CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

VOL. XXXII *July 1961* No. 7

Three Words in Our Worship: Devotional Reflections

By ARTHUR CARL PIEPKORN

HOSANNA

Hosanna is one of three words — the other two are *Alleluia* and *Amen* — that the church has taken over from the Hebrew into her worship in mere transliteration and without translation,[1] as a frank and unabashed witness to her roots in the Israel of which she herself has become the successor under the New Covenant.

Mark 11 tells us that as our Lord rode into Jerusalem on His borrowed colt "many spread their clothes on the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields. And those who went before and those who followed cried out: 'Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed be the kingdom of our father David that is coming! Hosanna in the highest!'" (vv. 8-10). Matthew 21 has them shout: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed be He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (v. 9). John 12 adds the touch that has given Palm Sunday its name: "They took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, crying, 'Hosanna! Blessed be He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!'" (v. 13). The Hosannas are there even in Luke 19, still audible in the Greek into which they have been translated: "Blessed be the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (v. 38)

Originally, Hosanna derives from Ps. 118:25: אָנָּא יְהוָה הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּא — "Save now, I beseech Thee, O Lord," as the King James Version renders it. Ps. 118 was sung at the Feast of Tabernacles, and the people used this verse as a refrain as they carried their branches of palm, of myrtle, and of willow in procession, notably on the seventh day of the feast, when the branches of the trees were finally piled up high at the altar, as a tangible memorial of the worshipers' fleeting cries of acclamation and devotion. In Aramaic the cry took the form הוֹשַׁע־נָא, Hellenized as ὡσαννά, a kind of divine hurrah.

The cry and the palm branches were transferred from the Feast of Tabernacles to other festive occasions. Thus the Second Book of Maccabees tells us how Judas Maccabaeus celebrated the ignominious fall of Antiochus Epiphanes and the purging of the sanctuary with an eight-day celebration in the manner of the Feast of Tabernacles, the people bearing ivy-wreathed wands, beautiful branches, and fronds of palm and offering hymns of thanksgiving to Him who had given success to their purifying of His own Holy Place (10:6,7). The First Book of the Maccabees similarly records how at a later date Simon Maccabaeus led the Jews into the recently reconquered citadel of Jerusalem with praise and palm branches, and

[1] A fourth is *Sabaoth,* which, however, occurs in the liturgy only as part of the formula *Dominus Deus Sabaoth,* "Lord God of Sabaoth," whereas the other three words are used as independent ejaculations.

with harps and cymbals and stringed instruments, and with hymns and songs, because a great enemy had been crushed and removed from Israel. (13:51)

In the gospels the first Palm Sunday sees our Lord deliberately identifying Himself as the One in whom Messianic prophecy was finding final fulfillment. To His disciples and to the enthusiastic Passover pilgrims this was a completely natural occasion for hailing Him with Hosannas and palms and acclamations of precisely the kind that we find in all four of the gospels. It may even have occurred to some of them that there was a peculiar propriety about the cry "Hosanna" when it was addressed to our Lord, for in its etymology it comes from the same root that underlies the human name of Christ, Jesus, "the Lord is Savior" — the very name of the great national liberator Joshua that the divine messenger had given to our Lord before the most blessed Mother of God (FC, Ep VIII, 12; SD VIII, 24) had conceived Him in her womb.

We can understand, too, why at a very early date the church's liturgy would link the Holy Eucharist with the cry of the Passover pilgrims cheering our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. In the second-century church manual known as *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles,* the prayer of thanksgiving after receiving Holy Communion includes the ecstatic cry: "Let Grace come, and let this world pass away! Hosanna to the God of David."[2] In the "Clementine Liturgy" of the fourth century *Apostolic Constitutions* the congregation sings just before the Communion of the celebrant and people: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord! God is the Lord, and He has appeared to us! Hosanna in the highest!"[3] We find the "Blessed is He that cometh" linked with the "Holy, Holy, Holy" in the West as early as the sixth century,[4] and we may well suppose that if the "Hosanna in the highest" did not then already bracket the "Blessed is He that cometh" it came to do so very soon after.[5]

Thus the church voices her unshaken conviction that in accord with His promise at the institution of the Holy Communion the same Lord who entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday in visible flesh is present in the midst of His congregation and imparts His true body and His true blood under the earthly forms of the hallowed host and the consecrated contents of the Eucharistic

---

[2] *Didache* 10:6; Karl Bihlmeyer, ed., *Die apostolischen Väter* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1924), I, 6, lines 24—25.

[3] *Apostolic Constitutions,* VIII, sec. ii, 13 (cf. VII, sec. ii, 26); F. E. Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), I, 24, lines 27—30. In the West, from approximately this period, we have the interesting comments on Hosanna in St. Jerome's *Epistola XX ad Damasum* (J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina,* 22, 375—379) and St. Augustine's *In Ioannis Evangelium Tractatus LI,* 2 (Migne, *PL,* 35, 1764).

[4] St. Caesarius of Arles (died 540), *Sermo LXXIII,* 3 (Migne, *PL,* 39, 2277).

[5] St. Isidore of Seville (560?—636), *De ecclesiasticis officiis,* I, xv, 2 (Migne, *PL,* 83, 753), refers to the singing of *Hosanna in excelsis* ("because when the Savior was born of the family of David, salvation came to the world *usque ad excelsa*") as an integral part of the Mass in Spain in his day; cf. Migne, *PL,* 72, 116. As given in C. E. Hammond, *Liturgies Eastern and Western* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1878), 324—325, the Roman, Ambrosian, and Mozarabic rites have it, as do also the Gregorian and Gelasian canons (ibid., 366—367). In the East, Brightman, I, 324, lines 1—3, gives it as part of the Byzantine Liturgy of the 9th century.

chalice. It is this awful moment that links together Advent and Holy Week, Maundy Thursday and the last Epiphany at the parousia. He for whom the world had waited during so many centuries of mysterious prophecy, when the time had fully come did appear as God's Emissary, God's *Apostolos* in the flesh, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive adoption as sons. The self-same Lord still comes in His church as she proclaims His Word and administers the sacraments that He has instituted. Some Eastern liturgies express this by rendering "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" with two verbs side by side: "Blessed is He who has come and who is coming."[6] And He who came and He who comes is identical with Him who will come again at the end of time to manifest the Kingdom that shall have no end.

Thus our Hosanna is at once an acclamation and an acknowledgment of our utter dependence, the pledge of our loyalty and the confession of our complete helplessness, the Spirit-directed response of faith and the affirmation of our total contingency. It is the symbol of that great mystery to which the Apology of the Augsburg Confession gives expression, when it tells us that the highest service of the New Testament and the chief worship of the Gospel — the very essence therefore of the Christian's λογικὴ λατρεία, of his intellectual service Godward — is paradoxically to wish to receive from God what He has promised, remission of sins, grace, and righteousness, and with them every other good and perfect gift that our heavenly Father has designed for us in Christ.[7]

There is another term in our worship that corresponds functionally to Hosanna — *Kyrie eleison.* It too is first and foremost an acclamation, a divine hurrah. The Biblical occurrences of the idea in the Septuagint and in the Gospels provided a sufficient basis for the church to take over into its worship the cry with which pagan congregations had hailed their gods in their temples and patriotic crowds had saluted the King-Emperor in the streets, *Kyrie eleison.* But where these had addressed it to fictitious deities and to very human and mortal monarchs, the church used the shout with a fullness of meaning it had never before possessed. The church addressed it to her Victor-King, God out of God and Light out of Light, the *Basileus* above every human king-emperor, the celestial *Kyrios* above every lord upon earth, the One in whom the whole created universe hangs together. The difference between *Kyrie eleison* and the Hosanna of the first Palm Sunday is simply that when He comes among us now, He comes with His victory no longer in prospect but behind Him. He has bowed His meek head to mortal pain, and He has already taken His power and reigns forever.

It is a pity that we have widely lost the sense of what ought to be a great act of faith. The *Kyrie eleison* of our rite is almost meaningless to our people when we sing it in Greek — except as they

[6] Brightman, I, 86 (Syrian Jacobite), 284 (Nestorian), and 436 (Armenian). J. M. Hanssens, *Institutiones liturgicae de ritibus orientalibus,* III (Rome, 1932), quoted in Josef Andreas Jungmann, *Missarum sollemnia: Eine genetische Erklärung der römischen Messe,* 2d ed. (Vienna: Verlag Herder, 1949), II, 167, n. 43, takes the "who is coming" as eschatological.

[7] Ap. IV 49, 154, 225, 310; XXIV 27.

recognize it as an indication that we stand in a worshiping succession that goes back to before the days when men worshiped God in English or even in Latin, to a time when the language of the universal church was the Greek of the gospels.

But the words are nearly as meaningless in English — possibly more so ultimately — since we have given the Kyrie a flavor that the original does not have by introducing an alien idea in rendering the words: "Lord, have mercy *upon us.*" We can understand why people have sometimes felt that the Kyrie belongs more logically to the Confession of Sins than to the subsequent Glory be to God on High!

We do well, therefore, to remember that the Kyrie corresponds to the ἐκτένεια of the Greek rite,[8] the zealous litany of intercession of the deacon and congregation that ultimately goes back a millennium and a half and that in a late and abbreviated form has been borrowed by the new rite of the *Service Book and Hymnal of the Lutheran Church in America* as an optional substitute for the *Kyrie* as we know it.[9] It is a prayer for all sorts and conditions of men, for the whole church, the clergy, the people and their rulers, the travelers and the sick, the benefactors of the church and the poor that need the church's benefactions, and for peace.

In the last decade of the fifth century a wise and pious Bishop of Rome, Saint Gelasius, devised, or at least may be presumed to have edited, a Kyrie intercession, the *Deprecatio Gelasii,* which enjoyed great popularity in the liturgy for at least a century, when it gradually began to be displaced by the less meaningful ninefold Kyrie that we ultimately inherited.[10] The following English adaptation of this ancient prayer[11] might well be used by us to voice our Hosanna, our acclamation in faith of the King of kings and Lord of lords, by whom and with whom and in

[8] Brightman, I, 362—363; cf. 380—382. Similar prayers occur in other Eastern liturgies; cf., for instance, Brightman, I, 4—5, 9—12, 23—24 ("Clementine" Liturgy); 34—40, 44 to 48 (Liturgy of St. James); 206—208 (Liturgy of the Abyssinian Jacobites); 263—266 (Nestorian Liturgy); 472—473 (Liturgy of Antioch); 497—498 (Presanctified Liturgy of St. James). — The occurrence of *Kyrie eleison* with an accusative object (for example, Ps. 40 [41]:5, 11; Is. 33:2 LXX; Matt. 20:30, 31; cf. Ps. 6:3; 9:14; 30[31]:10; 85[86]:3; 122 [123]:3 LXX; Matt. 15:22), that is, as a petition rather than as an acclamation, is paralleled in the liturgy in the *Gloria in excelsis* and the *Agnus Dei.*

[9] *Service Book and Hymnal of the Lutheran Church of America* (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publication House, c. 1958), p. 18.

[10] Another Western litany of similar type is that of the Ambrosian rite of Milan. This litany appears in two forms, one for the first, third, and fifth Sundays, the other for the second and fourth Sundays of the month. For an English translation, see E. G. Cuthbert F. Atchley, *The Ambrosian Liturgy* (London: Cope and Fenwick, 1909), 43—46.

[11] The original, entitled "The entreaty which Pope St. Gelasius ordered to be sung on behalf of the universal church," is in Migne, *PL,* 101, 560—561. The critical text in Bernard Capelle, "Le Kyrie de la messe et le Pape Gélase," in *Revue Bénédictine,* 46 (1934), 136—138, on which the present English adaptation is based, is reproduced in Jungmann, I, 417—418. This adaptation, by the author of this study, seeks to reproduce the intention of the original rather than the literal sense. If the entreaty is sung, the following pattern may be employed: Taking *g* as the reciting note, both the petition and the response may terminate *g-(e-)e* when the accent does not fall on the final syllable (as in "have mércy," "Holy Spírit," or *eléison*), or *g-e-f♯* when the last syllable is accented (as in "Let us all sáy" or "before Christ our Lórd"). In the case of the longer petitions the last syllables before the "we" clause may be sung *g-f♯-e-g(-g),* as in "established throughout all the eárth" or "diligently engage in spiritual lábors."

whom we ask for all things needful to us in this world and in the world to come:

Let us all say:

Hear, O Lord, and have mercy.

With faithful hearts we call upon the Father of the Only-Begotten and upon the Son of God the Unbegotten Father and upon God the Holy Spirit:

Kyrie eleison (or, *O Lord, have mercy*).

For the holy church of the living God, established throughout all the earth, we entreat the riches of God's goodness:

Kyrie eleison.

For the holy servants of the Most High God, for all who minister about His sacred altar, and for all nations that worship the true God, we bring our supplications before Christ, our Lord:

Kyrie eleison.

For all who rightly handle the Word of truth, we particularly beseech the diverse wisdom of the Word of God:

Kyrie eleison.

For those who discipline themselves in mind and body for the sake of the kingdom of heaven and diligently engage in spiritual labors, we beseech the Giver of all spiritual gifts:

Kyrie eleison.

For the President of the United States of America and for all who are in authority over us, that they may love righteousness and seek after equity, and for all our defenders by land and sea and in the air,[12] we beseech the power of the Lord:

Kyrie eleison.

For pleasant sunshine and timely rainfall, for gentle winds, and for the regular course of season upon season, we entreat the Lord, the Ruler of the world:

Kyrie eleison.

For those who are learning to know the Christian name for the first time and in whom the desire for heavenly grace has already been kindled, we beseech the mercy of Almighty God:

Kyrie eleison.

For those whom the frailty of human weakness, the enmity of spiritual evil, or the manifold errors of this present world have ensnared, we implore the mercy of our Redeemer:

Kyrie eleison.

For those whom the necessity of travel exposes to danger or whom the oppression of an unjust government or an enemy power vexes with a heavy burden, we bring our supplications before the Lord, our Savior:

Kyrie eleison.

For God's ancient people Israel, for those who are deceived by the corruptions of heresy,[13] and for those who are deluged by pagan superstition, we entreat the Lord of truth:

Kyrie eleison.

For those who engage in works of pious devotion and for those who in brotherly love supply the necessities of them that labor, we entreat the mercy of the Lord:

Kyrie eleison.

For all who enter the precincts of this holy house of the Lord and come together with faithful hearts and humble devotion, we entreat the Lord of glory:

Kyrie eleison.

---

[12] The original reads: "For God-fearing princes and all their armies, who love justice and right judgment" *(Pro religiosis principibus omnique militia eorum, qui iustitiam et rectum iudicium diligunt).*

[13] The original reads: *Pro iudaica falsitate . . . aut haeretica pravitate deceptis.*

For ourselves, that we may be made pure in soul and body and have the forgiveness of all our sins, we bring our supplications before the Lord of all mercy:

Kyrie eleison.[14]

A body in which vice has been put to death and a soul which lives by faith:

Grant, O Lord, grant.

Chaste fear and true charity:

Grant, O Lord, grant.

A life lived in Thy grace and a departure in Thy favor:

Grant, O Lord, grant.

An angel of peace and the rest that remains for the saints:

Grant, O Lord, grant.

Ourselves and all that is ours, the origin and increase of which is from the Lord, which we have received at His hands, and which we keep under His watchful protection, we commend to His mercy and to the disposition of His providence:

O Lord, have mercy.[15]

ALLELUIA

It happened during the second quarter of the fifth century. St. Germanus of Auxerre and St. Lupus of Troyes were in Britain, charged with the task of eradicating the Pelagian heresy in the homeland of its architect. The pagan Picts and Saxons chose this occasion to make war upon the partly Christianized Britons, who put an army of their own — accompanied by the visiting prelates — into the field. At this point we let Constantius of Lyons, the official biographer of St. Germanus, tell the story. "It was the season of Lent, and the presence of the bishops made the sacred days still more sacred, so much so that the soldiers who received instruction in daily sermons flew eagerly to the waters of salvation. Meanwhile the enemy had learned of the practices and appearance of the camp. They promised themselves an easy victory over practically disarmed troops. But their approach was discovered by the scouts, and when the Easter solemnities had been celebrated, the army — the greater part of it fresh from the font — began to take up their weapons and prepare for battle, and Germanus announced that he would be their general. In the direction from which the enemy was expected he saw a valley enclosed by steep mountains. Here he stationed a new kind of army. As the savage host of the enemy came close, Germanus rapidly circulated an order that all should repeat in unison the call he would give as a battle cry. Then, while the enemy were still secure in the belief that their approach was unexpected, the bishops three times chanted the Alleluia. All as one man repeated it, and the shout they raised rang through the air and was repeated many times in the confined space between the mountains. The enemy were

[14] Here the Latin adds: "For the repose of the souls of the faithful, especially of the holy priests of the Lord who have governed this Catholic church, we entreat the Lord of spirits and the Judge of all flesh *(Pro refrigerio fidelium animarum, praecipue sanctorum Domini sacerdotum, qui huic ecclesiae praefuerunt catholicae, Dominum spirituum et universae carnis iudicem deprecamur): Kyrie eleison.*"

[15] The final response of the original is in Latin: *Domine miserere.*

panic stricken. They fled away in every direction, throwing away their weapons and thankful if they could save at least their skins. The bishops" — thus Constantius concludes his account of what later generations have come to call the Alleluia Victory — "were elated at the rout of the enemy without bloodshed and a victory gained by faith and not by force." [16]

It was not only as a battle cry that the early church took upon its lips the word *Alleluia.* Sidonius Apollinaris, a contemporary of Constantius, tells us that Christian coxswains and sailors used Alleluia as the *celeusma,* the call that gave the rhythm to the oarsmen on the galleys,[17] and in St. Jerome's Palestine the Christian farmers reportedly chanted it as they guided their plows.[18] But it was chiefly in worship that the church took it over from the synagog as the congregational response *par excellence.*[19]

Alleluia, we remind ourselves, appears more often in the Sacred Scriptures than our English versions indicate. This is true particularly of the Old Testament. In the last two books of the Psalter Alleluia occurs at the beginning of 11 psalms (106, 111—113, 115—117, 135, 146—150) and at the end of 13 (104—106, 113, 115—117, 135, 146—150) as an additional exhortation to sing praises to Israel's God, but it is always translated "Praise ye the Lord" in our English Bibles.

These psalms, we remember, were part of the morning synagog service, and in some parts of the early Christian church they were recited daily. Some of them were part of the Hallel, Ps. 113-118, the psalmody that was sung in Jewish family circles on the Passover and on the other great feasts; this is very probably the "hymn" that the Gospel reports our Lord and His disciples as having sung after the first Holy Communion (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26). The large scale adoption of Alleluia by the church is thus a deliberate borrowing of the very vowels and consonants that our Lord's mouth had pronounced, and our retention of the ancient cry is, in the words of Caspar Calvör, the great Lutheran liturgiologist of 250 years ago, "an attestation of our respect for our mother the church, from whom we have our origin, and of our connection with her, as well as of the venerable gray hairs of our liturgy." [20]

Yet, we must probably all confess, our Alleluias are frequently anything but spontaneous. Indeed, we are often likely to be quite deaf to the message of Alleluia and to repeat the word only because the text of the hymn or the letter of the rubrics recommends or requires it. This state of affairs is really a pity, because Alleluia

---

[16] Condensed from Constantius of Lyons, "The Life of St. Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre," chs. xvii—xviii, in F. R. Hoare, ed. *The Western Fathers* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954), pp. 300—301.

[17] Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistolae,* Book II, Epistle 10 to Hesperius, in J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina,* 58, 488.

[18] *Epistola Paulae et Eustochii 46(17) ad Marcellam,* in Migne, *PL,* 22, 491.

[19] For the use of Alleluia in the liturgy of the church see Jungmann, I, 519—545, and Fernand Cabrol, "Alleluia (acclamation liturgique)," in Cabrol and Henri Leclercq, eds. *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie,* I (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1924), 1229—46.

[20] Caspar Calvör, *Rituale ecclesiasticum* (Jena: Johannes Christoph König, 1705), II, 581 (speaking of the Alleluia, Amen, and Hosanna from the Hebrew, the *Kyrie* from the Greek, the *Gloria,* Creed, prefaces, antiphons, hymns, and figural chant from the Latin): "Testamur iis venerationem matris Ecclesiae ex qua processimus Conjunctionemque cum ea, ut et Liturgiae nostrae venerandam canitiem."

has a great deal to say to us, by its very form as well as by its use in Sacred Writ.

It takes only the barest knowledge of Hebrew to identify the verb in הַלְלוּ־יָהּ as a *piel* imperative in the second person plural. It is the second person *plural* that is of primary importance here. Most of the psalms in which Alleluia occurs are couched in a properly objective plural number — we and you — throughout. But even those psalms that have verses with a subjective first person singular "I" in them (Ps. 116, for instance) retain the plural הַלְלוּ־יָהּ. Thus Alleluia is a reminder that worship can never be exclusively a matter of man in his loneliness reconciled to God in His holiness and praising his Maker and Redeemer in the individualistic solitude of a hermit. While corporate worship always demands and inescapably implies as the essence of worship the interior individual response of faith in God's promise, it demands no less that like-minded people join one another and encourage one another and build up one another in the common praise of God, who has redeemed them to be part of His family and who continues to save them in His family.

Part of the manifestation of God's saving mercy in the Alleluia psalms is that He gathers the outcasts of Israel (Ps. 147:2), that He gives the barren woman a house, making her the joyful mother of children (Ps. 113:9), and that He saves from among the nations a people to give thanks to His holy name and to glory in His praise (Ps. 106:47). It is precisely one of the Alleluia psalms that begins: "Alleluia! I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation." (Ps. 111:1)

Again, Alleluia, as the sacred writers use it, appeals for faith in God's faithfulness, faith in the promises that He makes to us and in His power to keep His promises, even when faith is challenged by apparently overwhelming, persuasive, and irrefutable ocular evidence to the contrary. It is instructive to read through the 15 psalms that have Alleluia as a prefix or as a signature and to consider their praise of the manifold works of the Lord in His created universe (in Ps. 104, for example), of the unfailing mercies of the Deliverer of His people (as in Ps. 105), and of the holiness and abhorrence of sin that kindles His anger against apostate Israel, coupled with the responsive kindness with which He regards their distress when He hears their penitent cry, so that He remembers for their sake His covenant and relents according to His steadfast love (Ps. 106:40-46). These psalms laud the faithfulness and justice of the works of His hands and the trustworthiness of His precepts (Ps. 11:7). They hymn the confidence of the righteous person, who is not afraid of any evil tidings, whose heart is firm, trusting in the Lord (Ps. 112:7). They proclaim God's expressed determination to vindicate His people and to have compassion on His servants (Ps. 135:14). In the midst of the conflict they call for the simultaneous presence of the high praises of God in His people's throats and of two-edged swords in their hands. (Ps. 149:6)

This Old Testament complex of motives is concentrated and focused in the single chapter of the Revelation of Saint John in which, within the compass of half a dozen verses (19:1-6), all four New Testament occurrences of Alleluia are found. Here, with what seems to be almost

gleeful vindictiveness, the denizens of high heaven exultantly celebrate the collapse of Babylon.

But — and this is where faith comes in — at the moment in history in which the Seer saw the heavenly vision, Babylon had *not* fallen. On the contrary, she still stood as the blatant and utterly self-confident symbol of a world and a culture in which political and economic power were totally allied and perfectly organized, in contempt of every moral and ethical principle, to defy God and to destroy His holy community. She was Babylon the Great! All nations had drunk of the wine of her impure passion. The kings of the earth had committed fornication with her. The merchants of the world had grown rich with the wealth of her wantonness. The bare catalog of the cargoes of this commerce in ch. 18 evokes even in the English translation a picture of limitless luxury: "Gold, silver, jewels and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet, scented wood, articles of ivory and costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, cinnamon, spices, incense, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls." (Vv. 11-13)

Her victory and that of her demonic associates appeared to be complete. It seemed that she had spilled the blood of prophets and saints and of all whom she had slain upon the earth with total and utter impunity. But in that very instant God was preparing to avenge His own and to destroy Babylon's wealth in a holocaust the smoke of which the Seer proleptically beholds ascending for ever and ever. Still, in the world outside the mystic circle of his vision the triumph of God and the destruction of His foes was in that moment something that only *faith* could see.

Alleluia, however, is an invitation to precisely that kind of indomitable faith which endures as seeing Him that is invisible. It is a faith that starts out from the great deed of God for us in Christ Jesus, our Lord, as it is mediated to us through His Word and His sacraments in His church. It is faith in Christ's incarnation for us men and for our salvation; faith in His Passion and crucifixion for us under Pontius Pilate; faith in His sacrificial death upon the altar of the cross, where He Himself the Holy Victim and He Himself the blameless Priest offered Himself through the eternal Spirit without blemish in a single offering for all time to secure an eternal redemption for us. It is faith in His rising to life again to restore to us everlasting life. It is a faith that doubts neither the promise of the final destruction of the works of the devil for which our Lord came into the world nor the power that can accomplish it. It is therefore a faith which can mingle with its very tears the exhortation with which the 106th Psalm begins: "Alleluia! Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever."

Thus Alleluia is a password for dark days no less than for bright ones. Whether our concerns are for ourselves or our loved ones in peril or pain, or whether they are for the church in her ceaseless conflicts, Alleluia is the right word.

And Alleluia will also be the right word for every tomorrow, no matter what any tomorrow brings. For in the very moment that the cause of the church seemed to be most competely lost, the Theologian reminds us, the mighty angel was poising

his millstone over the sea, and the voices of heaven's huge and holy hosts were beginning to fill the empyrean with the lay that is like the sound of many waters and like the sound of many thunderpeals: "Alleluia! For the Lord, our God, the Almighty, reigns."

The marriage of the Lamb with His bride the church *will* take place. And then it will be made manifest that His bride, during and in spite of all the alarums and excursions, has been making herself ready. In the very midst of the universal moral collapse, it will still have been granted to her (and therefore to us) to be clothed — and we may well note the implications of God's purposeful activity in the passive verbs "it was granted her" and "to be clothed" — with fine linen bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

"Alleluia enim" — Blessed Martin Luther wrote in his *Form of the Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg* (1523) on behalf of a year-round historical, commemorative use of Alleluia in the church's liturgy — "vox perpetua est esclesiae, sicut perpetua est memoria passionis et victoriae eius (Alleluia is the church's constant word because she constantly remembers Christ's suffering and victory." [21] Two hundred and fifty years before the Reformation William Durand the Elder had illuminated another aspect of Alleluia, its eschatological implication, when he declared that our repetition of Alleluia "points toward the unspeakable praising and rejoicing of our real Fatherland." [22]

With Luther we do well to look back constantly to Golgotha and Easter with Alleluia on our lips, and with Durand we do well to point forward constantly to the coming Fatherland with Alleluia in our hearts.

Praise the Lord! Alleluia!

AMEN

We can well remind ourselves at the very outset that *Amen* is a sober commitment and not the expression of a pious wish. Amen speaks in the confident indicative mode of faith, not in the yearning optative mode of desire. In its primary thrust, Amen is not too well translated by the Septuagint's γένοιτο, "may it happen." Aquila's πεπιστομένως,[23] "certainly," renders it better. So does the third gospel when it reproduces the ἀμήν that we find in parallel passages of the other synoptists with ναί, "yes," [24] or ἀληθῶς, "truly." [25] So, for that matter does Blessed Martin Luther when in the Small Catechism he explains that "Amen" means that "I should be certain that these petitions please our Father in heaven and that He hears them, since He Himself has commanded us to

---

21 W. A. 12, 210, 11—12.

22 William (Guilhelmus) [Durand(us)], *Rationale divinorum officiorum* (Strasbourg: [Georg Husner] 1488), IV, 1, 20 (folio ixiii *recto*): IV, xx, 7, quoted in Jungmann, I, 530, n. 59: "Per hoc vero quod alleluia cum neuma repetitur, laus et gaudlum ineffabile patrie significatur."

23 Heinrich Schlier, art. ἀμήν, in Gerhard Kittel, ed. *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1933), I, 340, 15—17. The difference between the Septuagint's and Aquila's rendering is noted already by St. Jerome, *Commentarii in Epistolam ad Galatas*, I, 1 (Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, 26, 341).

24 St. Luke 11:51 (Matt. 23:36).

25 Luke 9:27 (Mark 9:1); 12:44 (Matt. 24:47); 21:3 (Mark 12:43). Cp. ἐπ' ἀληθείας, 4:25, with ἀμήν in v. 24.

pray in this way and has promised that He will hear us. Amen, Amen. That means: Yes, yes, it shall happen that way."[26]

We need to remind ourselves further that Amen is not first and foremost something that *we* append to *our* prayer to give it additional validity, but that it is primarily an identification of my will with the expressed will of Somebody else.

In the usage of Israel of old, if I am present when someone else is placed under an oath and I say Amen along with him, I bind myself to carry out his obligation under the pains and penalties of perjury if I fail to do so. If someone else pronounces a curse, and I say Amen to the curse, it becomes, for better or worse, my anathema. If someone else has pronounced a blessing, and I say Amen to it, those two syllables make it my blessing down to the last detail. When another person announces a plan and I say Amen to it, I am committing myself to unqualified support of its execution as if it were my own plan.[27]

Thus when David calls the priest Zadok and the prophet Nathan and the general Benaiah and orders the anointing and enthronement of Solomon as his successor and Benaiah says Amen, we presently find Benaiah on his way to cause Solomon to ride the royal beast as a symbol of his succession. (1 Kings 1:32-38)

When Nehemiah commands the Israelite nobility and officialdom under oath to cancel their usurious contracts and symbolically shakes out his lap and says, "So may God shake out every man from his house and his labor who does not perform this promise," the assembly of the people before whom he accused the offenders lends the weight of their influence to this action by saying Amen and praising the Lord. (Neh. 5:7-13)

When under the Mosaic Law a woman charged with infidelity by a jealous husband is put to the ordeal of the waters of bitterness, she is required to make the priest's conditional curse upon her, if she is guilty of the charge, her own self-malediction through saying Amen, Amen. (Num. 5:18-22)

In Deut. 27 a great deal of the impact of the 12 solemn curses that the Levites are to pronounce after Israel has crossed the Jordan into the Land of Promise lies in the litany-like rubric after each that directs, "And all the people shall say Amen." (Vv. 15-26)

Again, when Ezra on his temporary wooden pulpit in the square before Jerusalem's Water Gate opens the book of the Law of Moses and blesses the Lord, the great God, the audience makes his grateful benediction their own by crying Amen, Amen, as they lift up their hands and bow their heads and worship the Lord with their faces to the ground. (Neh. 8:5-6)

In the same way the Amens at the end of each of the first four books of the Psalms are the worshipers' assent to the prayers and the praises, the petitions and the thanksgivings, the blessings and the curses, contained in them. (Ps. 41:13; 72:19; 89:52; 106:48)

This continues to be the force of Amen in the worship of the synagog. Ultimately it was expected of every pious Jew that, whenever he heard anyone else praise God or pray to Him even outside a service, he would reverently make the prayer or praise

---

[26] SC, "Our Father," 21. Cp. LC, "Our Father," 119—121.

[27] Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 2d ed., (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1956), I, 242.

his own with his Amen. "Amen is confirmation," various rabbis of the Amoraean period are quoted as saying. "Amen is an oath, Amen is acceptance." [28]

This was the attitude that primitive Christianity took with it out of the synagog. For this reason, when St. Paul discusses ecstatic speaking in tongues in 1 Cor. 14, he can say: "If you bless God in the spirit but not with the mind, that is, in ecstasy and in speech which the congregation does not understand, how can anyone who is in the situation of one not so endowed say the Amen to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified." (Vv. 16-17)

For the same reason the early Christian community took over the Amen with great enthusiasm, so much so that the Jewish community began to regard the too profuse use of Amen — after every prayer — as a heretical, Christian practice.[29]

Amen from the very earliest times was the response by which the congregation made the Eucharistic prayer of the celebrant its own. In giving us our earliest detailed descriptions of a postapostolic Eucharist, in the second century, St. Justin the Martyr, himself a layman, twice makes a considerable point of the fact that the layfolk thus associate themselves with the action of the celebrant.[30]

Two centuries later, in his *Commentaries on Galatians,* St. Jerome describes the fervent Amen of a large congregation as resounding exactly like thunder out of heaven.[31]

Similar importance was attached to the confirmatory Amen with which the communicant responded to the formulas of distribution, "The body of Christ," and "The blood of Christ." [32]

The apocryphal Acts of Philip, roughly contemporary with St. Jerome, in at least one recension cast an interesting sidelight on the significance of the Amen in the primitive church when they stress that the Amen is the peculiar privilege of the baptized members of the people of God and that this evidence of the congregation's exercise of its corporate priesthood is necessary to perfect the offering.[33] In passing

---

[28] Georg Rietschel, *Lehrbuch der Liturgik,* 2d ed. by Paul Graff (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1951), I, 216, n. 16.

[29] John S. Clemens, "Amen," in James Hastings, ed. *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921), I, 51.

[30] St. Justin the Martyr, *The First Apology,* 65.67 (Migne, *Patrologia Graeca,* 6, 428—429). Cp. the Amens and other ejaculations ("We believe that this is true," "We believe and confess," etc.) which the liturgy of the Abyssinian Jacobites directs the people to intercalate in the celebrant's repetition of the words of institution and the subsequent invocation (Brightman, I, 232—233).

[31] St. Jerome, *Commentarii in Epistolam ad Galatas,* II, *prooemium* (Migne, *PL,* 26, 381): "ad similitudinem coelestis tonitrui *Amen* reboat."

[32] For example, St. Hippolytus of Rome, *Traditio apostolica,* in Joachim Beckmann, *Quellen zur Geschichte des christlichen Gottesdienstes* (Gütersloh: Carl Bertelsmann, 1956), 8; *The Apostolic Constitutions,* VIII, 13 (Migne, *PG,* 1, 1110); Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History,* VI, 43 (Migne, *PG,* 20, 628); Pseudo-St. Ambrose, *De sacramentis,* IV, v, 25 (Migne, *PL,* 16, 463—464); St. Augustine, *Sermo CCLXXII* (Migne, *PL,* 38, 1247); Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures,* XXIII (*Mystagogic Catecheses,* V), 21 (Migne, *PG,* 33, 1125); the Syrian Jacobite and Abyssinian Jacobite liturgies, in Brightman, I, 104, 241.

[33] Acts of St. Philip, 143(37): ἀναπέμψατε εἰς ὕψος τὸ ἀμήν, ἵνα γένηται τελεία προσφορά. 147(41): ἐνετείλατο δὲ ὁ Βαρθολομαῖος . . . βαπτίζειν τοὺς πιστεύοντας εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, καὶ ἵνα λέγωσιν ἀμήν. (Richard

we can note that even in the darkest days of liturgical degeneration, toward the end of the Middle Ages, Radulph de Rivo, who died in 1403, requires all those present at a celebration of the Holy Eucharist to answer with Amen as a token of their confirmation of what is being done.[34]

Yet the Amen of the Christian community is ultimately profounder and richer than the Amen of God's ancient people under the Law. The newness of the New Testament has played a role here too. For with Our Lord there came a new use of Amen. Close to 100 times in the New Testament the Christ, who forbade needless swearing and who as God had no one by whom He could swear, prefaces a pronouncement with Amen to give it all the force and assurance that a formal invocation of God as Witness might have imparted. The King James Version translates it "Verily, verily." The Revised Standard Version renders it "Truly, truly." *The New English Bible* reproduces the phrase in a variety of ways. But they conceal from the reader the Amen that the Greek contains and the Latin Vulgate preserved. The synoptists invariably have a single Amen, the Fourth Gospel, even where it parallels the synoptics, as regularly has two. We need not agree on the reason for this variation. Blessed John Bengel, the Lutheran abbot of Alpirsbach, suggests that the Fourth Gospel wants to stress that Christ speaks for His Father as well as for Himself, or that His word is true with reference to both the speaker and to the believers.[35] We may find it simpler to believe that St. John is doubling the particle for the sake of emphasis.[36] The important thing is that it is Christ who is speaking and that He is God's Amen to the world.

Is. 65:16, if we follow the Masoretic vocalization, describes the Lord as the God of the Amen. Before man can answer, God must speak His Amen, His "verily," His "truly."

God spoke His Amen in His revelation of Himself as "I am who I am" (Ex. 3:13). This was not, as the medieval philosophers thought, a metaphysical statement about the divine Essence, but an affirmation of God's sovereignty, a declaration that He reserved His purposes to Himself, past the power of any rebellious creature, whether the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places or the rebellious sons of disobedient Adam upon earth, to alter or divert. These purposes of God find expression in such modifiers as "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands and forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin," as well as in the expression of His determination by no means to clear the guilty in their impenitence. (Ex. 34:6-7)

Adalbert Lipsius and Maximilian Bonnet, *Acta Apostolorum apocrypha,* 2d ed. [Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1959], II/2, 84, lines 6—7; 89, lines 3—5)

[34] Radulph de Rivo, *De canonum observatione propria,* 23, in Kunibert Mohlberg, *Radulph de Rivo, der letzte Vertreter der altrömischen Liturgie,* II (Münster, 1911 to 1915), 139, quoted by Jungmann, I, 299, n. 24. Radulph reiterates the 11th-century *Micrologus* of Bernold von Schaffhausen (?), ii, 7 (Migne, *PL,* 151, 981): "Omnes autem astantes iuxta antiquam sanctorum patrum traditionem in signum confirmationis Amen subiungere debent, ut communem orationem, quam sacerdos pro omnibus Domino libavit, confirment."

[35] John Albert Bengel, *Gnomon Novi Testamenti, ad* St. John 1:52, 3d ed. (Tübingen: Johannes Henricus Philippus Schrammius, 1773), p. 381.

[36] See Ludwig Radermacher, *Neutestamentliche Grammatik,* 2d ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1925), p. 68, n. 1.

God spoke His Amen in His mighty acts in history, and He spoke it in the interpretation of those acts in the proclamation to which He called the prophets. But most of all He spoke His Amen in Our Lord Jesus Christ, who in the Apocalyptic message to the church in Laodicaea called Himself the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Principle of God's creation (Rev. 3:14). In Him both the wrath and the mercy of God find their fullest account. Because it pleased the Lord to bruise His Son and His Servant for human kind, because God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, because God laid on Him the iniquity of us all, sin can never appear as anything but frighteningly serious to us, and the curse on sin that wreaked itself on Christ calls for our concurring Amen. And because God in Christ was reconciling our whole world to Himself, not counting our trespasses against us because our Lord became obedient to death for us, even death on a cross, and because God has highly exalted Him and given Christ a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, the fact of our redemption cannot be gainsaid even by our disbelief. The very voice of the Gospel commands and empowers our confirmatory Amen to the sentence of His gracious forgiveness.

Amen is linked for us in two directions.

By etymology it is linked to faith. Amen is from the same root that in the *hiph'il* means "to believe in, to trust in," in almost 50 passages of the Old Testament. In the noun אֱמוּנָה, thought of as a "consistent, loyal, unalterable, and uncompromising tenacity in holding to God and to His promises in His Word," the root provides St. Paul with decisive Old Testament documentation for the doctrine of forgiveness through faith. (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17)

In the other direction the New Testament links Amen to the truth of God. Not only does Christ explain His self-designation Amen with the apposition, "the faithful and true Witness" (Rev. 3:14), but St. Paul appeals to the same identification of Amen with "Truth" when in a luminous passage in 2 Cor. 1 he pleads: "As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been yes and no. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we preached among you, was not yes and no; but in Him it is always yes. For all the promises of God find their yes in Him. That is why we utter the Amen through Him to the glory of God." (Vv. 18-20)

In his first vision of the vast white host of the redeemed, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands, St. John the Theologian heard them cry out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!" And at that, he tells us, all the angels in high heaven stood around the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen." (Rev. 7:9-12)

Ultimately it is that same cry, "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!" to which God summons us in faith to say our Amen.

St. Louis, Mo.