

LOGIA

A JOURNAL OF LUTHERAN THEOLOGY

EASTERTIDE/APRIL 1994

VOLUME III, NUMBER 2

CONTENTS

APR 18 1995

CORRESPONDENCE.....2

ARTICLES

That the Unlearned May Be Taught
By Dennis W. Marzolf.....4

Lutheran Hymnody: Is it Possible or Even Necessary Anymore?
By Paul J. Grime.....8

A Victorian Legacy: The Translating of German Hymns
By Alan C. Hoger.....18

We All Believe in One True God: Luther's Liturgical Confession of the Church's Continuity of Doctrine throughout the Ages
By Jon D. Vieker26

Music: Gift of God or Tool of the Devil
By Richard C. Resch.....33

A Call for Manuscripts.....39

Hymnody and Liturgy Across Cultures: A Case Study: Papua New Guinea
By Gregory Lockwood.....40

"If Stones Cried Out" by James Honig.....44

Gender Considerations on the Pastoral Office: In Light of 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 and 1 Timothy 2:8-14
By Robert W. Schaibley.....45

COLLOQUIUM FRATRUM.....52

Burnell F. Eckardt, Jr.: *Reaching the TV Generation*

"Inklings" by Jim Wilson.....53

REVIEWS.....54

Review Essay: *CHRISTIAN WORSHIP: A Lutheran Hymnal*

Hymnal Supplement 1991. Ed. by Robert J. Batastini and John Ferguson

Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible. By Brevard S. Childs

Motivation for Ministry: Perspectives for Every Pastor. By Nathan R. Pope

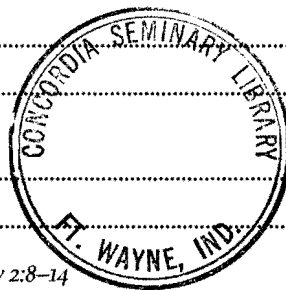
Modern Fascism: Liquidating the Christian Worldview. By Gene Edward Veith

Catholic, Lutheran, Protestant: A Doctrinal Comparison of Three Christian Confessions. By Gregory L. Jackson

BRIEFLY NOTED

LOGIA FORUM.....70

Next to Theology • Sound Concepts or Double Standards? • Catechetical Hymns • Hollywood Squires
Tombstones and Epitaphs • Treason and Tradition • Easter Devotions • House of Prayer or Den of Thieves?
The Hyperactive Church • Myths About Worship • Reflections on the Office • At Life's End
The Glamour of Worship • A Secret Report • One Song, One Voice
Friends of Westfield House • Gift-Bearing Greeks and Geeks



Lutheran Hymnody

Is It Possible or Even Necessary Anymore?

PAUL J. GRIME



WHEN MARTIN LUTHER ISSUED THE CALL FOR QUALIFIED poets to take up the pen and write hymns in the language of the people, he had no way of knowing what the final result would be. Four and one-half centuries later, we still don't know. Though we have societies and journals devoted to the study of hymnody, it is nearly impossible even for the specialist to get a handle on the thousands of hymns that have been written by thousands of poets in countless languages.

So where are all of these hymns? Why is it that our hymnals contain only a fraction of the many thousands that have been written? Obviously, there is the physical limitation: our pew racks cannot manage a book that is four thousand pages thick nor can our arms hold up such an enormous volume through a ten-stanza hymn! There is, however, a much more significant reason that explains why the great majority of Christian hymns are no longer in use: they simply couldn't cut it. Whether due to artistic inferiority, bad theology, or spiritual triteness, many hymns have not withstood the test of time and can no longer be found in any modern hymnals.

Perhaps the fate of many of these hymns can be explained by using a concept from the theory of evolution. The process of natural selection holds that a weaker species will fall prey to the stronger. Applied to the church's hymnody, such a concept would suggest that over the course of time, many hymns do not survive. When compared to the great hymns of the church, these hymns simply are no match. It is a given that from both a theological and an artistic perspective, many hymns will be of an inferior quality and will eventually fall by the wayside.

Is Lutheran hymnody possible or even necessary anymore? The answers may seem obvious, but the fact that the question is raised suggests that there is a problem. The problem is that the evolutionary process has broken down. The process of natural selection by which weaker hymns give way to stronger ones is not happening. Any survey of a congregation's favorite or most sung hymns reveals that it is not always hymns with a rich theological content that are chosen, but those in which the content plays no significant role.

Who determines which hymns are the strong ones that should survive, and who decides which hymns do not deserve that honor? Since it is so easy for these decisions to become colored by personal tastes, it is necessary that any discussion of the church's hymnody be set within the larger context of her worship. Thus, before asking whether Lutheran hymnody is possible or necessary anymore, even before tackling the question "What is Lutheran hymnody?" we must first ask, "What is worship?" and, more precisely, "What do Lutherans understand by worship?" This is, to be sure, a return to the basics; yet, if the issue of worship is forthrightly considered on the basis of Holy Scripture and the Confessions, then our questions regarding the church's hymnody will find adequate answers as well.

A LUTHERAN THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP

For worship to be Christian, it must speak about Jesus Christ, just as the apostle Peter confessed with great courage, "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). To speak of Jesus and his work of salvation is to speak the gospel (Rom 1:3-5), for it is in the gospel that the righteousness of God is revealed (Rom 1:17). The gospel is not, however, the only revelation of God. God also reveals his wrath (Rom 1:18), and that revelation we find in the law.

The distinction between law and gospel and the proper relationship of one to the other is a vital concern in any discussion of worship. In his law and gospel God addresses us directly, killing the sinner by means of the law and making us alive through the gospel. The purpose of the word of God in worship is not merely to impart knowledge about God or give rules for holy living, but to confront us with the stark reality of our sinful condition and then to free us through the proclamation of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, to strip us of our fig leaf behind which we hide our guilt and shame and to reclothe us with the righteousness of Christ.

This authority to kill sinners and give birth to believers should make it clear that all worship is centered on the triune God and that he is the chief actor in worship. The Father bares his throbbing heart of love by sending his only-begotten; the Son willingly lays down his life on our behalf and victoriously takes that life up again; the Spirit delivers to us Christ and all his benefits. The chief action in worship is not the meager thanks and praise that we attempt to throw God's way, but God's gift of himself by which he imparts life and salvation.

PAUL J. GRIME is pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, West Allis, Wisconsin, and a contributing editor of *LOGIA*. This paper was presented on January 20, 1993 at the sixth annual Symposium on The Lutheran Liturgy and Hymnody at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Crucial to a proper understanding of worship is the question of how God gives himself to us. The answer, of course, is that it is not through our pious thoughts, our mystical contemplations, or our contrived emotions, but rather through the means that God has chosen, through his word and sacraments. That familiar Lutheran concept of the means of grace means this: both God's word of condemnation and his declaration of pardon must be delivered to us from the outside. The human heart cannot be the source either of true contrition or of confidence in God's mercy. As our Lord himself said, "Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries . . ." (Mt 15:19). Only the harsh word of God's law can strike terror into that heart, and only the sweet news of the gospel can bring peace. When our worship is centered around the means of grace, God does his work in us.

Our encounter with God in what we call worship is not about what we offer him.

God gives himself to us through his means. We receive him through faith. In the Lutheran Confessions, faith and worship go hand in hand. Concerning the words Jesus spoke to the woman who had anointed his feet—that her faith had saved her—Melancthon writes the following in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession:

The woman came, believing that she should seek the forgiveness of sins from Christ. This is the highest way of worshiping Christ. Nothing greater could she ascribe to him. By looking for the forgiveness of sins from him, she truly acknowledged him as the Messiah. Truly to believe means to think of Christ in this way, and in this way to worship and take hold of him (Ap IV, 154).

Later, Melancthon returns to this association of faith and worship and says, "The service and worship of the Gospel is to receive good things from God. . . . the highest worship in the Gospel is the desire to receive forgiveness of sins, grace, and righteousness" (Ap IV, 310).

When speaking of worship, therefore, it is probably best not even to use that word, because it cannot do justice to the uniquely Lutheran term *Gottesdienst*. Our encounter with God in what we call worship is not about what we offer him, something Melancthon calls the "worship of the law" (Ap IV, 310); rather, it is God's service to us through his means of grace. In worship we do not give, we receive. This emphasis upon the gifts that God gives us in worship is not intended to discount what the Lutheran Confessions call our sacrifice of thanksgiving (Ap XXIV, 25 ff.). Certainly, there is an element of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving in all worship. What we must remember, however, is that even this sacrifice of thanksgiving is the result of God's good gifts to us.

As the psalmist says, "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth your praise" (Psalm 51:15).

WHAT IS LUTHERAN HYMNODY?¹

What place, then, does hymnody occupy in this Lutheran understanding of worship? Toward the end of 1523, Martin Luther wrote a letter to Georg Spalatin, the court chaplain of Luther's prince, Frederick the Wise. In this letter, Luther issued a decisive challenge to Spalatin and others to write German hymns. This is how he explains the importance of this endeavor:

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

The primary reason for writing German hymns was not to provide the people with heart-felt responses of praise and thanksgiving, though these were certainly present in the final product, but to set before them the word of God. In his preface to the 1524 Wittenberg hymnal, Luther endorses the singing of spiritual songs and psalms "so that God's Word and Christian teaching might be instilled and implanted in many ways." This hymnal has been compiled, Luther continues, "so that the holy gospel which now by the grace of God has risen anew may be noised and spread abroad." Finally, Luther writes:

Like Moses in his song [Exodus 15:2], we may now boast that Christ is our praise and song and say with St. Paul, 1 Corinthians 2[:2], that we *should know nothing to sing or say, save Jesus Christ our Savior.*³

Clearly, Luther regarded the congregation's song as a bearer of the word of God. Just as the preached word of God in the service conveys his grace, so does the hymn deliver the mercy of God in song.

Luther's concern that the word of God "be instilled and implanted in many ways" is understandable considering the historical context. Just two years earlier, he had been holed up at the Wartburg, frantically translating the New Testament. Upon his return to Wittenberg, Luther wasted no time beginning his translation of the Old Testament. Within nine months he had completed the entire Pentateuch, and by the end of the following year he had gone as far as the book of Esther. In 1524 Luther also published a translation of the entire psalter. With so much of his time devoted to translating the Word of God into the language of his fellow Germans, it is not surprising to hear Luther call for that Word to be set to music as well.

When Luther encouraged Spalatin to write hymns, he suggested that the Psalms be used as a model. Within the year, Luther had taken his own advice and written six hymns based on the Psalms. His instructions for transforming the Psalms into hymns were simple: "Maintain the sense, but don't cling to the words; [rather] translate them with other appropriate words." The six examples that we have from Luther's pen show that in many cases Luther did cling to the words. His psalm hymns display a remarkable sim-

ilarity to the original Psalms. Not only is the structure of each Psalm closely followed, but often key words and phrases from his 1524 translation of the psalter are also used in the hymn version.

A good example of Luther's devotion to the biblical text can be found in his hymn "Happy Who in God's Fear Doth Stay." Using Psalm 128 as his model, Luther has produced a hymn that closely parallels the original. (See Appendix A.) There is only one departure from the text, but it is notable. In stanza 3, Luther chooses to expand upon the psalmist's announcement in verse 4 that the man who fears the Lord will be blessed. Observe how Luther interprets this blessing:

See, such rich blessing hangs him on
Who in God's fear doth live a man;
From him the [old] curse away is worn
With which the sons of men are born.

The blessing for the one who fears God is freedom from the old curse, the curse of original sin. Here we find that Luther has moved beyond the limited scope of the Psalm, which in verse 3 speaks of wife and children as the blessings that God brings to the God-fearing man. For Luther, such temporal blessings cannot begin to compare with the blessings of being free from the curse of the law. Thus, while Luther strives to maintain the sense of the Psalm, he is not opposed to reaching beyond the message of the individual Psalm in order to provide the soteriological teaching that is so prevalent throughout the psalter and all of Scripture.

Another of Luther's hymns, "May God Bestow on Us His Grace," will further illustrate this point. Based on Psalm 67, this hymn also follows its model closely (see Appendix B). Luther even takes advantage of the repeating refrain in verses 3 and 5, using these verses as the opening of stanzas 2 and 3 respectively. In the German the similarities are even more striking.

But while the structure of Luther's hymn mirrors that of the Psalm, there are also subtle differences that reveal how Luther intended for his hymns not only to bring the word of God to the people, but also to instill Christian teaching in them. We shall consider the two most obvious examples. In Psalm 67:2 King David writes, "That your way may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations." While Luther is content in the Psalm to translate the Hebrew word for salvation simply with *Heil*, in the hymn he takes the opportunity to expound upon the meaning of this salvation. He describes God's way on earth as his work which is related to his action of loving us. God's salvation is then more specifically described as belonging to Jesus Christ and is related to his might and power.⁴

Any translation of the Scriptures that would offer such a blatant paraphrase as this would be immediately rejected. Yet in his hymn setting Luther does not miss this splendid opportunity to draw upon the unity of the Scriptures in order to teach the people about salvation. There is, however, an even more astounding example of this artistic, or maybe we should call it theological, freedom. In verses 6 and 7 of the Psalm David writes, "God, our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us." How does Luther handle this threefold repetition of the name of God? By invoking the Holy Trinity, of course. The names of the Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit can be found nowhere in the Psalm; yet the triune God, and especially Christ, is found throughout the hymnal of Israel, and for that reason Luther does not hesitate to conclude the hymn with this high doxology to the Holy Trinity.⁵

What can we learn from Luther's psalm hymns? First, they demonstrate Luther's concern for the clear and unhindered proclamation of the word of God. There can be no doubt that in these psalm hymns Luther has succeeded in making that word available to the people in the form of music. Second, though Luther displays a great deal of respect for the biblical text, he is not averse to elaborating upon that text when he sees the opportunity to instruct the people on some point of Christian doctrine. Third—and this is related to the second point—Luther savors every opportunity he has to reflect upon the doctrine of God's grace as it is revealed through his Son Jesus.

He is not opposed to reaching beyond the message of the individual Psalm in order to provide the soteriological teaching.

Consider another of Luther's psalm hymns, "Out of the depths I cry to Thee," based on Psalm 130, one of the penitential psalms. Luther makes the most of the psalmist's focus on God's mercy. For example, when the psalmist writes, "Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications," Luther sings,

Bend down Thy gracious ear to me
And grant my supplication. (ELH 415:1)

For Luther, God listens with gracious ears. Or consider the final verse of the psalm which reads, "And the Lord shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities." Here is how Luther the hymnwriter puts it:

Our Shepherd is the Lord, and He
At last shall set his Israel free
From all their sin and sorrow. (ELH 415:5)

In the preceding stanza, Luther has made it clear that we are God's Israel who have been born of the Spirit. Now he makes the bold assertion that the Lord who redeems us is none other than our Shepherd. Unfortunately, most English translations fail at this point, for in the German Luther clearly calls this Lord *der gute hirt*, the good Shepherd.

Luther's hymns demonstrate a clear soteriological thrust. Just as he continuously defended and taught that we are saved by God's grace alone, so did he proclaim that same message in his hymns. The diverse ways in which he portrays God's mercy are most instructive. For example, the opening verse of Psalm 12 reads, "Help, Lord, for the godly man ceases!" In his hymn on this Psalm, Luther does not merely reiterate this plea for help, but uses it as an occasion to call specifically upon God's mercy:

Ah God, from heaven look down and view;
Let it *thy pity* waken. (AE 53:226, st. 1)

Another example can be found in the hymn "In the Midst of Earthly Life." In all three stanzas God is addressed directly in words reminiscent of the ancient *Trisagion*:

Holy and righteous God!
Holy and mighty God!
Holy and all-merciful Savior! (TLH 590)

The emphasis is not on God's transcendence and power, but on his mercy. In the second stanza Luther further explains this mercy of God:

We should sin and suffer so. (AE 53:276, st. 2)

But the decisive portrayal of God's mercy in Luther's hymns is found in the fourth stanza of "Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice."

Then God beheld my wretched state
With deep commiseration;
He thought upon his mercy great
And willed my soul's salvation;
He turned to me a Father's heart—
Not small the cost!—to heal my smart,
He gave his best and dearest. (ELH 310:4)

In Luther's hymns, the mercy of God is nearly always coupled with an emphasis upon the sinner's inability to save himself.

The words "He thought upon his mercy great" are reminiscent of Exodus 2:24, where God, seeing the suffering of his people who were slaves in Egypt, remembered his covenant with his servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. An even more powerful image is found in the incident on Mount Sinai when God was ready to annihilate the people because of their worship of the golden calf. In this case, it was Moses who reminded God of his covenant (Ex 32:13).

But in Luther's hymn it is another line in this stanza that must occupy our attention: "He turned to me a Father's heart." What image could more appropriately describe God's desire to save? In the Large Catechism Luther speaks of the Father's heart in several places. In the first article God's fatherly heart is revealed to us in the preservation of his creation.

Everything we see, and every blessing that comes our way, should remind us of it. When we escape distress or danger, we should recognize that this is God's doing.

He gives us all these things so that we may sense and see in them his fatherly heart and his boundless love toward us (LC II, 23).

It is, however, in the conclusion to the Creed that Luther connects the Father's heart to his desire to save, specifically through Christ.

In these three articles God himself has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of his fatherly heart, his sheer, unutterable love. . . . As we explained before, we could never come to recognize the Father's favor and grace were it not for the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the Father's heart (LC II, 64, 65).

This soteriological component in Luther's hymns is hardly a minor feature. In nearly every hymn, the mercy of God shines through. Any examination of Lutheran hymnody, therefore, must pay serious attention to this important feature. But in order to understand the full extent of salvation, we must also take into account our need for it. That leads us to a fourth aspect in Luther's hymns, namely, the doctrine of man.

To begin our inquiry into what is a crucial and often overlooked component in Luther's hymns, we turn again to his hymn based on Psalm 130. The biblical basis for Luther's comments on the nature of man is found in verse 3: "If you, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" These words provide Luther with a prime opportunity to highlight man's lost condition:

The best and holiest deeds must fail
Of all before Thee living;
Before Thee none can boasting stand,
But all must fear Thy strict demand
And live alone by mercy.

My hope I rest, then, on the Lord,
And build not on my merit. (ELH 415:1,2)

In Luther's hymns the mercy of God is nearly always coupled with an emphasis upon the sinner's inability to save himself.

The best example of Luther's emphasis on the total depravity of man can be found in another hymn that he wrote at the same time as his psalm hymns. Luther's "Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice" is undoubtedly one of his finest hymns, for in it he brilliantly lays out the entire order of salvation. After a festive introductory stanza in which he invites the congregation to join in praising God for his wondrous deeds, Luther abruptly launches into a scathing attack on the sinner (st. 2 and 3). We are bound in Satan's chains, possessed by the sin in which we were born. Our works are useless, irreparably stained by sin. Our will fights against God's judgment, which declares us dead and lost. Our only option is to despair and die, for it is to hell that we are sinking.

Luther's use of the law in this hymn is most striking. He shows no interest in enumerating individual sins; instead, he goes to the heart of the matter—our sinful heart—describing not what we have done, but who we are. He locks all the gates so that there is no possibility of escape, for it is only after the sinner is brought

into a state of total despair that the sweet news of the gospel can blossom. To highlight this preaching of the law, Luther effects a subtle shift between the first and second stanzas. In the introductory stanza he has the congregation singing to one another, inviting one another to join in praising God for his wondrous deeds. But as he moves into the second stanza, Luther switches from second person plural to first person singular. When it comes time to speak of sin, we can only speak of our own. Luther allows no one to hide in the crowd, for each of us must stand alone before our mighty Judge. Who is in Satan's chains? I am. Who was born in sin? I was. When it comes to the preaching of the law, no one is allowed to escape, and that includes Luther himself.

Luther refused to present the doctrine of grace apart from a clear proclamation of the law.

There are two reasons why this emphasis on the depravity of man can assist us in our examination of Lutheran hymnody. First, it is a prevalent theme in Luther's hymns. The word "sin" occurs thirty-one times. Other, related words such as original sin, misdeed, error, and guilt account for seventeen additional occurrences. Luther seldom depicts sin as an impersonal quality; rather, in nearly half of the occurrences, the word is modified by a possessive adjective. It is quite common to find such phrases in Luther's hymns as "Cleanse us from *our sins* we pray," or "All *our debt*, Thou hast paid."⁶ The hymn "In the Midst of Earthly Life" repeatedly emphasizes this personal nature of sin:

We mourn that we have greatly erred,
That our *sins* Thy wrath have stirred.

In the midst of utter woe
When our *sins* oppress us,
.....
Thy precious blood was shed to win
Full atonement for our *sin*. (TLH 590:1, 3)

In his treatise *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther takes up this matter of the personal nature of sin, writing:

Not that we should sin or be damned through that one transgression of Adam if it were not our own transgression. For who could be damned for another's transgression, especially before God? It does not, however, become ours by any imitative doing of it ourselves, for then it would not be the one transgression of Adam, since it would be we and not Adam who committed it; but it becomes ours the moment we are born.

In the hymn "Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice," Luther underscores this personal nature of sin from which we cannot escape by reminding us that Christ came to be sin for us. In

stanza 8 we hear our Lord say to us, "Mine innocence shall bear *thy sin*." Throughout his hymns Luther never lets us forget this personal character of sin.

Luther refused to present the doctrine of grace apart from a clear proclamation of the law. Now, for any Lutheran that should be nothing new. We're simply talking here about law and gospel. Yet when one considers what is sung in many churches today, the question must be raised: "Is the law receiving adequate treatment in modern Lutheran hymnody?" The answer may not be the resounding "yes" that it ought to be.

While it is not possible in this brief study to provide an exhaustive investigation of this issue, it is worthwhile to consider one interesting aspect regarding the place of the law in modern hymnody. It has to do with the editing of Reformation hymns in modern hymnals. Sixteenth and seventeenth century hymns often ran anywhere from ten to twenty stanzas in length. To make these hymns more palatable to twentieth-century time constraints, many of them are shortened. But how does one decide which stanzas to omit? Take the hymn "Salvation unto us has come," not a hymn of Luther's but of his colleague and friend, Paul Speratus. Of the fourteen stanzas in the original, ten are included in *The Lutheran Hymnal*. In *Lutheran Worship* that number is reduced further to six. Can you guess which stanzas have been omitted? One of them is a stinging proclamation of the law, two of the stanzas beautifully contrast law and gospel, and the fourth contains an important reference to Baptism.

This criticism is not being directed at the editors of *Lutheran Worship*, because they clearly had difficult decisions to make. Even the editors of *The Lutheran Hymnal* had to make some hard choices. In Luther's Easter hymn, "Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands," both the 1941 and 1982 hymnals omit a powerful stanza of law proclamation:

No son of man could conquer Death,
Such mischief sin had wrought us,
For innocence dwelt not on earth,
And therefore Death had brought us
Into thralldom from of old
And ever grew more strong and bold
And kept us in his bondage.
Hallelujah! (ELH 224:2)

And even though *Lutheran Worship* omitted more stanzas of law than we might like, we can thank the editors for seeing to it that Luther's baptism hymn, "To Jordan Came the Christ Our Lord," has again been made available to us. Consider this marvelous example of how Luther can preach the law:

But woe to those who cast aside
This grace so freely given;
They shall in sin and shame abide
And to despair be driven.
For born in sin, their works must fail,
Their striving saves them never;
Their pious acts do not avail,
And they are lost forever,
Eternal death their portion. (LW 223:6)

This examination of the nature of man in Luther's hymns has highlighted a crucial element in Lutheran hymnody. But since the law's proper function of exposing our sinfulness is but a preparation for the proclamation of the gospel, we will now return to the soteriological emphasis in Luther's hymns, focusing specifically on the person and work of Christ.

Luther's focus on Jesus Christ permeates his hymns. The vocabulary that Luther uses to describe Jesus and his work is especially rich. He is "God's Son," "the beloved Son," "God the Father's eternal Son," "Christ the only-begotten," "the virgin's Child," "the dear little Jesus," "the eternal Light," "the Creator of all things." In all, there are some 126 references to Jesus in Luther's hymns. Of those, only 11 use the name Jesus or Christ. The other 115 occurrences are a tribute to Luther's command of the biblical language and the richness of his theological vocabulary.

Luther's focus on Jesus Christ permeates his hymns.

As one might expect, Luther's Advent and Christmas hymns are filled with references to Christ. One common theme is the paradox of God's becoming man. Here is a sampling:

Th' eternal Father's only Son
For a manger leaves his throne;
Disguised in our poor flesh and blood
Is now the everlasting Good.

He whom the world could not inclose
Doth in Mary's lap repose,
He is become an infant small,
Who by his might upholdeth all.

The Father's Son, God ever blest,
In the world became a guest. (*ELH* 147:2, 3, 5)

He who himself all things did make
A servant's form vouchsafed to take,
That He as man mankind might win
And save his creatures from their sin.

Upon a manger, filled with hay,
In poverty content He lay;
With milk was fed the Lord of all,
Who feeds the ravens when they call.
(*ELH* 148:2, 5)

Ah! Lord, who hast created all,
How hast Thou made Thee weak and small
That Thou must choose Thy infant bed
Where humble cattle lately fed. (*ELH* 150:9)

These examples are reminiscent of the early church fathers, who often used similar language to marvel at the mystery of the incarnation.

One aspect of Luther's focus on Christ is his effort to instill pure doctrine through his hymns. For example, he leaves no doubt that Jesus is true God and true man. He recognizes the virgin birth, acknowledges that Jesus is sinless, and frequently mentions his work of salvation. Luther's hymn on the Apostles' Creed, "We All Believe in One True God," is a good example of the thoroughness with which he instructs those who sing his hymns. Consider the stanza that speaks of God's Son.

We all believe in Jesus Christ,
His own Son, our Lord, possessing
An equal Godhead, throne, and might,
Source of ev'ry grace and blessing.
Born of Mary, virgin mother,
By the power of the Spirit,
Made true man, our elder Brother,
That the lost might life inherit;
Was crucified for sinful men
And raised by God to life again. (*TLH* 251:2)

In several of Luther's hymns, Christ's work of salvation takes on a rather strident tone. His Easter hymn, "Christ Jesus lay in death's strong bands," is a good example. Using the language of 1 Corinthians 15, Luther writes,

It was a strange and dreadful fray
When Death and Life contended
But it was Life that won the day,
The reign of Death was ended.
Holy Scripture plainly saith
That Death is swallowed up by Death,
Made henceforth a derision.
Hallelujah! (*ELH* 224:4)

Unfortunately, the stanza preceding this one is not included in either of our hymnals. Yet in it Luther builds on this battle that Jesus waged against the devil:

But Jesus Christ, God's only Son,
To our low state descended,
The cause of Death He has undone,
his power forever ended,
Ruined all his right and claim,
And left him nothing but the name,
his sting is lost forever.
Hallelujah! (*ELH* 244:3)

In his hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" Luther again takes up this theme of Christ as our Victor. In the second stanza we sing,

But for us fights the Valiant One,
Whom God Himself elected. (*TLH* 262:2)

While volumes could be written on these two lines, it is what follows that must occupy our attention:

Ask ye, Who is this?
 Jesus Christ it is,
 Of Sabaoth Lord,
 And there's none other God. (TLH 262:2)

Though that last line is a strong statement, it is typical of Luther, who was not afraid to use his hymns to teach even such profound doctrines as the Holy Trinity. In his *Treatise on the Last Words of David* (1543), Luther uses this same phrase—and there's none other God—when he speaks of the revelation of each person of the Trinity at the Baptism of Jesus. Of the dove that descends and rests on Jesus, Luther says, "That is God, and there is no other God beside Him." Of the voice of the Father, he repeats the same words. And of the man Jesus, Luther says once more, "That is God, and there is no God beyond that one." On that basis, Luther says that "it is also correct to say that God died for us, for the Son is God, and there is no other God but only more Persons in the same Godhead."⁷ In his hymns Luther refuses to shy away from a bold and daring witness to Jesus Christ.

Perhaps it is time to recognize that one of the strengths of Luther's hymns is the harmonious balance between instruction and proclamation.

There are other topics in Luther's hymns that we could also consider. One might be his treatment of the Holy Spirit. Here again, Luther reveals his mastery of the biblical language, for he uses the word "Spirit" in only 16 of 42 references to the third person of the Trinity. Or one could explore Luther's understanding of life and death. The word *leben* occurs 31 times, while a wide variety of expressions for death appear 55 times. The doctrines of creation, the church, sanctification, eternal life, and more can all be found. Indeed, as a corpus Luther's hymns are a veritable systematic theology for the layman.⁸

There is one final topic that we will consider. It is, in a sense, a defense of Luther's hymns. How often has it been said that Lutheran hymnody is too didactic and fails to offer sufficient praise and adoration of God? One can certainly understand the basis for such a charge, for throughout his hymns Luther is continually teaching Christian doctrine. In certain instances, his express goal is to teach. The catechism hymns would certainly fall into this category. Whether he was working with children or adults, Luther was constantly striving to instruct them in the truths of salvation.

In order to answer the charge that Luther's hymns are too didactic, we must remember that one of the reasons Luther wanted to provide hymns in the vernacular was so that the people could be instructed in the word of God and Christian doctrine.

To the extent, then, that Luther's hymns succeed in conveying the truths of the Holy Scriptures, there is no reason to deny or apologize for their didactic character. Nevertheless, in the review of the theology of worship at the beginning of this paper, it was shown that the function of the word of God in worship is not merely to instruct, but also to proclaim. That proclamation takes the form of putting to death through the law and making alive by the gospel.

Perhaps it is time to recognize that one of the strengths of Luther's hymns is the harmonious balance that he has achieved between instruction and proclamation. To illustrate this point, we turn to a hymn that not only exhibits didactic characteristics but was expressly written to serve as a teaching tool. It is plainly evident in his hymn on the Ten Commandments that Luther the teacher is at work. In many instances, the stanzas match precisely the explanations that Luther gives in his *Small Catechism*. Compare Luther's explanation of the fifth commandment with the corresponding hymn stanza:

In sinful wrath thou shalt not kill,
 Nor hate, nor render ill for ill;
 Be patient and of gentle mood,
 And to thy foe do thou good.
 Have mercy, Lord! (ELH 391:6)

There can be little doubt that Luther's goal here is the same as in his catechism: to teach.

There is, however, another dimension to this hymn that can easily escape our attention. The hymn teaches, to be sure, but more importantly, it positions us directly before our Judge and condemns us as the sinners we are. For each commandment we hear the sin that God forbids and the holiness that he demands. But in every case the crushed sinner can only respond like the penitent publican in the temple: "Have mercy, Lord" (Luke 18:13). If this were a hymn only of instruction, even the devil could join in. What harm would it do him to learn the commandments? But this is a hymn of penitence and confession. The law is doing its work, as we sing in stanza 11:

God these commandments gave therein
 To show thee, child of man, thy sin. (ELH 391:11)

But this is also a hymn of faith, as the final stanza clearly demonstrates:

Help us, Lord Jesus Christ, for we
 A Mediator have in Thee.
 Our works cannot salvation gain;
 They merit but endless pain.
 Have mercy, Lord! (ELH 391:12)

There are many other examples where Luther both proclaims and teaches in the same breath. We have already considered his severe preaching of the law in the hymn "Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice." Are these stanzas of law didactic? Certainly, but who has time to worry about such things when the law is thoroughly crushing us? And when the gospel is pro-

claimed in the following stanzas, it does not reach our ears merely as facts to be stored for future reference, but as sweet comfort of sins forgiven, flowing from the lips of the Father and the Son.

What of the corollary complaint that Luther's hymns fail to offer sufficient praise and adoration of God? Consider these selected stanzas from his Christmas hymns:

All this He did that He might prove
To us sinners his great love;
For this let Christendom adore
And praise his name forevermore.
Hallelujah! (ELH 147:7)

All honor unto Christ be paid,
Pure offspring of the favored maid,
With Father and with Holy Ghost,
Till time in endless time be lost! (ELH 148: 7)

My heart for very joy doth leap,
My lips no more can silence keep;
I, too, must sing with joyful tongue
That sweetest ancient cradle-song. (ELH 150:14)

Luther's hymns are hardly lacking in their praise of God. There are some 65 occurrences of words like praise, thanks, and glory. In addition, expressions of joy, pleasure, and delight occur 25 times.⁹ Listen to the way in which Luther depicts the joy of Jesus' resurrection:

So let us keep the festival
With heartfelt exultation.
Christ is himself the Joy of all,
The Sun of our salvation.
By his grace he doth impart
Eternal sunshine to the heart;
The night of sin is ended.
Hallelujah! (ELH 224:6)

These examples show us that we are mistaken if we think that we can clearly distinguish between instruction about God and praise of God. We must never forget that Luther did not even view the catechism's function as solely didactic. In his letter *A Simple Way to Pray* Luther explains how he personally used the catechism not only as a book of instruction, but also as a source for thanksgiving, confession, and prayer.¹⁰

IS IT POSSIBLE? NECESSARY?

Is Lutheran hymnody possible or necessary anymore? Certainly, Lutheran hymnody is necessary. It is no coincidence that challenges to our Lutheran hymnody have come at precisely the same time as challenges to our church's theology. When the focus of our hymns changes from the God-centered proclamation that we have encountered in Luther's hymns to the man-centered emphasis that permeates much of what is sung today, you can be certain that it is but a reflection of the theological climate in which the church struggles and a gauge of our people's theology and piety.

It is rather curious that so many in the Lutheran church these days are raiding other parts of Christendom for new hymns. Luther would be perplexed if not shocked. When he called for the writing of new hymns at the end of 1523, he may have had another reason besides that of simply providing hymns in the language of the people. Earlier that year, Thomas Muntzer, a leader of the radical Reformation, had published a revision of the liturgy in German, together with German translations of eleven Latin hymns. While there is no historical evidence which proves that Luther was aware of Muntzer's hymn translations, he certainly was familiar with the spiritualizing tendencies of Muntzer's theology. There can be little doubt that one reason Luther called for the writing of new hymns was his desire to provide the people with hymns of sound theological content so that they would not be led astray by hymns like Muntzer's and the false theology contained in them.¹¹ So what do we do now? Lutherans now sing hymns that would have made Muntzer proud.

Lutherans now sing hymns that would have made Muntzer proud.

Lutheran hymnody is necessary. The faith still must be taught, and through every medium at our disposal. Just because our people have their own Bibles, and perhaps even read them, does not mean that they have grasped the basic teachings of sin and grace, let alone the finer points that are taught in the Scriptures. There is still a need for Lutheran hymnody.

But is it possible? In our examination of Luther's hymns, we have considered several themes that can assist us in making Lutheran hymnody possible for future generations. First, there is the need for God's Word to be proclaimed, and that need shall continue until our Lord's return. But as Luther has so marvelously shown us, Lutheran hymnody need not be limited solely to a repetition of the Word of God. Luther the hymnwriter, like Luther the catechist, is often asking, "What does this mean?" The answers to that question, of course, are the true treasures that are found in his hymns and that should be found in all of Lutheran hymnody. The central focus is always salvation by God's grace alone. If you are ever in need of the gospel, turn to Luther's hymns. But don't be shocked when you run into the law, because we have seen how prominent, and even brutal, Luther's preaching of the law can be. But always, the answer to our sin is Christ, the Valiant One who fights for us.

Yes, Lutheran hymnody is still possible. But for it to remain possible, we will need writers of new hymns, hymns that will exhibit the vibrance of Luther's hymns, hymns that will nourish us with the richness of the biblical text, hymns that will pulverize our stubborn, self-centered will, lift us up by God's grace in Christ, and point us to faithfulness in our calling and love for our neighbor. Yes, Lutheran hymnody is possible and necessary, for as long as God gives us breath, we must "know nothing to sing or say, save Jesus Christ our Savior." ■■■■

APPENDIX A

f PSALM 128

1. Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord,
Who walks in His ways.
When you eat the labor of your hands,
2. You shall be happy, and it shall be well with you.
3. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine
In the very heart of your house,
Your children like olive plants
All around your table.
4. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed
who fears the Lord.
5. The Lord bless you out of Zion,
And may you see the good of Jerusalem
All the days of your life.
6. Yes, may you see your children's children.
Peace be upon Israel!

WOHL DEM, DER IN GOTTES FURCHT STEHT

1. Happy who in God's fear doth stay,
And in it goeth on his way;
Thine own hand shall thee find thy food,
So liv'st thou right, and all is good.
2. So shall thy wife be in thy house
Like vine with clusters plenteous,
Thy children sit thy table round
Like olive plants all fresh and sound.
3. See, such rich blessing hands him on
Who in God's fear doth live a man;
From him the [old] curse away is worn,
With which the sons of men are born.
4. From Zion God will prosper thee;
Thou shalt behold continually
Jerusalem's now happy case,
To God so pleasing in her grace.
5. He will thy days make long for thee,
With goodness ever nigh thee be,
That thou with thy sons' sons may'st dwell
And there be peace in Israel.

APPENDIX B

PSALM 67

1. God be merciful unto us and bless us,

And cause his face to shine upon us.
2. That your way may be known on earth,

Your salvation among all nations.
3. Let the peoples praise you, O God;
Let all the peoples praise you.
4. Oh let the nations be glad and sing for joy!

For you shall judge the people righteously,
And govern the nations on earth.
5. Let the peoples praise you, O God;
Let all the peoples praise you.
6. Then the earth shall yield her increase;

God our own God, shall bless us.
7. God shall bless us,
And all the ends of the earth shall fear him.

ES WOLLE GOTT UNS GNÄDIG SEIN

1. May God bestow on us His grace,
With blessings rich provide us.
And may the brightness of His face,
To life eternal guide us,
That we His gracious work may know
And what is His good pleasure,
And also to the heathen show
Christ's riches without measure
And unto God convert them.
2. Thine over all shall be the praise
And thanks of every nation,
And all the world with joy shall raise
The voice of exultation;
For Thou shalt judge the earth, O Lord,
Nor suffer sin to flourish;
Thy people's pasture is Thy Word
Their souls to feed and nourish,
In righteous paths to keep them.
3. O let the people praise Thy worth,
In all good works increasing;
The land shall plenteous fruit bring forth,
Thy Word is rich in blessing.
May God the Father, God the Son,
And God the Spirit bless us!
Let all the world praise Him alone,
Let solemn awe possess us.
Now let our hearts say, Amen.

NOTES

1. The writer is indebted to Dr. Kenneth Korby for this law/gospel expression.

2. The discussion below will be limited to the hymns of Martin Luther. That limitation in no way implies that only Luther's hymns are worthy of the designation "Lutheran hymnody." On the contrary, Luther's own example is most instructive, for no more than a third of his hymns were actually original. Luther translated ancient Latin hymns and edited and enlarged a variety of medieval German hymns. Thus from the beginning the Lutheran church has recognized that her hymnody is drawn from the best of the church's tradition.

3. *AE* 49:68; *WA Br* 3:220; emphasis added.

4. *AE* 53: 316; *WA* 35:474, 15-17; emphasis added.

5. Michael Reu, *Luther's German Bible: An Historical Presentation Together with a Collection of Sources* (Columbus: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1934), pp. 185-87, 195, 199.

6. *AE* 49:69; *WA Br* 3:220, 10-11.

7. *AE* 53:243, st. 3. Because hymn translations often require some freedom to accommodate both meter and rhyme, I will draw from several translations in order to provide an English version that is closest to Luther's thought. In addition to the fairly literal translations in the American Edition of Luther's Works (*AE*), I will also use the translations in several English hymnals: *The Lutheran Hymnal (TLH)*, *Lutheran Worship (LW)*, and the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book, 1937 (ELH)*.

8. Luther's psalm translations:

v. 3a—*Es dancken dyr Gott die volcker*

v. 5a—*Es dancken dyr alle volcker*

Luther's hymn versions:

st. 3—*So dancken, Gott, und loben dich*

st. 5—*Es dancke, Gott, und lobe dich*

9. The German is much more direct than any of the translations, which fail to reproduce the word "love" to describe God's work: *Das wyr erkennen seyne werck / und was yhm liebt auff erden / Und Jesus Christus heyl und sterck / bekand den heyden werden / und sie zu Gott bekeren*. Markus Jenny, ed. *Luthers Geistliche Lieder und Kirchengesange: Vollständige Neuedition in Ergänzung zu Band 35 der Weimarer Ausgabe*, vol. 4 (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1985), p. 185 (*Mi Walt* 1524, Nr. XII).

10. This is hardly a fanciful interpretation for Luther. For further examples of his trinitarian exegesis in the Old Testament, see his *Last Words of David*, *AE* 15:276 ff.

11. Patrice Veit, *Das Kirchenlied in der Reformation Martin Luthers: Eine thematische und semantische Untersuchung* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, 1986), pp. 119, 180.

12. From the hymns "God the Father, Be our Stay" (*TLH* 247) and "O Lord, We Praise Thee" (*TLH* 313:2).

13. *AE* 33:272; *WA* 18:773, 12-16.

14. Veit, pp. 186-87.

15. While "A Mighty Fortress" is based on Psalm 46, it is not like the other psalm hymns of Luther. He wrote this hymn three to four years later and intended it only as a summary of the Psalm.

16. *AE* 15:304-305, 310; *WA* 54:59, 24-25, 37-38; 60, 19; 64, 13-14.

17. See the semantic tables in Veit, pp. 167-88.

18. Veit, p. 68, n. 28; p. 171.

19. *AE* 43:200.

20. Veit, pp. 37 ff.

21. Claus Burba, *Die Christologie in Luthers Liedern*, [Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte], no. 175 (Gütersloh: Carl Bertelsmann Verlag, 1956), p. 9.

22. *AE* 53:316; *WA* 35:474, 16-17.