

Volume 56: Numbers 2-3

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The Chorale: Transcending Time and Culture

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The chorale is not the inheritance of the Lutheran church alone. It has become so inextricably interwoven within the hymnody of other confessions throughout the world that it is now a common heritage. In many of these other confessions, however, the people within the congregations who sing these chorales do not always think of them as "chorales." They embrace them as the hymns they know and love, the hymns with which they have grown up, the hymns that continue to inspire and challenge them.¹

One notable example comes to mind, "Now Thank We All Our God." This "German Te Deum," as it has been called, has become the classic hymn of thanksgiving that transcends all national, linguistic, and denominational boundaries. For example, it had become so familiar in English that no one in Britain in 1944 questioned the protocol of celebrating victory over Hitler's Germany by singing this *German* hymn. It had been sung for so long in English and had entered into the common memory so deeply that it was regarded as a well-loved "English" hymn. Its origins were forgotten as the sturdy text with its equally substantial melody, beloved by many generations of singers, expressed all that needed to be said, in gratitude and in faith, at that moment in time. Similarly, if one examines the contents of the substantial new hymnals that have been appearing in the United States—such as the *Episcopal Hymnal 1982* (1985), *The United Methodist Hymnal* (1989), *The Presbyterian Hymnal* (1990), and even recent Roman Catholic hymnals such as *Worship III* (1985)—one will see that these self-consciously English-language hymnals make substantial use of the Lutheran chorale and often do so in, what is for them, new and exciting ways.

We need to stop and think about the significance of this use. How has this situation come about? How is it that the chorale has crossed all these confessional, linguistic, cultural, and geographic barriers? It has happened not through any program of propaganda and promotion on the part of Lutherans. There has not been any kind of "Chorale Growth Movement" to have these hymns accepted and sung throughout contemporary Christendom. It is not that Lutherans have imposed the chorale on the worshipping Christians

in other confessions. It is rather that those Christians have chosen—and continue to choose—to sing the chorale within their different confessions and traditions. Lutherans have not consciously exported the chorale. The truth is that other confessions have voluntarily and enthusiastically imported it. This fact alone has important implications and ramifications.

I. Defining the Chorale

A. *Contemporary Concepts*

Before we proceed we need to ask a basic question: What is the chorale? The most common definition of "chorale" is this: "the German Protestant congregational hymn," with emphasis on "German" and "Protestant." In other words, in many people's thinking the chorale is not so much too "Waspish" (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant) as too "Gaspish" (German, Aryan-Saxon, Protestant) for the multi-cultural situation of the United States of America in these latter days of the twentieth century. Furthermore, the term "chorale" also carries with it the connotation of being antique (and therefore out-of-date) and ponderous (and therefore musically out-of-touch with the spirit of the age).

B. *Historical Considerations*

Temporarily deferring a direct discussion of the multi-cultural issue, a discussion of the second charge may well begin with a historical example of such criticism. That the German chorale was somewhat outdated and dull was the argument of the English music historian Charles Burney in his account of a visit which he made to Germany in the latter part of the eighteenth century. In mid-October of 1772, after spending a remarkable day in Hamburg with Johann Sebastian Bach's son, Karl Philipp Emanuel, Burney set out to return to England. On his journey across North Germany he made a short stop in Bremen. He reports his visit thus:

In my way from Hamburg to Amsterdam, I stopt only a few hours in this city, as it contained no musical incitements sufficiently powerful to encourage a longer residence. However, I visited the *Domkirche* or cathedral, belonging to

the Lutherans, where I found the congregation singing a dismal melody, without the organ. When this was ended, the organist gave out a hymn tune, in the true dragging style of Sternhold and Hopkins. The instrument is large, and has a noble and well-tuned chorus, but the playing was more old-fashioned, I believe, than anything that could have been heard in our country towns, during the last century. The interludes between the lines of the hymn were always the same . . . After hearing this tune, and these interludes, repeated ten or twelve times, I went to see the town and, returning to the cathedral, two hours after, I still found the people singing all in unison, and as loud as they could, the same tune, to the same accompaniment. I went to the post-office, to make dispositions for my departure; and, rather from curiosity than the love of such music, I returned once more to this church, and, to my great astonishment, still found them, vocally and organically performing the same ditty, the duration of which seems to have exceeded that of a Scots Hymn in the time of Charles I.²

Burney could hardly believe his ears—that these North German, hymn-singing Lutherans could be worse than Scottish psalm-singing Presbyterians at the high-point of British Puritanism; it hardly seemed possible. But Burney was not so much an objective historian as a musician-observer who could not help expressing himself in a highly opinionated manner. A significant term in Burney's account is "old-fashioned," because it betrays his specific agenda with regard to congregational music. He, like others in the Rationalist age of the latter part of the eighteenth century, believed that hymn tunes in the acceptable style of the day should not simply augment these chorales and hymn-tunes of the past, but totally eclipse and replace them. In other words, only contemporary music was legitimate in the worship of the church. For a time this view of Burney and others (it was a view that was equally as alive in Germany as in England) succeeded. But it is ironic to note that today very little of the hymnody of this period survives in modern hymnals. For instance, none of the original tunes composed by Charles Burney are sung any more—although an adaptation by Burney of a fourteenth-century tune can be found in the current

Episcopal *Hymnal*—whereas the tunes of the type which Burney criticized in Bremen, suitably restored to more original forms, continue to be included in hymnals and are persistently sung by contemporary congregations of a wide confessional spectrum.

This persistence is due in large measure to the proper noun that is frequently prefixed to the term "chorale," namely, "Bach." For many, the Bach-chorale epitomizes the whole German Lutheran chorale tradition. To speak correctly, one must qualify this idea considerably; the Bach-chorale epitomizes only the German Lutheran chorale of the eighteenth century, since the chorale in general embraces within itself various traditions and a long period of development. Nevertheless, Bach's harmonizations of the traditional chorale melodies, in their later isometric forms, were basic to the restoration of the chorale tradition that took place in the second half of the nineteenth century. Felix Mendelssohn and others now rediscovered the music of Bach, especially the cantatas, oratorios, and passions which made significant use of the old chorales. Little by little the remaining years of the nineteenth century saw these works of Bach published and performed, and composers like Mendelssohn emulated Bach's use of the chorale in their own compositions. Simultaneously, other musicians were digging into the pre-Bach and post-Luther period and began to discover that the familiar isometric melodies had much more interesting rhythmic forms in their original states, so much so that by the middle of the nineteenth century congregations in Germany had begun to sing these energetic chorale melodies as sixteenth-century people had sung them. A reform movement had begun, and congregational singing in Germany was revitalized. The movement spread across the Atlantic, brought by the immigrants from Saxony and elsewhere, a good many of whom became the founders of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. The vitality of the worship of the Missouri Synod was in no small measure due to the fact that C. F. W. Walther promoted the original rhythmic forms of chorale melodies, rather than the later and weaker isometric forms, for use with the official German hymnal of the new synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, founded in Chicago in 1847. The hymnal of the new church appeared in the same year that the synod was founded: *Kirchengesangbuch für Evangelisch-*

Lutherische Gemeinden (St. Louis, 1847). The hymnal itself did not include the melodies, but appropriate chorale melodies were listed according to their associated first-lines. The collections of chorale melodies, in their original rhythmic forms, edited by Friedrich Layritz and published in Erlangen, Germany, were promoted in *Der Lutheraner* in the early 1850s. Eventually, in 1857, the Lutherischer Concordia-Verlag in St. Louis published a selection of melodies from Layritz's German collections under the title *233 Melodien deutscher Kirchengesänge nach Dr. Friedrich Layritz*, thus reinforcing the use of the original rhythmic forms of chorale melodies. Thus, among Lutheran congregations across North America in the mid-nineteenth century, "chorale" meant different things to different synods. To Lutherans of the Missouri Synod "chorale" meant the original rhythmic versions; to other German-speaking Lutherans "chorale" was understood to refer to the later isometric forms; and to Nordic congregations the term implied something else again.

C. Specific Characteristics

The historical data, then, clearly show that the definition of the chorale as "the German Protestant congregational hymn" is too simple and that an adequate definition must also deal with function and form, history and content. The following, therefore, is herewith proposed as a working definition of the term "chorale": a congregational song that originated in Germany but subsequently expanded into a variety of forms and traditions, and is historically and contemporaneously confessional, catechetical, liturgical, multi-cultural, and musically diverse. The characteristics of the chorale enumerated in this definition will provide the outline for the remaining pages of this study.

II. Describing the Chorale

A. The Chorale Is Confessional

The chorale is confessional in two senses. Firstly, there is the way in which the Lutheran confessional documents refer to it. Secondly, there is the textual content of the individual chorales.

1. The Chorale in the Lutheran Confessions

In the process of writing and compiling the document that was eventually known as the Augsburg Confession, Philipp Melanchthon worked from a number of drafts which were subsequently revised and expanded. At the request of the Elector of Saxony, Wittenburg theologians took part in a consultation in Torgau in March of 1530 that produced a nine-point document concerning various matters in dispute at the time. Since the document did not deal with as many points as he desired, the Elector requested further elaboration. A revision of the Torgau Articles was undertaken by Melanchthon as early, probably, as the following month, April of 1530.³ Significantly, at this time Melanchthon added a new section headed "Of German Singing." After stating that the issue is to be related to what had been said earlier in the Torgau Articles concerning "indifferent ceremonies," Melanchthon continues:

Since now ceremonies ought to be of service for doctrine, some have adopted German singing, that by this practice men might learn something, as St. Paul also teaches, 1 Cor. 14, that in the Church nothing unintelligible should be spoken or sung. Yet no command to that effect is made [in our churches], and Latin also is always sung for the practice of the young.⁴

Although Melanchthon is here making a number of points, among them the use of the vernacular and the need to teach young people, his principal concern is that the chorale has a primary doctrinal, and therefore confessional, purpose.

In the final form of the *Confessio Augustana*, submitted on 25 June 1530, the chorale (although it is not so named) is given a substantial reference in Article XXIV, which deals with the mass. The Latin version has been translated as follows:

We are unjustly accused of having abolished the Mass. Without boasting, it is manifest that the Mass is observed among us with greater devotion and earnestness than among our opponents. Moreover, the people are instructed often and with great diligence regarding the holy sacrament . . . The people are also given instruction about other false

teachings concerning the sacrament. Meanwhile no conspicuous changes have been made in the public ceremonies of the Mass, except that in certain places German hymns are sung in addition to the Latin responses for the instruction and exercise of the people. After all, the chief purpose of all ceremonies is to teach the people what they need to know about Christ.⁵

The German version is a little different and speaks of the chorale in the vernacular with a reference to 1 Corinthians 14, following Melanchthon's revision of the Torgau Articles.

In addition, moreover, to this status in the Augustana, there are similar references to the chorale in the subsequent confessions of the Lutheran church (certainly in both of Luther's catechisms, the Apology, and the Formula of Concord). Within Lutheranism, therefore, the chorale cannot be dismissed as a musical-poetic aid to worship that is to be regarded simply as adiaphorous, as something which one can take or leave at will. The chorale, as congregational song, was a striking feature of the reformed mass of Wittenberg and elsewhere. Its primary importance is the doctrine that is embraced by its poetry and music, and doctrine cannot be regarded as adiaphorous.

The chorale as doctrine in music and poetry is the point that is made by the unnamed author—almost certainly C.F.W. Walther—in an article commending the new *Kirchengesangbuch für Evangelisch-Lutherische Gemeinden* (St. Louis, 1847). The article appeared in *Der Lutheraner* in June of 1847:⁶

In the selection of the adopted hymns the chief consideration was that they be pure in doctrine; that they have found almost general acceptance within the orthodox German Lutheran Church and have thus received the almost unanimous testimony that they had come forth from the true spirit [of Lutheranism]; that they express not so much the changing circumstances of individual persons but rather contain the language of the whole church, because the book is to be used primarily in public worship; and finally that they, though bearing the imprint of Christian simplicity, be not

merely rhymed prose, but the products of a truly Christian poetry.⁷

If therefore the chorale is doctrine, it must also be confessional *per se*.

2. *The Chorale as a Confession of Faith*

A chorale that immediately comes to mind as a confession of faith is Luther's credal hymn "Wir glauben all an einen Gott," with its strong statement of trinitarian belief. There are other chorales that are similarly direct confessions of faith. The framers of the Formula of Concord, however, had a much more comprehensive understanding of the confessional nature of the chorale. In Article 1 of the Solid Declaration (on original sin), there is a remarkable statement (paragraph 23) in connection with a particular chorale:

Likewise, we also reject and condemn those who teach that, though man's nature has been weakened and corrupted through the Fall, it has nevertheless not entirely lost all the goodness that belongs to spiritual and divine matters, or the situation is not the way the hymn which we sing in our churches describes it, "Through Adam's fall man's nature and being are wholly corrupted" ["Durch Adams Fall ist ganz verderbt menschlich Natur und Wesen"].⁸

The citation here is the opening couplet of the classic chorale on original sin by Lazarus Spengler of Nuremberg, probably written at the request of Luther sometime towards the end of 1523. It first appeared in print in Johann Walter's part-books, the so-called *Chorgesangbuch*, published in Wittenberg in 1524. Two generations or so later it was included here in the Formula of Concord as a classic statement and summary of biblical doctrine. That reference was made at this point to a chorale, and not a theological treatise, underscores the confessional status of the classic Lutheran chorale.

Some would want to restrict this understanding to the texts of the chorales and exclude therefrom the music. But chorales do not consist in texts alone. Certainly the textual content is primary, but the musical treatment of the text is also fundamental. The content of the text demands a tune that reinforces and intensifies its

meaning, rather than one that undermines and diminishes it. Speaking of the chorales of Bach in particular, Walter Buszin makes this general observation:

Those who undervalue the melodies of these hymns also underrate their text. If the melodies lack immediate appeal, it is better that one learn first to comprehend the more profound theological content of the text in order to appreciate their full value as hymns. We see here that a hymn text and its tune must match if they are to be successful. An inferior text will cause a good melody to decline while an inferior melody will quickly push a good text into the shade.⁹

The music and poetry of the chorale, through which the community of faith at worship proclaims the fundamental doctrines of the faith, are thus in themselves confessions of faith.

B. The Chorale Is Catechetical

Here the first requisite is a brief consideration of the term "catechetical," as opposed, for example, to "educational" or "evangelistic." The term "educational" is too broad a term to use here; the concern here is not with a comprehensive education but specifically with the teaching of the faith. Nor is the term "evangelistic" appropriate; most evangelistic hymnody is designed to evoke a response from the singing participants, whereas the classic Lutheran chorale is designed to expound the content of the Christian belief on which the response of faith must be based. Thus, "catechetical" is the more appropriate term. The chorale is catechetical in that it teaches the faith, while it must itself be taught in order to fulfill this function.

1. The Chorale Teaches the Faith

From the outset when Luther and his colleagues began writing chorales towards the end of 1523, they were regarded as the word of God in song. Sometime during the last months of 1523 Luther wrote letters to a number of his friends—presumably including Lazarus Spengler as noted above—encouraging them to write hymns or metrical versions of the psalms. In his letter to Georg Spalatin

Luther declared: "I intend to make vernacular psalms for the people, that is, spiritual songs so that the Word of God even by means of song may live among the people."¹⁰ The earliest Wittenberg chorales, written in 1523 and 1524, originally circulated as printed broadsides. In 1524 a Nuremberg printer brought out a small collection of eight of these hymns—four of them by Luther—under this title: *Etlich Christlich lider Lobgesang und Psalm dem rainen wort Gottes gemess auss der heyligen schrift . . .* ("Some Christian Hymns, Canticles, and Psalms, Made according to the Pure Word of God, from Holy Scripture" [Nuremberg, 1524]). The three hymns of Paul Speratus each had an extensive appendix in which the scriptural source of every line of every stanza was cited. These early Lutheran hymns were thus considered to be the word of God in song—in the form of songs that would teach the people as they sang.

Two years after the appearance of these early Wittenberg hymns, Luther linked the chorale with the need for a catechism. In the *Deutsche Messe* (Wittenberg, 1526) he introduced a significant development in the Lutheran chorale (see C. 2. below) and called for a catechism. Luther wrote: "We Germans are a rough, rude, and reckless people, with whom it is hard to do anything, except in cases of dire need . . . First, the German service needs a plain and simple, fair and square catechism."¹¹ Luther met this need himself in the Large Catechism and Small Catechism of 1529. In both catechisms the chorale is given prominence. In the Small Catechism, in the section on morning and evening prayers in the home, Luther suggests that the morning devotion should conclude with the singing of a hymn, "possibly a hymn on the Ten Commandments," that is, a hymn on one of the principal parts of the catechism.¹² Toward the end of the preface to the Large Catechism Luther makes the following summary:

Thus we have, in all, five parts covering the whole of Christian doctrine, which we should constantly teach and require young people to recite word for word. Do not assume that they will learn and retain this teaching from sermons alone. When these parts have been well learned, you may assign them also some psalms or hymns based on

these subjects, to supplement and confirm their knowledge. Thus our youth will be led into the Scriptures so that they make progress daily.¹³

This catechetical purpose of the chorale was made explicit in the Wittenberg hymnal issued the same year as the catechisms: *Geistliche Lieder auff's new gebessert zu Wittemberg D. Mart. Luther* (Wittenberg, 1529). Following the first section of hymns on the principal festivals of the church year was a second section of specifically catechism-hymns dealing with the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Supper. In the 1543 edition of the Wittenberg hymnbook the section devoted to the catechism was completed by the addition of two hymns.¹⁴ The sequence of Luther's hymns on the five principal parts of the catechism is as follows:

- I. The Commandments: "Dies sind die heiligen zehn Gebot"
- II. The Creed: "Wir glauben all an einen Gott"
- III. The Lord's Prayer: "Vater unser im Himmelreich"
- IV. Baptism: "Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam"
- V. The Lord's Supper: "Jesus Christus unser Heiland"

At a later date the explanation of confession appended to the section on baptism was regarded as one of the principal parts of the catechism, bringing the total to six. Luther's metrical version of Psalm 130, "Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu Dir," then became the chorale associated with this separate section on confession.

The six principal catechism-chorales by Luther became a fundamental part of Lutheran worship, especially at Sunday vespers, in which the catechism was customarily rehearsed and expounded in suitable sermons. This catechizing and preaching on the catechism, often called *Catechismusübung* ("catechism-practice"), encouraged the singing of these catechism-chorales and the composition of specific choral and organ music based on their melodies. In 1739, for example, Johann Sebastian Bach published Part III of his *Clavierübung*. A major part of the collection is made up of organ preludes based on the melodies of the catechism-chorales of Luther; indeed, the title-page of the collection specifically refers to them

("Third Part of the Keyboard Practice Consisting in Various Preludes on the Catechism and Other Hymns for the Organ"). These catechism preludes are exactly divided into two halves: one set is meant for a small (manual-only) organ and the other for a larger instrument with at least two manuals and pedals. These musical expositions of the catechism-chorale melodies, therefore, correspond to Luther's two treatments of basic doctrine in his Small Catechism and Large Catechism. When the music of other Lutheran composers is investigated, it will be found that Bach was not alone in recognizing that catechetical significance of the chorale.

2. *The Chorale Must Itself Be Taught*

The chorale, however, must itself be catechized in order to teach the faith or, to put it another way, the chorale has to be taught to people before it can teach them. A fundamental understanding of the chorale, as the sung word of God and a confession of faith in music and poetry, can only exist in the realm of theory unless the people are encouraged to learn and sing them in practice. When congregational singing was introduced in Wittenberg, two immediate questions were how to teach the people to sing the chorale and how to encourage them to continue to sing week by week. The first Wittenberg hymnal, Johann Walter's *Chorgesangbuch*, issued in 1524, was not, as one might suppose, a congregational hymnbook; it was a set of part-books for choral use. In his preface to the collection Luther explained that these choral settings were intended for young people, "who should . . . be trained in music."¹⁵ The strategy of Luther and Walter was that the chorale melodies should first be learnt by the boys in the school. When they had mastered these melodies, they would then learn the part-settings in Walter's *Chorgesangbuch*. When these had been mastered, the school choir was then ready to lead the congregation in church. Here an alternation was practiced. After an improvised organ prelude on the melody, ending on the leading-note, the choir led the congregation in singing the chorale in unaccompanied unison. The second stanza was then sung by the choir alone, perhaps with instruments doubling the voice-parts, in one of the *cantus firmus* settings of the chorale melody by Johann Walter, with the congregational melody in the tenor voice-part. The third stanza would follow with choir and

congregation singing in unaccompanied unison. Then would come a choral setting—and so on to the end of the hymn.¹⁶ The strategy was to use the young people, who were being trained in music day by day in the school, to teach the people the chorale melodies by leading the singing in church.

The doctrinal, confessional, and liturgical functions of the chorale could not succeed without the leadership of trained musicians and singers. Therefore, Luther and his Wittenberg colleagues knew that the teaching of music had to be promoted in the schools. Between 1528 and 1548 the Wittenberg musician-printer Georg Rhau (who had been for a short time the *Thomascantor* in Leipzig) produced sixty collections of music to be used in Lutheran schools for teaching and in Lutheran churches for worship.¹⁷

A principal reason why the Lutheran chorale tradition has been so strong and has developed in a variety of ways is that there has been an incredible succession of gifted composers and creative musicians who have been ready to teach their own generation to sing the chorale. And it has always been the musicians, rather than the theologians, who have been the first to recognize that, unless the chorale itself is taught, it cannot do what it is intended to do, that is, teach the faith. This teaching of the faith has, however, a particular context.

C. The Chorale Is Liturgical

The chorale has two primary functions that are closely related to the ordinary and the propers of liturgical celebration. On the one hand, the chorale can operate in the same way as the propers of the day by interpreting, in its musical and poetic way, the principal teaching of the day, which is primarily found in the gospel. On the other hand, the chorale actually becomes the liturgy when it is used to paraphrase the ordinary of the service.

1. The Chorale Has a Liturgical Function

A true understanding of the nature of the chorale requires that it be regarded, not simply as a hymnic form, but rather as a *liturgical* hymnic form. The chorale does not exist in a vacuum; it has a

specific context. To make this assertion is not to say that chorales were sung only within the liturgical assembly. It is clear that these hymns were sung in homes and other non-ecclesiastical settings, but Luther intended that their primary function would be congregational and liturgical. In his *Formula Missae* of 1523 Luther develops at length the need for such congregational song in the public worship of the church:

I also wish that we had as many songs as possible in the vernacular which the people could sing during [the substantially Latin] mass, immediately after the gradual and also after the Sanctus and Agnus Dei. For who doubts that originally all the people sang these, which now only the choir sings . . .? But poets are wanting among us, or not yet known, who could compose evangelical and spiritual songs, as Paul calls them [Col. 3:16], worthy to be used in the church of God. In the meantime, one may sing after communion: "Gott sei gelobet" . . . Another good [hymn] is "Nun bitten wir den Heiligen Geist" and also "Ein Kindelein so lobelich . . ."18

Taking the evidence found in the *Formula Missae* of 1523, the *Deutsche Messe* of 1526, the Visitation Articles of 1528 and 1533, the eye-witness report of Wolfgang Musculus (who was in Wittenberg in 1536), and Bugenhagen's Wittenberg church-order of 1533, it is possible to delineate the substantial liturgical use of the chorale in the principal Sunday service of the Wittenberg churches.¹⁹ A chorale was frequently sung in place of the introit. A chorale was invariably sung after the gradual and Alleluia as the principal hymn of the day, effectively preparing for the gospel which was to follow. On festivals this *Graduallied* was sung in alternation with a suitable Latin sequence. After the Latin *Credo*, Luther's credal hymn, "Wir glauben all an einen Gott," was normally sung; and following the sermon, after the Latin *Da Pacem*, Luther's German version of the same text was sung, "Verleih uns Frieden gnädiglich." Then, too, chorales were sung at the end of the Ministry of the Word, at the beginning of the Ministry of the Sacrament, and *sub communione* (that is, during the distribution of communion), especially the hymns "Jesus Christus, unser Heiland, der von uns den Gotteszorn wandt"

and "Gott sei gelobet und gebenedeiet." Finally, at the conclusion of the distribution, the German Agnus Dei, "Christe, du Lamm Gottes," was sung.

In Wittenberg, therefore, the chorale was employed, not imprecisely as general Christian song, but rather as a vital and integral part of the liturgy. The singing of hymns presented a unique opportunity for the whole congregation to join together in the praise of God and at the same time provided the means for the worshippers to encourage each other in the faith and actualize the doctrine of the royal priesthood of all believers.²⁰

2. *The Chorale Functions as Liturgy*

Sometime either towards the end of 1525 or at the beginning of 1526, Luther published his directions for vernacular worship in the Wittenberg churches, his *Deutsche Messe und Ordnung Gottis Diensts*. There Luther writes that "after the Gospel the whole church sings the creed in German, "Wir glauben all an einen Gott."²¹ Later he allows that during communion "the German Sanctus [that is, "Jesaja, dem Propheten"] . . . could be sung . . . or the German Agnus Dei [that is, "Christe, du Lamm Gottes"]."²² "Jesaja, dem Propheten" was included in the *Deutsche Messe* but "Christe, du Lamm Gottes" did not appear in print until 1528, although it probably existed in Wittenberg at the time Luther was writing the *Deutsche Messe* or soon thereafter.

The Kyrie, in a three-fold form, is retained in its original language and sung to simple plainchant in the *Deutsche Messe*. The Gloria in Excelsis Deo is strangely absent; this omission was presumably an oversight, since the Gloria is known to have continued in use in Wittenberg and elsewhere.

Both the Kyrie and Gloria were eventually given chorale forms. The troped Latin "Kyrie Fons Bonitatis" became "Kyrie, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit" and was first published in Naumberg in 1537. At least two versifications of the Gloria in Excelsis Deo appeared. A rhymed antiphonal chant version, probably by Luther himself, had some currency and was included in later Wittenberg hymnals, "All Ehr und Lob soll Gottes sein." The more popular version was "Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr," written by Nikolaus Decius in

1522. These chorale versions of the Kyrie and Gloria, like the liturgical models on which they are based, are strong statements of trinitarian belief.

As with the catechism-chorales, these "ordinary" chorales were the focus of an enduring tradition of musical composition; much organ and choral music was written on the basis of the associated melodies. One prominent example is again Bach's *Clavierübung III* of 1739. The liturgy begins with the trinitarian affirmation, "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." Significantly, the first section of Bach's *Clavierübung III* comprises three groups of three preludes based on two trinitarian chorale melodies: "Kyrie, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit" and "Allein Gott in der Höh' sei Ehre," the chorale equivalents of the Kyrie and Gloria.²³ Again, when the music of other Lutheran composers is investigated, it will be found that Bach was not alone in recognizing the liturgical significance of the chorale.

D. The Chorale Is Multi-Cultural

The chorale is frequently considered to be a mono-cultural and narrowly-defined phenomenon. In fact, however, it is quite multi-cultural in its origin. It is even more multi-cultural in its subsequent development.

1. The Chorale Is Multi-Cultural in Origin

The chorale did not burst onto the scene in 1523 as a radically new phenomenon, totally unrelated to all that had gone before. Certainly, the idea of congregational singing seemed novel in general to Western Christians of the time, but as Luther pointed out, such singing was a vital part of the worship of the early church. What appeared novel in the sixteenth century was, in fact, the restoration, to some considerable degree, of the practice of the early church. In reintroducing congregational song, however, Luther was neither antiquarian nor faddish. He did not seek the earliest form of ecclesiastical chant and then impose it on his Wittenberg congregations, nor did he create an entirely new form of corporate song. Instead, he and his colleagues formed the chorale from various elements which had histories reaching back through many genera-

tions as well as contemporary significance. There were, specifically, four primary cultural sources of the chorale of the sixteenth century.

First, there was the ecclesiastical culture expressed in the Latin chants and hymns of the church, which the people had heard often enough but had not actually sung for some time. The educated and refined culture of the church had its roots in the Middle-Eastern culture of the early centuries of the Christian era. Latin texts were translated into the vernacular, and their plainsong melodies were adapted to the new German texts. One notable example is Luther's translation of the Ambrosian "Veni Redemptor Gentium," which became "Nun komm der Heiden Heiland." But there were also less obvious adaptations of plainsong. For example, the chorale melodies of the two vernacular versions of the Gloria in Excelsis Deo—Luther's "All Ehr und Lob soll Gottes sein" and Decius' "Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr"—are both adaptations of the plainsong "Gloria Tempore Paschali," with the major difference being that Luther begins with the *incipit* of the Latin chant, whereas Decius adapts the melody from "Et in Terra Pax."

This plainsong origin of many chorale melodies is very significant in that the very name "chorale" is derived from plainsong. The term *choraliter* means, indeed, "sung after the manner of plainsong." In German reference literature, significantly enough, in entries entitled *chorale* one will find, not discussion of the German hymn, but rather discussion of plainsong.

Secondly, there was the popular religious culture expressed in the *Leisen* (folk-hymns) that began to appear from the twelfth century onwards. Some of these were pilgrimage songs, sung by pious Germans as they visited holy places across Europe and the Middle East. Others were celebrations of major festivals in the church year, such as Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. These songs were in the language of the people, even though a good many of them were adaptations of Latin liturgical chant. For example, "Christ ist erstanden," and Luther's re-working of it, "Christ lag in Todesbanden," owe something both musically and textually to the Easter sequence "Victimae Paschali Laudes." Among other *Leisen* that Luther adapted or extended are "Nun bitten wir den Heiligen Geist," "Wir glauben all an einen Gott," and "Gott sei gelobet und gebene-

deiet."

Thirdly, there was the more popular culture expressed in the *contrafacta*, the new religious texts that made use of secular melodies. Luther's "Vom Himmel hoch" was apparently originally sung to a secular melody. The melody which the Wittenberg hymnal of 1533 assigned to Lazarus Spengler's "Durch Adams Fall" is almost certainly of secular origin, as are a number of other melodies in that hymnal.

Fourthly, there was the refined literary culture represented by the new compositions (in both words and music) of Luther and his colleagues. The form in which they chose to write was the *Hofweise* (the court-song), which can be regarded as the art-song of the day. The *Hofweise* was related to the long German song tradition of the *Minnesänger* and *Meistersänger*. It was a developed and skillful poetic tradition and also a distinctive melodic tradition, which employed the so-called "bar-form" stanzaic structure, an AAB form of repeated *stollen* followed by an *abgesang*. A high proportion of chorales were written in this basic bar-form, from Luther's "Aus tiefer Not" and "Ein feste Burg" to Nicolai's "Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme" and "Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern."

In origin, therefore, the chorale incorporated the expressions in word and music of various cultures. The educated culture of the church was highly literary. The religious culture of the people had both oral and literary dimensions. The secular culture of the people was largely transmitted orally. The refined secular culture of court was almost exclusively promoted by literary media.

2. *The Chorale Is Multi-Cultural in Development*

In the course of the centuries which have followed, the varied cultural expressions on which the chorale drew in the sixteenth century have continued to influence and condition this tradition of congregational song. But as Lutheranism has spread to various countries and language-groups, new cultural settings have made further contributions to the steadily expanding chorale tradition. For example, as Lutheranism expanded northwards into Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland, it took on certain characteristics of

the respective cultures of the countries and languages involved. The same adaptation has occurred in the spread of Lutheranism to North America, Africa, and wherever else the Lutheran church has become indigenous. The chorale tradition is open-ended; it continues today because it is a living tradition. There are, for example, highly literary chorales that could only have been written in the twentieth century. A twelve-tone melody by Sven-Erik Bäck has become a popular eucharistic hymn-tune in Sweden.²⁴ In South America elements of hispanic folk-song are being incorporated into the basic chorale tradition.

E. The Chorale Is Musically Diverse

Space does not allow separate attention to the musical diversity of the chorale. There have, however, been several intimations along the way (in discussing other aspects of the chorale) of the tremendous musical diversity that, in fact, exists in the chorale tradition. An immense quantity of organ, choral, and other music has grown from the chorale melodies of the congregation.

Conclusion

Two propositions, together with a final comment, will serve to conclude this study. The first proposition is negative and the second positive. They are really two sides of the same coin.

Proposition One: The chorale in its historic and contemporary manifestations will not survive in those churches that have given up confessional Christianity, churches that desire to "evangelize" while seeing no need also to catechize. Nor will the chorale survive in those churches that have become impatient with the liturgy and desire to de-ritualize its ritual. The chorale will wither and die if, on the one hand, it is confined to just one cultural expression or, on the other hand, if different cultural expressions are blended into an amorphous amalgam. Nor can the chorale survive where musical diversity is banished in favor of a banal, uniform, sing-along style.

Proposition Two: The chorale in its historic and contemporary manifestations will thrive and will become the distinctive mark of those churches that are truly confessional, churches that are

concerned not only to commend the faith but also to teach it and live by it. Those churches where the liturgy is taken seriously will be those that value the liturgical function of the chorale and will enthusiastically explore and promote the multi-cultural and musical diversity of this living and lively tradition. When all is said and done, it needs to be recognized that the chorale is important, not for its own sake, but as a vital indicator of the spiritual and theological health of the church and confession which created it.

Endnotes

1. The substance of this article was presented to the Second Annual Symposium on the Lutheran Liturgy and Hymnody, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, January 25, 1991. An expanded version is being prepared for publication elsewhere.
2. *An Eighteenth-Century Musical Tour in Central Europe and the Netherlands: Being Dr. Charles Burney's Account of His Musical Experiences*, ed. Percy A. Scholes, 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 222-223.
3. See Wilhelm Maurer, *Historical Commentary on the Augsburg Confession*, trans. H. George Anderson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 17.
4. Michael Reu, *The Augsburg Confession: A Collection of Sources with an Historical Introduction* (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1930; reprint, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1983), 90*.
5. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert, et. al. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 56.
6. [C. F. W. Walther], "Lutherisches Kirchen-Gesangbuch," *Der Lutheraner*, 3 (15 June 1847), 84.
7. Carl Schalk, *Source Documents in American Lutheran Hymnody* (River Forest, Illinois: Concordia college, 1978), 28.
8. Tappert, 512.
9. Walter E. Buszin, "The Chorale in the Baroque Era and J. S.

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- Bach's Contribution to It," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Music: A Tribute to Karl Geiringer on His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. H. C. Robbins Landon (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), 113-114.
10. See *Luther's Works: American Edition*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (56 vols.; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-1986 [hereafter cited as *LW*]), 53, 221.
 11. See *LW*, 53, 64; *WA* 19, 75-76.
 12. Tappert, p. 352.
 13. Tappert, p. 364.
 14. See C. Mahrenholz, "Auswahl und Einordnung der Katechismuslieder in den Wittenberger Gesangbüchern seit 1529," *Gestalt und Glaube: Festschrift für Vizepräsident Professor D. Dr. Oskar Söhngen zum 60. Geburtstag am 5. Dezember 1960* (Witten and Berlin, 1960), 123-132; P. Viet, *Das Kirchenlied in der Reformation Martin Luthers: Eine Thematische und Semantische Untersuchung* (Stuttgart, 1986), 68-72.
 15. See *LW*, 53, 316.
 16. A. Böes, "Die reformatorischen Gottesdienste in der Wittenberger Pfarrkirche von 1523 an die Ordnung der Gesänge der Wittenbergischen Kirchen von 1543-44," *Jahrbuch für Liturgik und Hymnologie*, 6 (1961), 52-53, demonstrates how the sequence "Victimae Paschali Laudes" was sung in alternation with the hymn "Christ lag in Todesbanden" on Easter Day. It was a threefold alternation: the organ played the plainsong melody for some of the verses of the sequence in alternation with the choir (which sang a polyphonic setting in which the other verses of the Latin text were associated with the German *Leise* "Christ ist erstanden") and with the congregation (which sang the verses of Luther's Easter hymn).
 17. Victor H. Mattfeld, *Georg Rhau's Publications for Vespers* (New York: Institute of Medieval Music, 1966), 351-353.
 18. See *LW*, 53, 36-37.
 19. A. Böes, "Die reformatorischen Gottesdienste in der Wittenberger Pfarrkirche von 1523 an die Ordnung der Gesänge der Wittenber-

- gischen Kirchen von 1543-1544," *Jahrbuch für Liturgik und Hymnologie*, 4 (1958-1959), 4-11; Walter Blakenburg, "Der gottesdienstliche Liedgesang der Gemeinde," *Leiturgia: Handbuch des evangelischen Gottesdienstes*, 4. *Die Musik des evangelischen Gottesdienstes* (Kassel: Johannes Stauda Verlag, 1961), 613-614.
20. On the liturgical function of Luther's hymns, see Gerhard Hahn, *Evangelium als literarische Anweisung: Zu Luthers Stellung in der Geschichte des deutschen kirchlichen Liedes* (Munich, 1981), 38-60.
21. See *LW*, 53, 78.
22. See *LW*, 53, 81-82.
23. See Robin A. Leaver, "Bach's 'Clavierübung III': Some Historical and Theological Considerations," *The Organ Yearbook*, 6 (1975), 17-32.
24. The Swedish text by Olav Hartman, as translated by Fred Kaan, is given with Bäck's tune in *Songs and Hymns from Sweden*, ed. Anders Frostenson and trans. Fred Kaan (London: Stainer and Bell, 1976), number 14.