—Exodus 15:1–19. Friday: *Domine Audivi*—Habakkuk 3:1–19. Saturday: *Audite Coeli*—Deuteronomy 32:1–43. In secular usage, the Old Testament canticle served as the fourth psalm. In monastic usage, it was the fifth. See John Harper, *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy from the Tenth to the Eighteenth Century: A Historical Introduction and Guide for Students and Musicians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 97–98. Citing the research of J. B. L. Tolhurst, Harper notes that though not all monasteries followed the same scheme of the Psalter, there is a discernible consensus, at least in the research of English monasteries (256–259).

<sup>5</sup> Benedict of Nursia, *Holy Rule of St. Benedict* 13.

<sup>6</sup> The liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council expanded the number of Old Testament canticles for use in the daily office to twenty-six. In the reformed office, an Old Testament canticle serves as the second psalm in the office of Morning Prayer in a four-week cycle.

*The Lutheran Church—Reformation Era*

Luther's deep knowledge of the Psalter and his high regard for the Psalms derives from his years of praying the daily office.<sup>7</sup> The Old Testament canticles also would have been well known to him from his time in the cloister. So it comes as no surprise that we find the Old Testament canticles included in the vernacular and set to music in the first hymnals of the Lutheran Reformation (those hymnals on which Luther exerted strong influence).<sup>8</sup> This aspect of Luther's contribution to church music is almost entirely ignored in liturgical scholarship.<sup>9</sup>

In the influential *Babstsche Gesangbuch* (1545), for which Luther wrote the preface, six of the seven traditional Old Testament canticles from the medieval office were included. Five other Old Testament texts were included as canticles. Some of these were known to Luther from other parts of the monastic office (such as special canticles appointed for Christmas), some are from the traditional canticles of the Eastern churches (such as the Song of Jonah).<sup>10</sup> Above each canticle is a short homiletical summary of the contents. Leaver believes that even though these were probably written by Georg Rörer, they bear Luther's vocabulary and theological influence.<sup>11</sup> The singing of these canticles lasted into the seventeenth century. For example, in early seventeenth-century Magdeburg (1612), the rotation of psalms for the daily office included the traditional usage of the seven Old Testament canticles at Lauds.<sup>12</sup> However, by the eighteenth century, none of the Old Testament canticles were included in hymnals, let alone sung.<sup>13</sup>

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See Stanislaus Campbell, *From Breviary to Liturgy of the Hours: The Structural Reform of the Roman Office, 1964–1971* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 166–167.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483–1521*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985), 64.

<sup>8</sup> As refinements were made to the German translation of the Bible, these changes were reflected in the text of the canticles used in the hymnals (Robin A. Leaver, "The Biblical Canticles in Luther's Hymnals" in *Lord Jesus Christ, Will You Not Stay: Essays in Honor of Ronald Feuerhahn on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. J. Bart Day, Jon D. Vieker, Albert B. Collver, Scott A. Bruzek, Kent J. Burreson, Martin E. Conkling, and Naomichi Masaki [Houston: Feuerhahn Festschrift Committee, 2002], 62).

<sup>9</sup> The exceptions are Leaver, "The Biblical Canticles in Luther's Hymnals," 23–63; and Robin A. Leaver, *Luther's Liturgical Music: Principles and Implications* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> The canticles in the *Babstsche Gesangbuch*: canticle 1: Exodus 15:1–18; canticle 2: Deuteronomy 32:1–13; canticle 3: Judges 5:2–31; canticle 4: 1 Samuel 2:1–10; canticle 5: Isaiah 12:1–6; canticle 6: Isaiah 26:1–21 (from the canticles sung at monastic Matins for Christmas); canticle 7: Isaiah 38:10–20; canticle 8: Isaiah 61:10–11 (from the canticles sung at monastic Matins for Feasts of Virgins); canticle 9: Isaiah 63:7–19; 64:1–12; canticle 10: Jonah 2:3–10; canticle 11: Habakkuk 3:1–19. The *Benedicite Omnia Opera* was not included.

<sup>11</sup> Leaver, *Luther's Liturgical Music*, 265–270.

<sup>12</sup> The 1612 Magdeburg Psalter schedule was graciously shared with me by Mr. Matthew Carver.

<sup>13</sup> Leaver, *Luther's Liturgical Music*, 62.

*The Lutheran Church—America*

When *The Lutheran Hymnal* (TLH) arrived on the scene in 1941, all seven traditional Old Testament canticles were included on the pages immediately preceding the psalms.<sup>14</sup> This collection of canticles also included the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3–10) and the *Dignus Est Agnus* (Rev 5:12–13; 15:3–4; 19:5–6) from the Revelation to St. John.

However, like the psalms, only the text was printed, with nary a musical note, and there was no direction on how to use these texts given in the hymnal.<sup>15</sup> As Feuerhahn observes, there was little to commend these texts to use—they looked rather “lifeless,” not even lending themselves to be read, let alone sung.<sup>16</sup> Not only that, but also only two of the canticles, *Confitebor Tibi* and *Ego Dixi*, escaped unabridged. No one missed the Old Testament canticles that were not included when *Lutheran Worship* came out in 1982. Only the *Benedicite Omnia Opera* was spared excision.<sup>17</sup> In all likelihood, these Old Testament canticles were left out because no one had noticed them in TLH. But in all fairness to TLH, other Lutheran hymnals in America included the Old Testament canticles in a similar presentation. The earlier *Common Service Book* (1917) and the later *Service Book and Hymnal* (1958) also printed the Old Testament canticles without musical notation or directions for use.

With *Lutheran Service Book* (LSB),<sup>18</sup> however, these venerable texts have been returned to our church’s hymnal and are available for use. Six Old Testament canticles are included in the pew edition, with an additional four canticles available in *Lutheran Service Builder* and *LSB Accompaniment for the Hymns*. Among these ten are six of the traditional seven canticles, as well as three other canticles that were included in early Lutheran hymnals, such as the *Babstsche Gesangbuch*.<sup>19</sup> The one

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<sup>14</sup> The Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), 120–122.

<sup>15</sup> In the general rubrics for the Order of Matins, the altar book for TLH did include some direction for how to use the canticles, including their traditional associations with particular days of the week: “Any of the other Canticles, except the Magnificat and the Nunc dimittis, may be used at Matins on any Day except a Sunday or a Feast or a Festival. See page 282” (The Synods Constituting the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, *The Lutheran Liturgy* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1946], 423).

<sup>16</sup> Feuerhahn, “Healing in the Canticles,” 25.

<sup>17</sup> See *The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), 9.

<sup>18</sup> The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> The traditional canticles included in LSB are “Song of Moses and Israel” (LSB 925), “Song from Deuteronomy” (LSB 926), “First Song of Isaiah” (LSB 927), “Song of Hannah” (LSB 928), “All You Works of the Lord” (LSB 931), and “Song of Habakkuk” (LSB 986). The additional canticles are “I Will Greatly Rejoice in the Lord” (LSB 929), “Seek the Lord” (LSB 983), “Oh, That You Would

nontraditional canticle is *LSB* 983, “Seek the Lord,” based on Isaiah 55. In recent history, the use of this text as a canticle can be traced back to *Lutheran Book of Worship*,<sup>20</sup> followed by its inclusion in the 1979 edition of *The Book of Common Prayer*.

These Old Testament canticles have been given a new lease on liturgical life with this re-introduction to our worship resources. Therefore, “As a bridegroom decks himself . . . and as a bride adorns herself” (Isa 61:10), these canticles are clothed in the new-made garments of theology’s handmaiden: they have music! Let us notice and use them!

### III. Practice

“Well and good,” you say. “So we should use the Old Testament canticles. But *how* do we use them?” Is this not just “mere idealism”? That question was raised in the Liturgy Committee during the *LSB* project when the question of including the Old Testament canticles was brought up.<sup>21</sup>

Must our use of the Old Testament canticles be limited to their historical use in the church’s daily prayer? Granted, there are congregations that have schools, and some of those even have daily chapel and use Matins every day. Therefore, perhaps those congregations that are so blessed *could* make use of the historical assignment of the canticles and sing them at Matins on their particular day of the week. However, that gives no real opportunity to use the Song from Deuteronomy, appointed for Saturday. And what should one do on Tuesday, when the historic canticle from Isaiah 38 is not included in *LSB*? As much as I am in favor of a regular offering of daily prayer in our churches, particularly in the schools of our congregations, this seems unrealistic. For each of the very few congregations and schools that could restore the historic usage of the Old Testament canticles in daily prayer, there are hundreds of congregations in which the Old Testament canticles would continue to slip by unnoticed.

A helpful axiom as we consider the issue of how and when to use these canticles is “Think seasonally.” Many of these canticles contain strong themes that connect them to the various seasons of the church’s liturgical year. I will highlight some

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Rend the Heavens” (*LSB* 984), and “Song of Jonah” (*LSB* 985). The traditional canticle, *Ego Dixi*, from Isaiah 38 was replaced by “Song of Jonah.”

<sup>20</sup> *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House; Philadelphia: Lutheran Church in America Board of Publication, 1978), 15.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Grime, Jon D. Vieker, and Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Commission on Worship, “Liturgy Committee Minutes: May 13–14, 2002” in *Committee Minutes*, vol. 2 of *Lutheran Service Book Historical Records* (St. Louis: Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Commission on Worship, 2007), 482.

of the canticles that are included in *LSB* and then give some suggestions on how to incorporate them into our liturgical life.

#### *Seasonal Suggestions*

**“Song of Hannah” (LSB 928).** The Song of Hannah is a remarkable parallel to Mary’s Magnificat. The occasion of a miraculous conception is the shared context, and the theme of the “great reversal” is central to the songs of both Hannah and Mary. Incredibly, the words designated as verse 6 in *LSB*, “Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger,” were excluded from *TLH*. Compare these words of Hannah, thankfully restored to the canticle, with Mary’s words in the Magnificat: “He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent empty away” (*LSB*, 248). As the church contemplates the mystery of the incarnation and prepares to celebrate the birth of the Savior from a lowly girl from Nazareth, this is a fitting song to sing during Advent as well as Christmastide.

Rather than using it as a substitute for the Magnificat during Midweek Vespers or Evening Prayer, I think the better way to use this canticle—indeed, all the Old Testament canticles—stems from how they have been understood historically and used in the church’s liturgy. Though they are called “canticles” (the same term used for the New Testament canticles and *Te Deum*), they function as a part of the psalmody. They are used in the same manner and in the same places during the liturgy as the psalms. The *LSB Altar Book* says any of the Old Testament canticles may serve as a substitute canticle in place of the *Te Deum* or *Benedictus*.<sup>22</sup> But I think there is something to be said for recognizing how these texts have been understood historically, and there is wisdom in at least mentioning their historical usage if not retaining that manner of usage.

A better place, then, I would argue, for the Song of Hannah is to serve as a psalm in the Advent evening orders of service. This second option would highlight the beautiful parallel between the songs of Hannah and of Mary, as both are sung—thereby showing that the God who worked wonders for lowly Hannah and brought forth his servant Samuel to anoint the first kings of Israel is the same God who dealt marvelously with humble Mary, the mother of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

**“Oh, That You Would Rend the Heavens” (LSB 984).** This canticle also fits well with Advent. However, with its strong eschatological theme, it could also be used during the final weeks of the church year, which have a pronounced emphasis on the second coming of our Lord in glory.

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<sup>22</sup> The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 296.



**“First Song of Isaiah” (LSB 927).** The First Song of Isaiah may be considered the chief canticle of the Old Testament. Presented in the twelfth chapter of Isaiah’s prophecy, it follows the three chief messianic prophecies of the incarnation, which are heard by the bride of Christ during the seasons of Advent and Christmas. In those three prophecies, the mighty seer directly prophesies the virgin birth of the Messiah in Isaiah 7. Isaiah 9 reveals that this virgin-born Messiah is the God-man. Chapter 11 further prophecies of the Messiah’s person and work as well as the characteristics of his church. This trio of messianic prophecies is then capped off with the hymn of thanksgiving of Isaiah 12.

This canticle is a sacrifice of faith, the church’s response of thanks for the saving work of the Messiah, his propitiatory sacrifice by which God’s wrath over our sin is turned away. In his suffering and death, “He has done gloriously” (Isa 12:5). Jesus, whose name means “the LORD saves,” is God himself, and “he has become my salvation” (Isa 12:2). This canticle is the ongoing hymn of the church.

God himself actually instructs us both as individuals and corporately to sing these words. Twice he says, “You will say in that day.”<sup>23</sup> These are the words that constitute and summarize all our hymns of praise to God for the salvation he wrought by the incarnation and sacrificial death of his Son. The hymns of praise erupt not only from the faith of the individual believer but also from the corporate gathering of the church as Christ’s bride. Thus, the First Song of Isaiah is fitting at any time but chiefly in the season of Epiphany.

Those who use the Service of Prayer and Preaching (LSB 260–267) should already know this canticle. There are two settings of the First Song of Isaiah (again, a testament to its primacy) in LSB. In addition to the setting we have been discussing (LSB 927), another setting serves as the Old Testament canticle at the beginning of the Service of Prayer and Preaching (LSB 261–262). The *LSB Altar Book* notes that other canticles can be used here and also in place of the New Testament canticle (LSB 266–267).<sup>24</sup>

**“I Will Greatly Rejoice in the Lord” (LSB 929).** This is another canticle that lends itself well to the Epiphany season, particularly on the occasion of the Baptism of our Lord. Though not one of the seven regular canticles of the Western breviary, it was used elsewhere in the medieval daily office and was included in the early Lutheran hymnals.<sup>25</sup> The words of this canticle lead the church to sing of the salvation and righteousness that the Messiah brings, with which he clothes the

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<sup>23</sup> Verse 1: אָמֵן; verse 4: אָמֵן.

<sup>24</sup> *LSB Altar Book*, 357, 364.

<sup>25</sup> Harper, *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy*, 257. It was included in the second imprint of the 1529 Klug *Gesangbuch*, the 1533 printing of the same, as well as the *Babstsche Gesangbuch* of 1545. See Leaver, *Luther’s Liturgical Music*, 249–252.

church. Thus, when used on the observance of the Baptism of our Lord, this canticle highlights the connection between his Baptism and ours. This canticle could also be used on Pentecost Sunday and the weeks immediately following. For, in this canticle, the church also sings of the righteousness and praise that the Lord God will cause to sprout up before all the nations.

**“Song of Jonah” (LSB 985).** Another canticle included in early Lutheran hymnals, though not one of the seven traditional canticles of the medieval church, is the Song of Jonah. The *LSB Historical Records* indicate that this canticle was selected to serve as a substitute for the historic canticle appointed for Tuesday, *Ego Dixi*, from Isaiah 38.<sup>26</sup> It is a hymn of thanksgiving for deliverance. Far from some gloomy individual wallowing in depression, Jonah’s prayer gives voice to the *Christian* penitent. This fits well with our understanding of Lent. Even on as solemn a day as Ash Wednesday, the penitential focus is grounded in the Small Catechism’s explanation of confession as sorrow for sin and faith that receives the “absolution, that is, forgiveness, . . . not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven” (SC, Confession).<sup>27</sup> Our need for a Savior and deliverance is dire, and like Jonah we call for deliverance to the Lord who answers.

This canticle has further significance. Our highest authority, the Lord himself, says that Jonah is a type of Christ.<sup>28</sup> Jonah is a divinely appointed picture of our Lord. Our Lord cites the circumstances of Jonah’s prayer—three days in the belly of the fish—as the sign given to the unbelieving generation of Jews. He will sleep in the belly of the earth, in death, for three days, and then he will rise again (Matt 12:39–40). That sign is the culmination of the Lenten season.

**“Song of Habakkuk” (LSB 986).** The Song of Habakkuk is related to the Song of Jonah. Sung in the daily office every Friday, the verses of Habakkuk 3:1–19 remained a part of the Good Friday liturgy in the office of Tenebrae, which comprised the offices of Matins and Lauds.<sup>29</sup>

O LORD, I have heard the re- | port of You,\*  
and Your work, O LORD, | do I fear.

In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years | make it

<sup>26</sup> Grime, Vieker, and Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Commission on Worship, “Liturgy Committee Minutes: November 6–8, 2003” in *Committee Minutes*, vol. 2 of *Lutheran Service Book Historical Records*, 510.

<sup>27</sup> Quotations from the Small Catechism are from *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*, copyright © 1986, 1991 Concordia Publishing House. All rights reserved.

<sup>28</sup> W. H. B. Proby, *The Ten Canticles of the Old Testament Canon* (London: Rivingtons, 1874), 76–77.

<sup>29</sup> Prosper Guéranger, *Passiontide and Holy Week*, vol. 6, *The Liturgical Year*, trans. Laurence Shepherd (Dublin: J. Duffy, 1867), 446–446. *LSB Altar Book* notes this historic use of the Song of Habakkuk in the Good Friday Tenebrae liturgy in its comments on the service of Tenebrae Vespers (*LSB Altar Book*, 526).

known;\*  
 in wrath remember | mercy.  
 God came from | Teman,\*  
 and the Holy One from Mount | Paran.  
 His splendor covered the | heavens,\*  
 and the earth was full | of His praise. (*LSB* 986:1–4)

This was sung after the first prophecy in the Roman Mass of the Presanctified on Good Friday from at least the eighth century until the reforms of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>30</sup> The words of the prophet Habakkuk express complete confidence in God. The Lord's work of salvation is portrayed in the dramatic pictorial imagery of warfare against the forces of hell:

You crushed the head of the house of the | wicked,\*  
 laying him bare from | thigh to neck. (*Hab* 3:13; *LSB* 986:10)

These words clearly hearken back to the Protoevangelium of Genesis 3:15, “the fountainhead of all messianic prophecy,”<sup>31</sup> where Satan is told that the Seed of the woman will crush his head. No wonder, then, that this canticle is associated with Good Friday, the day we remember the sufferings inflicted on the Messiah by which Satan was vanquished. This canticle lends itself well to use in Lent, Passiontide, and Holy Week. The *LSB Altar Book* notes further that this could serve as the canticle after the sermon in the office of Tenebrae Vespers.<sup>32</sup>

**The Canticles of the Easter Vigil.** Aside from the Service of Prayer and Preaching, the likeliest occasion for our people to notice the Old Testament canticles is at the Easter Vigil. The notes concerning the Easter Vigil in the *LSB Altar Book* list the various readings that can be used, each reading followed by a psalm or canticle. There are four Old Testament canticles that can follow a reading: the Song of Moses and Israel after the account of Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea; the Song from Deuteronomy after the reading from Deuteronomy 31; the Song of Jonah after the reading of Jonah's preaching to Nineveh; and finally “All You Works of the Lord,” or the Song of the Three Young Men, after the reading of their deliverance from the fiery furnace.<sup>33</sup>

**“Song of Moses and Israel” (*LSB* 925) and “Song from Deuteronomy” (*LSB* 926).** The Song of Moses and Israel and the Song from Deuteronomy were also a

<sup>30</sup> James Monti, *A Sense of the Sacred: Roman Catholic Worship in the Middle Ages* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012), 406.

<sup>31</sup> Douglas McC. L. Judisch, “The Protoevangelium and Concordia Theological Seminary,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 60, nos. 1–2 (1996): 75.

<sup>32</sup> *LSB Altar Book*, 526. The *LSB Altar Book* also suggests the canticle “Seek the Lord” (*LSB* 983) as another canticle that could be used.

<sup>33</sup> *LSB Altar Book*, 530.

part of the regular weekly cycle of canticles in the medieval office. The obvious connection between the deliverance God wrought for His people in the crossing of the Red Sea and the resurrection of our Lord suggests a continued use of the Song of Moses and Israel throughout the Easter season. It could be particularly appropriate in the early weeks of Paschaltide, which directs our gaze back to the glorious resurrection of our Lord, by which we are rescued from bondage to sin and death and redeemed from the dominion of that old evil foe who held us captive.

**“All You Works of the Lord” (LSB 931).** The final canticle in the Easter Vigil is the *Benedicite Omnia Opera*, the Song of the Three Young Men after their rescue from the fiery furnace. Excluded from early Lutheran hymnals, this canticle was included in *TLH* as well as in *Lutheran Worship*, which excluded all other Old Testament canticles. I suspect this was due to the growing recovery of the Easter Vigil among Lutherans. The role of this canticle in the Easter Vigil is essential, for it concludes the Service of Readings.<sup>34</sup> The Song of the Three Young Men, either in the responsive chant form discussed here or in the hymn paraphrase (“All You Works of God, Bless the Lord,” *LSB* 930), can also be used throughout the Easter season. Perhaps this would work best during the later weeks, which do not so much direct us back to the first Easter morning as prepare us for Pentecost. Yet it is still a time of praising the Lord for the salvation he wrought by the resurrection. Therefore, with the three young men, we call on all creation in heaven and on earth to praise and magnify the Lord forever.

#### *Suggestions on Liturgical Use*

These canticles work particularly well when used throughout a liturgical season. Such a repeated use over the period of a liturgical season is also simply good pedagogy, for it allows time to introduce and use them, giving the congregation plenty of time to sing and get to know the canticle that is used.

This survey of most of the canticles in *LSB* helps answer the question “When in the church year?” Now we come to the question “Where do we use the canticles in the liturgy itself?” I believe the answer to that lies in the nature of the Old Testament canticles. With regard to their function in the Scriptures and their poetic form, they are psalmody, to be utilized in the same ways as are the psalms. The places for the use of the psalms in the liturgy then become places to use the canticles. Regarding the Old Testament canticles as psalmody also allows a special place and role for the Gospel canticles (Luke 1:46–55, 68–79; 2:29–32), just as the Gospels themselves have a more prominent role within the canon of Scripture due to their firsthand accounts of the Lord Jesus.

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<sup>34</sup> *LSB Altar Book*, 541.

With a seasonal use, an Old Testament canticle can be a substitute for the additional psalm after the *Venite* in Matins or where only the *Venite* is used (and thus is the de facto psalm for the day). An Old Testament canticle can also replace the *Venite* during a particular liturgical season. I would not recommend using an Old Testament canticle for each successive season the same year (starting out, at least). That can easily send a congregation into change fatigue. Perhaps it would suffice to begin by using one Old Testament canticle for the time of Christmas and one canticle for the time of Easter. For example, use the “Song of Hannah” (*LSB* 928) during Advent and the “Song of Jonah” (*LSB* 985) or “Song of Habakkuk” (*LSB* 986) during Lent.

Eventually, however, you can reach the point where you have a rotation of several canticles during the festival half of the church year, each of which highlights the themes of the particular season. What about our dear friend the *Venite* (Ps 95:1–7a)? Return to it during the time of the church (the Sundays after Pentecost). As previously mentioned, if you regularly use the Service of Prayer and Preaching, you could substitute one of these Old Testament canticles for one of the canticles given in that order of service.

But what if your congregation does not use Matins? Look to where the Psalm of the Day can be used in the Divine Service.

- Use a canticle as the Psalm of the Day/Entrance Hymn.
- Insert a canticle in place of the Psalm of the Day between the Old Testament and Epistle readings.

If you prefer to use the Introit and appointed psalm or gradual, use an Old Testament canticle as a seasonal offertory or as a distribution hymn. Of course, as with the *Venite* in Matins, we do not want to neglect the regular use of the psalms, but a judicious and seasonal use of these canticles lends well to a use of the church’s liturgical treasures while satisfying the desire for variety. The possibilities are already there.

#### IV. Conclusion

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of *Lutheran Worship*’s release, Norman Nagel was asked what he thought was that hymnal’s “most significant liturgical music contribution to the worship life of the church.” His answer was brief: “Chanting of the psalms.”<sup>35</sup>

Aside from six Anglican chant settings in the back of the book, the psalms in *TLH* were just as lifeless and uninviting as the Old Testament canticles that were

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<sup>35</sup> William H. Otte, “Lutheran Worship at 10—A Look Backward and Forward,” *Lutheran Worship Notes* 25 (Summer 1992): 1–6.

printed on the pages preceding the psalter. That dreary presentation of the psalms is but a memory as the practice of singing the psalms has permeated the worship life of our congregations. Even for those who disliked *Lutheran Worship*, this single contribution is invaluable and incalculable.

As we reflect on the ten-year anniversary of *Lutheran Worship's* successor, *Lutheran Service Book*, may we be spurred finally to notice those other songs that we have been given: Old Testament canticles. As with the chanting of the psalms in these recent decades, let us endeavor to introduce the Old Testament canticles to the worship of our congregations and to the lives of God's people. Let us finally notice them!